
Title: Use of mobile communications devices at meetings

To: **Constitutional Review Working Party – 24 October 2012**

Main Portfolio Area: **Democratic Services**

By: **Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager**

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Ward: **N/A**

Summary: To consider the use of mobile communications devices at meetings

For Decision

1.0 Introduction and Background

1.1 Requests have been received from two Members of Council to refer to the Working Party the desirability of having a policy for Councillors, officers and members of the public on the use of mobile communications devices at meetings.

2.0 The Current Situation

2.1 Currently, there is a notice in the public gallery of the council chamber, advising that the unauthorised recording or relaying of proceedings of meetings is strictly prohibited.

2.2 At the beginning of meetings, it is practice for Chairmen to request everyone present to ensure that their mobile 'phones are turned to silent and that they are not used to make or receive 'phone calls whilst the meeting is in progress.

2.2 In order to determine the policies of neighbouring councils in relation to use of mobile 'phones and laptops at meetings, a telephone survey was carried out. The responses are summarised at Annex 1. It will be noted that in one case, it is currently expected that mobile 'phones are turned off by everyone present for the duration of the meeting; in one case, recording of meetings is prohibited by members of the public, but not by committee attendees; and that in two of the cases where use of mobile phones is permitted, recording of proceedings is prohibited. It will also be noted that in all four cases there appears to no limitation on the use of laptops at meetings.

2.3 An online search was also carried out with a view to establishing what practices and policies apply to a wider range of councils. A sample of results, which is summarised at Annex 2, might help to inform the Working Party's discussion. Owing to the nature of the online search, it has not been possible to sub-divide the results in a similar way to Annex 1. It will be noted, that with the exception of Brighton & Hove, recording of proceedings is either not permitted or is permitted only with consent being obtained to do so; that Oxford and Salford encourage councillors to switch off their mobile devices during council meetings; that Wyre, which allows use of social media by the press and public, disallows such use by members of a committee.

3.0 Corporate Implications

3.1 Financial and VAT

3.1.1 There are no financial implications.

3.2 Legal

3.2.1 The council's constitution will require to be amended should a new / amended policy be ultimately agreed by council.

3.3 Corporate

3.3.1 The Council strives to maintain openness and transparency in the conduct of public meetings. However, most local authorities set some boundaries on the use of modern mobile communications devices, in order that their use does not impede the effective running of meetings. Such boundaries are, within legal constraints, ultimately for Council to decide.

3.4 Equity and Equalities

3.4.1 None Apparent

4.0 Recommendation

4.1 The Working Party's instructions are requested.

5.0 Decision Making Process

5.1 Any recommendations by the Working Party that would alter the Council's constitution will be considered by the Standards Committee, which will, in turn, make recommendations to Council.

Meeting: Standards Committee	Date: 7 November 2012
Meeting: Ordinary Council	Date: 6 December 2012

Contact Officer:	Glenn Back, Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager
Reporting to:	Harvey Patterson, Corporate & Regulatory Services and Monitoring Officer

Annex List

Annex 1	Responses from other East Kent Councils
Annex 2	Responses from councils outside of East Kent

Background Papers

Title	Details of where to access copy
<i>None</i>	

Corporate Consultation Undertaken

Finance	N/A
Legal	Harvey Patterson, Corporate & Regulatory Services Manager and Monitoring Officer