

Protocol on the use of Social Media in Formal meetings

In recognising the ongoing developments in technology, this protocol provides guidance to members of the public (including press) and Councillors on the use of Social Media in formal meetings of Worcestershire County Council, its Committees and Cabinet.

'Social Media' includes the use of web-based technologies to share information and interact within online communities eg blogs, Twitter, Facebook and other platforms for interaction and networking.

Already many of the Council's public meetings are webcast live and an archiving facility is available to view the broadcasts of previous meetings. Whilst filming, videoing, photographing or recording the meeting remains prohibited [without the express consent of the chairman of the meeting], the Council is content to encourage public democracy through the use of Social Media as set out in this protocol.

- The use of Social Media in formal meetings, whether by Councillors, members of the public or press, is permitted as long as this (in the view of the Chairman) does not undermine or disrupt the meeting.
- To avoid undermining the meeting, the full attention of Councillors who are involved in the decision-making will be required during any formal debate or vote on any item under their consideration. These Councillors must not be distracted by using Social Media or any mobile devices during the time that the debate and vote is underway.
- To minimise disruption or disturbance to others attending the meeting, **all attendees** are asked to ensure that their phones or other mobile devices are set on silent or vibrate mode during meetings.
- These concessions do not apply following a motion to exclude the press and public from any part of a meeting. No Councillor in attendance, whether as a decision-maker or observer, is permitted to use Social Media or mobile devices during an 'exempt' session or disclose in any way the content of the items under discussion.
- Councillors need to be aware that inappropriate comments made during a meeting, would (almost definitely) fall within the remit of the Code of Conduct. Any inappropriate comments made using Social Media (e.g tweets or blog posts) could open councillors to potential complaints and investigations.

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