

GUSTON PARISH COUNCIL

RECORDING OF MEETINGS POLICY

INTRODUCTION

The Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014, which came into force on 6 August 2014, require Parish Councils to allow any person to film, audio-record or take photographs of, and to report on, the proceedings of any part of a meeting which the public are entitled to attend by law.

We now live in a modern, digital world where 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. This will ensure local government bodies are genuinely accountable to the local people whom they serve and to the local taxpayers who help fund them.

Further information on the Regulations can be found at

www.gov.uk/government/publications/open-and-accountable-local-governmentplain-english-guide

1. OUTLINE OF THE REGULATIONS

1.1 Councils are required to allow any member of the public to take photographs, film and audio-record the proceedings, and report on all public meetings. While no prior permission is required to carry out this activity, it is advisable that any person wishing to film or audio-record a public meeting let their Council know so that all necessary arrangements can be made for the public meeting. This is important because the rules require Councils only to provide reasonable facilities for any member of the public to report on meetings.

1.2 There is no legal requirement for Councils to webcast their meetings, but where Councils webcast any of their public meetings, they should, as a matter of good practice, notify the public.

1.3 The rules on the use of communication methods, such as filming and audio-recording, only require Councils to allow the reporting of meetings open to the public. The relevant Council may not allow you to film or audio-record its private meetings. You may also not be allowed to leave recording equipment in the room where a private meeting is held for the purpose of reporting on the meeting.

1.4 The national rules do not prevent Councillors from tweeting and blogging at meetings, so they should be able to do so provided it is not disruptive and does not detract from the proper conduct of the meeting. Whilst Councillors are expected to comply with their body's code of conduct, this should not prevent Councillors from tweeting or blogging when appropriate.

1.5 Councils are required to provide "reasonable facilities" to facilitate reporting. This should include space to view and hear the meeting, seats, and ideally a desk.

Councils should use their common sense to determine the range of reasonable facilities they can actively provide to support the free press in all its forms.

1.6 The law of the land applies –including the law of defamation and the law on public order offences. Freedom of speech within the law should also be exercised with personal and social responsibility – showing respect and tolerance towards the views of others.

1.7 The council should ensure that they protect children, the vulnerable and other members of the public who actively object to being filmed, without undermining the broader transparency of the meeting.

1.8 Any person can provide written commentary during a meeting, as well as oral commentary outside or after the meeting. The new rules do not permit oral commentary to be provided during a meeting as this would be disruptive to the good order of the meeting.

1.9 Generally, people attending public meetings must be readily able to film, audio-record, take photographs or use social media. Councils must take steps to ensure this is the case. However, those undertaking these activities must not act in a disruptive manner, which could result in being excluded from the meeting:

- a) moving to areas outside the areas designated for the public without consent of the Chair
- b) excessive noise in recording or setting up or re-siting equipment during the meeting
- c) intrusive lighting and use of flash photography
- d) asking people to repeat statements for the purpose of recording

2. IMPLICATIONS TO MEETINGS

2.1 Any person wishing to record a meeting in any format must contact the Clerk prior to the start of the meeting.

2.2 Some members of the public may not wish to be recorded. The Chair will facilitate this by ensuring that any such request will be respected by those making a recording. Any member of the public who does not wish to be recorded should make this known to the Clerk or Chair prior to the commencement of the meeting.

2.3 There will be a defined area from which recording may be carried out, if given advance notice, reasonable facilities will be made available to any person wishing to record, for example a table. However, the physical layout of a room may restrict any such provision.

2.4 All visual recording will be undertaken from a static point to avoid disruption at the meeting.

2.5 A person making a recording has no right to interrupt the meeting by asking questions or making comments. The person recording has no right to ask anyone to repeat a statement for the purposes of the recording.

2.6 The Chair has absolute discretion to stop or suspend recording if continuing to do so would prejudice proceedings at the meeting or if the person recording is in breach of this policy.

2.7 Any recordings should not be edited in a way that could lead to misinterpretation or misrepresentation of the proceedings or infringement of Parish Council values or in a way that ridicules or show lack of respect for those in the recording. The Parish Council will have no liability for material published by any other person.

2.8 The Council itself may photograph, film, record or broadcast meetings and can retain, use or dispose of such material as they see fit. Where the Council proposes to record all of its own meetings, it will be bound by this policy.

2.9 The minutes of a Parish Council meeting remain the statutory and legally binding formal record of Council's decisions.