

West Kingsdown Parish Council
Reporting Meetings - Recording, Photography and use of Social Media
Agreed on 22 March 2017

A. Protocol and Guidance

This guidance applies to any council and committee meetings that are open to the public.

1. The Council allows any member any person to report on public meetings subject to the limited exceptions outlined below. The term 'reporting' includes the taking of photographs, filming, audio-recording, tweeting, blogging or generally reporting on proceedings. It does NOT include making written notes of proceedings.
2. Those wishing to undertake any reporting of meetings are requested to make this known to the Clerk immediately prior to the commencement of the meeting.
3. The Chairman of the meeting shall advise everyone that the meeting is being reported.
4. The proceedings of the meeting must not be disrupted by the use of any equipment or by the manner in which the reporting is undertaken.
5. It is also important that reporting does not inhibit public involvement.

B. Guidelines for Reporting

Any person wishing to report a public meeting should note that:

1. Any photography or audio / visual recording must take place from a fixed position in the meeting room approved by the Chairman so as to minimise disruption to the proceedings. Equipment must be setup before the meeting commences.
2. The use of flash photography, additional lighting, sound booms or other equipment that may, in the Chairman's opinion, be likely to be intrusive or in any way interfere with proceedings will only be allowed if agreed in advance with the Chairman.
3. If the Chairman feels that any photography, audio or visual recording is disrupting the meeting in any way then the operator of the equipment will be required to stop reporting.
4. If during the meeting a motion is passed to exclude the press and public, because confidential or exempt information is likely to be disclosed, then all rights to report the meeting cease and the operator of the equipment will be required to stop reporting and leave the meetings taking all reporting equipment with them.
5. If a meeting for which agreement is given to report is adjourned by the Chairman then any reporting should stop at the point at which the meeting is adjourned.
6. They must comply with any request made by the Chairman to respect the public's right to privacy.
7. People in the public seating area should not be photographed, filmed or recorded without the consent of the individuals concerned. This also applies to those individuals who may ask a public question, present a petition or make a representation at any meeting. For the avoidance of doubt a written note may be made of any questions asked by members of the public.
8. Photographs, audio, and visual recordings should not be edited in a way that could lead to misinterpretation of the proceedings. This includes refraining from editing the recording in a way that may cause ridicule or show a lack of respect.
9. Notices advising the public that the public meeting may be reported on will be displayed in or directly outside the meeting room and this will be noted on the agenda.
10. The Council takes no responsibility for the loss of or damage to any equipment being used for reporting howsoever caused.

C. Social Media.

1. Social Media – there are no restrictions placed on anyone at the meeting using Twitter, blogs, Facebook or similar "social media" provided that the Chairman does not consider their actions are disrupting the proceedings of the meeting.
2. If the Chairman feels the use of social media is at the time disrupting the proceedings the person may be required to stop.

D. Disruptive behaviour when reporting or use of Social Media.

This could be any action or activity which disrupts the proper conduct of meetings. Examples could include:

1. Moving to areas outside the areas designated for the public or press without the consent of the Chairman,
2. Excessive noise in recording or setting up or re-siting equipment during the debate/discussion,
3. Intrusive lighting and use of flash photography; and

4. Asking for people to repeat statements for the purposes of recording.

If the person continues reporting or using Social Media after having being requested to desist then the Chairman will ask the person to leave the meeting. If the person refuses to leave then the Chair may adjourn the meeting or make other appropriate arrangements for the meeting to continue without disruption.

Anyone asked to leave a meeting because they have refused to comply with the Chairman's requests may be refused permission to report or use Social Media at future Council meetings that are open to the public.

E. Limits to what can be said in a tweet or video or report to be published.

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 be exercised with personal and social responsibility, showing respect and tolerance towards the views of others.

F. Can a commentary be provided during a meeting?

Any person can provide written commentary during a meeting, as well as oral commentary outside or after the meeting. Oral commentary during a meeting is not permitted as this would be disruptive to the good order of the meeting.

G. Recording by West Kingsdown Parish Council.

1. The Chairman will state at the start of the meeting (before public question time) that an audio recording is being made, which will be made available on request and within 3 months from that day.
2. The Minutes will show that audio recording of the meeting is available on request within 3 months from the date of the meeting.
3. The recording will be kept for 3 months. If no requests for a copy of the recording have been made, then the recording is deleted.
4. If a request for a copy HAS been made, then the original will be kept for three years.
5. The recorder will not be used for any part of the meeting deemed 'confidential' where the public are excluded.

A copy of this document may be downloaded from the FAQ section of the Parish council's web site:

<http://www.westkingsdownpc.kentparishes.gov.uk/default.cfm?pid=fagserver>

For approval and adoption at the Annual Parish Council Meeting each year as an annex to the Standing Orders.

Based on the guidance contained in Open and Accountable Local Government published by the Department for Communities and Local Government. August 2014.

** Agreed by the Parish Council on 22 March 2017 by their approval of the minutes of the General Purposes Committee meeting held on 13 March 2017 when this matter was considered.*