

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

ETHICS AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE

27TH JANUARY 2009

Protocol on the use of Mobile Phones in Council Meetings

OPEN	
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	Monitoring Officer
CONTACT OFFICER:	Caroline Newlands, Ext. 2715 Caroline.newlands@wyreforestdc.gov.uk
APPENDICES	Appendix 1 Protocol on the use of Mobile Phones in Council Meetings

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To ask the Council to give consideration to adopting a Protocol that prohibits the use of mobile phones during all meetings of the Council.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 **The Committee is asked to RECOMMEND to Council that:**

- 2.1 **The Protocol on the use of Mobile Phones and Blackberries in Council Meetings attached as Appendix 1 to this report be adopted and paragraph C.15 of the Council's constitution be amended accordingly.**

- 2.2. **A paragraph be included in all Council agendas stating that the use of mobile phones during meetings is prohibited.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 At the meeting of the Ethics and Standards Committee on 15th December 2009, it was suggested that a Protocol be drafted on the use of mobile phones in Council meetings. This suggestion had been made following concerns being expressed about Members using their mobile phones during meetings of the Council.

4. KEY ISSUES

- 4.1 Members were particularly concerned about Members and Officers who used their mobile phones to send text messages during committee meetings and the possible effect on public perception particularly with regard to regulatory meetings. There were also concerns about Members texting during consideration of exempt items of business.
- 4.2. A recent YouGov survey revealed that the majority of the UK's population owned a mobile phone. Included in the survey was the conclusion that there were a large number of people that exhibited poor mobile phone etiquette in that they failed to consider the effect their behaviour had on colleagues (eg. phones ringing during meetings/use of their phones to text during meetings).

4.3 Members of the Ethics and Standards Committee considered that the Council should have a protocol that all Members and Officers would be expected to adhere to that gave clear instructions on mobile phone use during meetings.

4.4 Paragraph C.15 of the Council's Constitution prohibits the use of photographic video and sound recording equipment. Modern mobile phones enable the user to not only take photos and videos but some also enable the user to record meetings.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no financial implications arising from the adoption of a protocol on the use of mobile phones.

6. LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There is no legislation that requires the Council to prohibit the use of mobile phones in Council meetings but it is a requirement of the Council's Constitution that meetings should not be photographed and no video or sound recording should take place unless the Chairman consents otherwise.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT NEEDS ASSESSMENT

7.1 As the policy is intended to apply to all Members and Officers it is considered that there are no issues arising from the Equality Impact Assessment.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT

8.1 The Council could be at risk of a possible legal challenge particularly in a regulatory committee if it was perceived that a Member was not giving an application their full attention.

8.2. Some Members have shared concerns about being contactable during meetings. In very special circumstances, if a Member has a genuine reason for needing to be contacted during a meeting they should make this known to the Chairman before commencement of the meeting.

9. CONCLUSION

9.1 Standards for England encourage Ethics and Standards Committees to take the lead in setting protocols that give clear guidance. It is considered that the proposed Protocol will give clear direction to both Members and Officers on the non-use of mobile phones in Council meetings.

10. CONSULTEES

10.1 Chairman and Vice-Chairman Ethics and Standards Committee

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

11.1 Minute ES.19 Ethics and Standards Committee 15th December 2009

11.2 YouGov Study

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

PROTOCOL ON THE USE OF MOBILE PHONES DURING COUNCIL MEETINGS

Introduction

Wyre Forest District Council recognises that the use of mobile phones is part of everyday life. This Policy outlines the Council's rules regarding the use of mobile phones during all Council meetings.

Application of Policy

This policy applies to *all* Officers and Members whilst attending Council meetings.

Personal/Work Mobile Phones/Blackberries

Whilst it is acknowledged that Officers and Members may wish to be contacted via mobile phone whilst at work during Council meetings the following must be adhered to:

- Phones/Blackberries should be switched to off or to silent vibrate.
- Texts must not be read or responded to.
- Ring tones **must be** switched off during all meetings.
- No using of phones to make photos or videos during meetings.

Breach of Policy

Breaches of this Protocol will be dealt with via the Council's Ethics and Standards Committee.

Review

The Protocol will be reviewed on a regular basis as required.