

**AGENDA ITEM**

**REPORT TO COUNCIL**

**22 JULY 2015**

**REPORT OF CORPORATE  
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

**THE OPENNESS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT BODIES REGULATIONS 2014**

**SUMMARY**

This report asks Council to consider the protocol regarding the public reporting and commentating on public meetings of full Council, and its committees and sub-committees.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the protocol is approved for continued use in relation to future public meetings of Council, its committees and sub-committees.

**DETAIL**

**The Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014**

1. At its meeting on 17 September 2014 Council received a report regarding the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 (“the Regulations”).
2. The Regulations came into force on the 6 August 2014 and are concerned with (amongst other things) allowing the public to report and commentate on public meetings of local government bodies (which includes principal councils like Stockton, and Town/Parish Councils).
3. “Reporting” means:-
  - Filming, photographing or making an audio recording of proceedings at a meeting.
  - Using any other means of enabling persons not present to see or hear proceedings at the meeting as it takes place or later, or
  - Reporting or providing commentary on proceedings at the meeting, orally or in writing, so that the report or commentary is available as the meeting takes place or later to persons not present.
4. The Government has produced a Plain English Guide for the public and practitioners regarding the Regulations. A copy is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/open-and-accountable-local-government-plain-english-guide> . This advises Councils to adopt a policy on filming of Members of the public. It also suggests the need for a general policy or protocol

for the benefit of members, officers and those wishing to exercise their rights under the Regulations.

### **The Protocol**

5. The protocol attached at the **Appendix** to this report was approved by full Council for use in connection with its public meetings, and the public meetings of its committees and sub-committees.
6. Arising from this, it was also agreed that the protocol would be reviewed after six months operation.
7. Following approval, the protocol was circulated to Members and Officers, and placed on the Council's website (<https://www.stockton.gov.uk/stockton-council/councillors-and-council-meetings-egenda/council-meetings-and-papers/>)
8. Since then, there have, however, been no occasions at any of the public meetings of the Council, its Committees or Sub-Committees when the protocol has had to be called into use.
9. Accordingly, Council is asked to reaffirm the protocol for continued use, if required, at future public meetings of Council, its Committees and Sub-Committees.
10. A separate report was presented to Cabinet on the 25 June 2015 when Cabinet reaffirmed the attached protocol for continued use in connection with its public meetings.

### **FINANCIAL AND LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

#### **Financial**

11. There are no financial implications arising at this point in time. Costs may arise in the future as a result of fulfilling the requirement to afford (so far as reasonably practicable) those wishing to report on Council meetings reasonable facilities for doing so.

#### **Legal**

12. The Regulations require arrangements to be put into place to facilitate the reporting of and commentating on Council public meetings. This is being done, as indicated in this report.

### **RISK ASSESSMENT**

13. As appropriate guidance is being provided and reasonable facilities will be afforded for the reporting on meetings, the risks arising from the requirements of the Regulations can be categorised as low to medium.

### **COUNCIL PLAN IMPLICATIONS**

14. Organisational and operational effectiveness and strong local democracy.

## EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

15. The Regulations have been the subject of their own statutory assessment. A further assessment is not necessary.

## CONSULTATION

16. Members have been provided with information regarding the requirements of the Regulations and the draft protocol on permitting the reporting of Council meetings.

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<u>Background Papers:</u>	None
<u>Ward(s) and Ward Councillors:</u>	Not Ward Specific
<u>Property Implications:</u>	Not applicable