

North Tyneside Council Report to Council Date: 21 January 2016

ITEM 9

Title: Filming of Council Meetings

Portfolio(s): Elected Mayor

Cabinet Member(s): Mrs N Redfearn

Report from Service

Areas: Law and Governance and Corporate Strategy

Responsible Officers: Vivienne Geary, Head of Law and Governance (Tel (0191) 6435339)

Jacqueline Laughton, Head of Corporate Strategy (Tel (0191) 6435724)

Wards affected: All

PART 1

1.1 Executive Summary:

This report requests the Council to agree to film future meetings of the full Council and provide a video/audio record of those meetings via the Authority's website for a trial period.

It sets out the legislative background to the right of the press and public to record meetings of the Authority, and provides information on the potential benefits and the experiences of other authorities who already film their meetings.

1.2 Recommendation(s):

It is recommended that Council agree to the filming of meetings of Full Council, initially for a trial period commencing with the Council meeting on 4 February 2016 until and including the Annual Council meeting on 19 May 2016, in accordance with the arrangements set out in this report.

1.3 Forward Plan:

This report appears on the Forward Plan that was published on 9 November 2015.

1.4 Council Plan and Policy Framework

This report has no direct relevance to any of the priorities identified in the 2014/18 Our North Tyneside Plan.

1.5 Information:

1.5.1 Background

The Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 allow members of the public to film, photograph, audio record or report via social media the proceedings of the Authority's meetings where those meetings are open to the public.

- 1.5.2 The Government considers that in a modern digital world, the use of modern communication methods such as filming, tweeting and blogging should be embraced for enhancing the openness and transparency of local government bodies. The Government contends that this will ensure that we have strong, 21st century, local democracy where local government bodies are genuinely accountable to the local people whom they serve and to the local taxpayers who help fund them.
- 1.5.3 The question of the Authority undertaking its own filming/webcasting has previously been considered by the Council in 2009 following a report by the former Organisational Effectiveness Sub Committee. Due to concerns about the costs involved/value for money considerations and doubts about potential impact in terms of engaging the public, Council agreed not to introduce filming/webcasting at that time. More recently the Standards Committee considered the issue of recording of meetings in October 2014, but expressed the view that they supported the current arrangements for the official record of the Authority's meetings in the form of written Minutes only and that an electronic record was not necessary.
- 1.5.4 However, increasing numbers of local authorities are now filming and broadcasting their meetings either live or soon after the meeting and the issue of the Authority recording its own meetings has recently been raised by a number of Members within the Authority. Furthermore, it is a facility that has been encouraged by the Government to ensure transparency and openness in local authorities' decision making processes. Some members of the public have also taken the opportunity to film recent Council meetings, and to upload extracts onto social media.

1.5.5 Potential Benefits

Filming of meetings could potentially:

- Strengthen the Authority's democratic accountability to the public both directly and via the local media.
- Increase public understanding of the workings of local government both directly and via local media, schools, etc.
- Improve public participation in the political process. Typically Authorities that broadcast their meetings report that the number of people watching recorded material is considerably higher than the number of people who actually attend meetings.
- Ensure greater equality of access to the Authority's decision making process.

Filming would potentially enable website visitors to:

- Replay meetings after they have taken place, which may be helpful for people who may be unable to attend the meeting.
- Search for, and view, particular agenda items.

In addition:

- Members not able to participate and travel to Quadrant would be able to view Council meetings when the recording is uploaded via a link to the Authority's website.
- Members would be able to draw on recordings for the purposes of drawing constituents' attention to relevant parts of a Council meeting.
- Local media could more readily access and report information regarding Council meetings.

1.5.6 Technical Issues

The microphone system currently used in the Council Chamber captures and channels the debate in meetings through the public address speakers in the Chamber. Filming will be undertaken by a single camera operator using a static web cam for the whole of the Chamber and a mobile camera to enable close ups on any speakers.

It is proposed that the footage would be uploaded via a link to the Authority's website within two working days of the meeting and made available for viewing until the next meeting at which the minutes are confirmed.

1.6 **Decision options:**

The following decision options are available for consideration by Council:

Option 1: film Full Council meetings

The Council Chamber is already equipped with microphones and a processing unit that can capture the proceedings. It would be possible to utilise this equipment, together with both a static web cam and a mobile camera operated by a single operator at future meetings to produce a video/audio record to which a link from the Authority's website could be made after the meeting. The sound quality is dependent on Members remembering to switch on their microphones – any comments not made into an open microphone will not be recorded.

Option 2: audio record Full Council meetings

The Council Chamber is already equipped with microphones and a processing unit that can capture the proceedings. It would be possible to utilise this equipment to produce an audio record to which a link from the Authority's website could be made after the meeting. The sound quality is dependent on Members remembering to switch on their microphones – any comments not made into an open microphone will not be recorded.

Option 3: do nothing

This option would have the effect of continuing current practice of not recording the Council meetings.

Option 1 is the recommended option.

1.7 Reasons for recommended option:

Option 1 is recommended for the following reasons:

The filming of Full Council meetings could make a contribution to promoting the democratic process and to increasing the transparency of the Authority's decision making.

1.8 Appendices:

None.

1.9 Contact officers:

Dave Brown, Law and Governance tel. (0191) 643 5358
Kevin Harrison, Corporate Strategy tel. (0191) 643 7757
Alison Campbell, Senior Business Partner tel. (0191) 643 7038

1.10 Background information:

The following background papers/information has been used in the compilation of this report and is available at the office of the author:

- (1) North Tyneside Council Protocol for members of the public wishing to record meetings of the Authority.

PART 2 – COMPLIANCE WITH PRINCIPLES OF DECISION MAKING

2.1 Finance and other resources

There would be some minor resource implications arising from Option 1 – in the main relating to staff time to oversee the use of existing equipment to record the meeting and transfer the audio/visual file to a video hosting site. For the duration of the trial period, these can be contained within the existing Corporate Strategy budget. Subject to a satisfactory trial, a further report will be submitted to Council containing financial and other implications to enable consideration to be given to introducing regular filming of meetings.

2.2 Legal

There are no legal implications directly arising from this report.

Filming by the Authority would be undertaken in accordance with the protocol that has previously been agreed in relation to the recording of meetings (Part 8.13 of the Authority's Constitution).

Filming and the retention of film using a video hosting site does not replace the formal record of the meeting and the decisions made. The only formal record of any meeting of a Local Authority is its minutes.

2.3 Consultation/community engagement

The Elected Mayor and Group Leaders have been consulted.

2.4 Human rights

Filming raises a number of issues in relation to the Human Rights Act and Data Protection Act. Images of members of the public that may be captured by the filming are potentially 'personal information' under the DPA. The Authority has agreed a protocol to ensure that it meets its statutory obligations, for example by ensuring that members of the public are made aware that a particular meeting is being filmed and that by remaining in the room they are deemed to have given their consent for any images of themselves that may be taken to be used for live or subsequent broadcast.

The protocol also provides for the Chair to cease the filming if there is a possibility of filming or recording becoming inappropriate or if it interferes with the orderly conduct of the meeting.

2.5 Equalities and diversity

Filming of Council meetings could potentially make an important contribution in promoting local democracy and increasing community engagement by enabling more residents to have greater involvement in the democratic process, for example people who are unable to attend the meetings.

There would be no need to travel to Quadrant in order to view Council Meetings and observe the decision making process.

It would also further the interests of good governance by providing increased transparency of decision making.

2.6 Risk management

There are no direct risk management implications arising from this report.

2.7 Crime and disorder

There are no crime and disorder implications directly arising from this report.

2.8 Environment and sustainability

There are no environment and sustainability implications directly arising from this report.

PART 3 - SIGN OFF

- Deputy Chief Executive X
- Head(s) of Service X
- Mayor/Cabinet Member(s) X
- Chief Finance Officer X
- Monitoring Officer X
- Head of Corporate Strategy X