

Members Advisory Panel

A meeting of Members Advisory Panel was held on Friday, 5th September, 2014.

Present: Cllr David Harrington (Chair), Cllr Jim Beall, Cllr Robert Gibson, Cllr Terry Laing, Cllr Ken Lupton, Cllr Norma Stephenson O.B.E

Officers: D.E.Bond, N.Hart, M.Waggott (LD); B.Brown (R).

Also in attendance:

Apologies: Cllr Lynne Apedaile, Cllr David Coleman, Cllr Eileen Johnson, Cllr Jean O'Donnell, Cllr Maureen Rigg.

1 Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest.

2 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 31st January 2014 were confirmed as a correct record.

4 Recording and Web Broadcasting of Council Meetings

At its meeting held on 13th March 2014, Cabinet was advised of the Government's intention to introduce regulations requiring local authorities to permit the public to report and commentate on their public meetings. Cabinet wished to consult with MAP regarding such proposals, and specifically whether the Council itself wanted to explore recording/web broadcasting its own Council/Committee meetings. The regulations had since come into force on the 6th August 2014 (the Local Government Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014).

MAP noted that some local authorities, including Middlesbrough Borough Council, had chosen to record and web broadcast their own public meetings in order to provide greater access to, and openness of those meetings and the decisions taken by their members. Insofar as Stockton was concerned, whilst there was no evidence to suggest that there was an untapped demand for such a facility, it would ensure that an official 'record' of a meeting was available. That prove to be beneficial should the proceedings be called into question for any reason. There was however likely to be a cost implication associated with the Council seeking to record or web broadcast its public meetings, which would need to be factored into the deliberations.

Irrespective of any decision of the Council to record its own public meetings, the regulations introduced on the 6th August 2014 now made it a statutory requirement for the Council to allow the public to 'film, photograph or make a sound recording of proceedings at a public meeting of the Council, the executive, or a Committee or Sub Committee'. MAP noted both Government guidance and a draft protocol for use at Stockton that sought to facilitate this requirement without detriment to the proper conduct of the meeting. The draft protocol was to be considered by Council on the 17th September 2014. Cabinet had previously approved the draft protocol for use in relation to its public meetings.

MAP suggested that the protocol should be agreed subject to an amendment requesting anyone who wishes to report or commentate on any of the Authority's public meetings to contact Democratic Services in advance of the day of the meeting, particularly if they wished to bring large equipment or to discuss any special requirements. MAP also suggested that the protocol be reviewed after six months of operation.

Members noted the fact that various venues were used for Council, Executive and Committee/Sub Committee meetings, which would have an implication on the type of equipment to be used should the Council decide to record its own

public meetings. Other considerations noted by members included the protection of a persons identity should they not wish to be filmed; safeguards against the use of flash photography; and the unavailability of wifi within public buildings for members of the public.

It was proposed that subject to both a technical and financial appraisal being carried out and reported to members of this Panel initially and thereafter to Cabinet/Council, agreement in principle be given to this Council recording/web broadcasting the following meetings, being meetings most likely to engage members of the public:-

- Council;
- Cabinet;
- Planning Committee.

This proposed approach would be reported to Cabinet and Council for consideration.

AGREED that:-

1. Subject to both a technical and financial appraisal being carried out and reported to members of this Panel initially and thereafter to Cabinet/Council, agreement in principle be given to this Council recording/web broadcasting the following meetings, being meetings most likely to engage members of the public:-

- Council;
- Cabinet;
- Planning Committee.

2. A further report on the results of the appraisals be reported to a future meeting following the consideration by Cabinet and Council of the proposed approach.

3. The draft protocol to facilitate the recording of public meetings be approved subject to the suggested amendment and to a review after six months of operation.

4. Appropriate amendments be made to the Council's Constitution to reflect the Local Government Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014, and the related Government guidance.