

# **Policy on Audio/Visual Recording and Photography at SSDC Council Meetings**

*Executive Portfolio Holder:* Peter Seib, Regulatory and Democratic Services  
*Lead Officer:* Angela Cox, Democratic Services Manager  
*Contact Details:* angela.cox@southsomerset.gov.uk or (01935) 462148

## **1. Purpose of the Report**

To provide a policy to guide the press and public who wish to record any SSDC Council meeting. Also to seek approval to trial the recording of District Executive meetings with a view to extending this to all Council meetings in the future.

## **2. Public Interest**

The Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 now allows both the public and press to freely record any public council meeting. This policy is proposed in order to ensure that no meeting is interrupted and to protect the privacy of any member of the public attending an SSDC meeting. Also, to enable members of the public who are unable to attend in person, it is proposed to trial the audio recording of District Executive meetings and post the recording on the council's website.

## **3. Recommendations**

That Council:-

- 1) adopt the policy on audio/visual recording and photography at Council meetings attached at Appendix 1;
- 2) agree to the trial audio recording of District Executive meetings;
- 3) agree that if the trial is successful, then it be extended to all Council meetings where practicable.

## **4. Background**

The Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, Part 7, Section 40 states:-

### **Access to local government meetings and documents**

- (1) The Secretary of State may by regulations make provision for and in connection with allowing persons —
  - (a) to film, photograph or make sound recordings of proceedings at a meeting of a body to which this section applies, or of a committee or sub-committee of such a body;
  - (b) to use other means for enabling persons not present at such a meeting to see or hear proceedings at the meeting, as it takes place or later;
  - (c) to report or provide commentary on the proceedings at such a meeting, orally or in writing, so that the report or commentary is available, as the meeting takes place or later, to persons not present at the meeting.

## **5. Report**

Many local authorities either audio record or video their Council meetings through webcasts which are available on their websites. This can be a useful for members of the public who

are unable to attend a meeting in person and as a reference to officers at the conclusion of a meeting.

A tentative enquiry as to the cost of full webcasting SSDC meetings in the council chamber was in the region of £20,000 for 3 cameras and related software. It would also require one staff member to operate the cameras during a council meeting.

In view of this it is proposed to start the trial at a relatively low key and low cost and to gauge public reaction to the audio recordings on the website.

It is proposed to start the trial with the same software used at East Devon District Council which is free to download and would only require the connecting cables to the existing sound system in the Council Chamber. The software is able to section the recording to each Agenda item so that it can be selectively listened to.

At the current time, there is no microphone system installed in the Main Committee Room and so a different recording system would be investigated for meetings held in this room. This could involve a greater capital outlay and would be the subject of a further report to District Executive if this initial trial is successful.

The portable sound system used by Area West and North Committee is capable of sound recording and could be implemented at any time. The microphone equipment at Churchfields, Wincanton is older but it is hoped that a low cost solution, similar to that proposed for the Council Chamber can be achieved. Area South Committee already meet in the Council Chamber and so recording these meetings will be possible.

## **6. Financial Implications**

At the current time, it is proposed to audio record meetings and the cost of achieving this in the Council Chamber is minimal as free audio software can be installed on an SSDC laptop and wired into the existing sound system. The cost of the connecting cables is less than £20. If a specialist voice recording device is required for a better quality recording this can be sourced at less than £50.

## **7. Corporate Priority Implications**

We want our services to be accessible to all our residents and visitors.

## **8. Carbon Emissions and Climate Change Implications**

None.

## **9. Equality and Diversity Implications**

The microphone system in the Council Chamber is linked to a hearing loop system for people with hearing difficulties. Full consideration to equalities has been given in producing the Policy on the recording of SSDC meetings.

## **10. Background Papers**

The Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, Part 7.