

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO Cabinet

1.	Meeting:	Cabinet
2.	Date:	6th April 2011
3.	Title:	Recording Council Meetings
4.	Directorate:	Chief Executive's

5. Summary

To review the procedures regarding the recording of Council Meetings.

6. Recommendations

- 1. That Standing Order 18 be amended to permit the recording of the ceremonial part of the annual Council meeting for the private use of the Mayor and his or her family.**
- 2. That a further report be submitted on the question of whether to permit the wider recording of Council meetings and if so, any safeguards that should be imposed.**

7. Proposals and Details

The Council's Standing Order 18 presently provides:-

(1) Except where the members present at a meeting of the Council, the Cabinet, a committee of the Cabinet or a committee authorised by majority vote the recording of the proceedings, no person shall record the proceedings or any part of them.

(2) A person authorised to record the proceedings of a Council meeting, in accordance with sub-paragraph (1), shall record them using the medium supplied or specified by the Council.

(3) A recording made in accordance with this standing order shall only be used or reproduced with the consent of the Council and on the terms specified by the Council.

The above Standing Order has applied for some considerable time. Members are asked to consider whether it should be reviewed in the light of modern communication methods and in the interests of opening up the workings of local democracy in action to a wider audience.

Two quite separate issues have prompted this report. The first is a request by the Deputy Mayor for permission to make a recording of the ceremonial part of the 2011 annual Council meeting. This will include those parts of the meeting comprising the election of the Mayor and his or her declaration of acceptance of office, the vote of thanks to the retiring Mayor and the retiring Mayor's speech and the appointment of the Deputy Mayor. At that point the Leader traditionally invites the guests to retire and take light refreshments, before the Council deals with the remainder of the business. The ceremonial part of the annual Council meeting should be a relaxed and celebratory occasion free from political controversy. Election as Mayor is the highest point of a Member's career and it would seem reasonable to permit this part of the meeting to be recorded on behalf of the Mayor and his or her family and friends for private use only.

A proposed amended Standing Order to permit this is attached at **Appendix 1**.

The second issue that has arisen is a request from Bob Neil MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Communities and Local Government highlighting the importance of Council giving citizens opportunities to access and experience their local democracy using modern communication methods. A letter has been sent to all Council Leaders and copied to Monitoring Officers and is attached at **Appendix 2**.

The letter urges greater openness and calls on Councils to give bloggers and online broadcasters the same routine access to Council meetings as traditional accredited journalists. Wider access to local decision making would improve public scrutiny and give stronger local accountability.

The letter does recognise that there are obligations under the Data Protection Act and quotes advice from the Information Commissioners Office.

Cabinet are asked to consider whether existing policy regarding recording of meetings should be reviewed, not merely because of the letter from the Minister, but generally in terms of how best to inform the public of Council decision making and in the light of the communication methods available today, including the Council's own much improved website. If it is felt the policy should be updated, Cabinet is asked to instruct officers to produce a further report examining the issues in more detail and suggesting appropriate safeguards, while encouraging openness and transparency.

8. Finance

There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

The Council will need to ensure that data protection obligations are complied with.

There may be some risk that if recording is permitted, selective editing or broadcasting of remarks out of context could be used in an attempt to create a misleading impression of a particular debate or decision. This should be considered as part of any further report.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

Effective communications and marketing should support the strategic and operational business of the local authority, and in particular openness and transparency in the democratic process. These activities – including the development of new and social media – are therefore critical to the council's policy and performance agenda as a whole.

11. Background Papers and Consultation

The Democratic Services Manager, Head of Communications and Head of Scrutiny Services have been consulted.

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