

RECORDING OF MEETINGS

Council – 1 April 2014

Report of Chief Officer Legal and Governance

Status: For decision

Also considered by: Governance Committee – 13 March 2014

Key Decision: No

This report supports the key Aim of Effective Use of Council Resources

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Fleming

Contact Officer(s) Mrs Christine Nuttall – Chief Officer Legal and Governance

Recommendation to Governance Committee: That Full Council meetings to be recorded on a trial basis for the month of May and July 2014 and if successful Full Council will be asked to ratify the roll out of recording all meetings of Full Council, Development Control Committee and Licensing Hearings.

Recommendation to Full Council: That Full Council meetings to be recorded on a trial basis for the month of May and July 2014 and if successful Full Council will be asked to ratify the roll out of recording all meetings of Full Council, Development Control Committee and Licensing Hearings.

Reason for recommendation: With present technology anyone can record any meetings undetected which opens the possibility of challenge.

Introduction and Background

- 1 The Council's Constitution states that in relation to the Photography and Recording of Meetings the consent of Members present at any meeting shall be required before any person may record, broadcast or photograph proceedings at the meeting. Any recording, broadcasting or photography shall be conducted in a manner to be directed by the Chairman and shall cease immediately if either:
 - Members so resolve; or
 - The Chairman so directs.
- 2 The Department for Communities and Local Government are encouraging the public to report on meetings, allowing the filming of councillors and officers at meetings that are open to the public including the social media reporting of meetings.

- 3 As a result of the above information the Governance Committee Working Group looked into the benefits of recording Council meetings which were concluded to be as follows:
- With present technology anyone can record any meeting undetected which opens the possibility of challenge as to what was said at the meeting.
 - The Council will have a true record of what was said in the event of an edited version being produced.

Matters to Consider

- 4 The Governance Committee Working Group considered that the recording of Council meetings in the Council Chamber could be feasible as this is an area already wired for sound.
- 5 The I.T. Department of the Council have looked into the feasibility of recording meetings that are held within the Council Chamber. Testing has confirmed that the recordings are clear when using the Chambers microphone system. Should two members be speaking into the microphones concurrently it will pick up both sets of voices. However, in testing, the recordings did also pick up the voices of those nearby, which could mean that some 'off-microphone' comments could be picked up.
- 6 The meetings would be recorded in an audio format called MP3. This is the format that audio is typically stored in and can be listened back on a collection of devices including PC's, laptops, tablet computers and MP3 players like iPods and iPhones.
- 7 As MP3 requires a small amount of disk space for storage, this would mean that storage for many meetings could take place.
- 8 A copy of the recording could be made available to the public upon request.
- 9 Information in relation to what recording is taking place at other councils indicates that Dartford Council and Tonbridge and Malling Council do not currently record any of their meetings. Tunbridge Wells Council is undertaking a trial run in relation to recording Full Council.

Policy Statement

- 10 The Governance Committee Working Group concluded that it was important to devise a Policy Statement that would set out the purpose of recording, how information on recording would be relayed to the public and the retention periods for recording. A draft Policy Statement is attached as an Appendix to this report.

Key Implications

Financial

In the testing the I.T department used a Philips digital Dictaphone which was easy to plug into the existing audio/visual (AV) solution in the chamber. This Dictaphone cost approximately £60 and could continue to be used for this purpose in the future.

The cost of providing the disk space includes the cost of securing the recording through the use of backup technology which will store the data both on-site and off-site.

Assuming that a meeting lasting three hours and the recording is retained for 6 months the cost would be £20 per meeting.

Example of costs

| Meeting | Meetings / Year | 6 Months Retention Cost | Retention Period (Years) | | |
|---------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------|--------|--------|
| | | | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Council | 7 | £140 | £280 | £560 | £840 |
| Development Control | 17 (approx) | £340 | £680 | £1,360 | £2,040 |
| | | | If retention periods are increased | | |

The retention periods shown above are examples.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement.

The Governance Committee Working Group considered that with present technology anyone can record any meeting undetected which opens the possibility of challenge as to what was said if we do not have our own recording which the Council can guarantee has not been 'edited'.

Resource (non financial)

There would be a cost in officer time as an officer would need to setup the recording device at the start of the meeting and then store it away at the end of the meeting. This entire process is likely to take only a matter of minutes. An officer would also need to copy the audio recording onto the Council's IT systems, although this should take no long than 10 minutes to complete. Additionally an officer may need to review the entire meeting content to ensure that the recording is fit for purpose and this would take as long as the original meeting took place.

On occasion members of the public may ask for a copy of the recording in order to listen to what was said. This would be available on a CD and could be supplied on a cost recovery basis only.

Equality Impacts

| Consideration of impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty: | | |
|---|--------|--|
| Question | Answer | Explanation / Evidence |
| a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to disadvantage or discriminate against different groups in the community? | No | |
| b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have the potential to promote equality of opportunity? | Yes | The introduction of recording certain meetings enables there to be a true copy of what was said. |
| c. What steps can be taken to mitigate, reduce, avoid or minimise the impacts identified above? | | N/A |

Conclusions

The Governance Committee Working Group concluded that the need on occasion to clarify what may have taken place at a council meeting, if issues of accuracy are raised, may make it desirable for some Council meetings to be recorded.

Background Papers:

[Sevenoaks District Council Constitution](#)

[Department for Community and Local Government
"Your council's cabinet – going to its meetings, seeing how it works – a guide for local people"](#)

Christine Nuttall

Chief Officer for Legal and Governance