

HOUGHTON PARISH COUNCIL

Recording, Photography and Use of Social Media

Protocol and Guidance

This guidance applies to any council meeting open to the public.

The Council allows any member of the public or press to report on all public meetings subject to limited exceptions outlined below. Subject to standing order 3(m), a person who attends a meeting is permitted to report on the meeting whilst the meeting is open to the public. To "report" means to film, photograph, make an audio recording of meeting proceedings, use any other means for enabling persons not present to see or hear the meeting as it takes place or later or to report or to provide oral or written commentary about the meeting so that the report or commentary is available as the meeting takes place or later to persons not present.

A person present at a meeting may not provide an oral report or oral commentary about a meeting as it takes place without permission.

The Chair of the meeting shall advise members of the public and members that the meeting maybe recorded if notice has been received that reporting is happening.

The purpose of this protocol is to provide guidance, particularly, for members of the press or public on reporting of any Parish Council meeting, which is held in public.

Although there is a legal right to allow reporting of Council meetings, the proceedings of the meeting must not be disrupted by the use of any equipment or the manner in which the reporting is undertaken. It is also important that reporting does not inhibit community involvement in the proceedings.

Guidelines for Reporting

Any member of the public or media wishing to report a public meeting should ensure that:

1. Any photography or audio/visual recording must take place from a fixed position in the meeting room approved by the Chairman, to minimise disruption to the proceedings.
2. The use of flash photography, additional lighting, sound boom or other equipment that may, in the Chair's opinion, be likely to be intrusive or in any way interfere with proceedings will only be allowed, if agreed, in advance with the Chairman.
3. If the Chairman feels that any photography, audio or visual recording is disrupting the meeting in any way, then the operator of the equipment will be required to stop reporting.
4. If during the meeting a motion is passed to exclude the press and public, because confidential or exempt information is likely to be disclosed, then all rights to report the meeting cease and the operator of the equipment will be required to stop reporting and leave the meetings taking all reporting equipment with them.
5. They comply with any request made by the Chairman regarding respecting the public's right to privacy.

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6. People seated in the public gallery/seating area should not be photographed, filmed or recorded without consent of the individuals concerned. This also applies to those individuals who may ask a public question, present a petition or make a representation at a Council meeting open to the public and who are not seated in a 'public seating' area.
7. Photographs, audio and visual recordings should not be edited in a way that could lead to a misinterpretation of the proceedings. This includes refraining from editing the views being recorded in a way that may ridicule or show lack of respect.

Notices advising the public that the public meeting maybe reported on will be displayed in or directly outside the relevant meeting room and this will be noted on the agenda. The Chairman will also make an announcement that the meeting maybe photographed, recorded or filmed.

What if I don't want to be recorded?

If as a member of the public you do not wish to be photographed, filmed, or recorded, please informed the Clerk in advance of the meeting. If you are concerned for your personal safety it may be possible to make alternative seating arrangements.

What is the procedure prior to the Meeting for those Wishing to Record or Photograph a Meeting?

Members of the public wishing to report on a public meeting, should contact the Clerk for the meeting concerned. Contact details available on the Agenda for the meeting, on the Parish Council's website or by e mailing houghtonparishcouncil@gmail.com at least two working days before the meeting. The request should include the following information:

1. Which meeting this request refers to;
2. The name, organisation (if applicable) and contact details of the person making the request;
3. What equipment it is intended to be used (e.g. camera/audio recorder/video camera, tri-pod etc.)
4. What the photographs, or audio/visual recording will be used for and/or where the information will be published.

What is the procedure for reporting during the meeting?

All reporting equipment must be set up before the meeting starts to avoid disrupting the meeting.

If the Chairman feels the photography/audio or visual recording is disrupting the proceedings the operator of the equipment will be required to stop reporting.

If the person continues reporting after having been requested to desist, the Chairman will ask the person to leave the meeting. If the person refuses to leave, the Chairman may adjourn the meeting or make other appropriate arrangements for the meeting to continue without disruption.

Anyone asked to leave a meeting because they refused to comply with the Chairman's requests may be refused permission to report at future Council meetings that are open to the public.

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If during the meeting a motion is passed to exclude press and public, because confidential or exempt information is likely to be disclosed, then all rights to record the meetings are removed. All equipment should be removed from the meeting room when members of the public and press are excluded.

If a meeting for which agreement is given to report is adjourned by the Chairman, then any reporting should stop at the point at which the meeting is adjourned.

Social Media

There are no restrictions placed on anyone at the meeting using Twitter, blogs, Facebook or similar 'social media' if the Chairman does not consider their actions are disrupting the proceedings of the meeting.

If the Chairman feels the use of social media is at the time disrupting the proceedings, the Councillor, member of the public or press may be required to stop.

If use continues, the Chair will ask the person to leave the meeting. If the person refused to leave then the Chair may adjourn the meeting or make other appropriate arrangements for the meetings to continue without disruption.

What is disruptive behaviour?

Essentially, this could be any action or activity that disrupts the proper conduct of meetings.

Examples could include:

- Moving to areas outside the areas designated for the public or press without the consent of the Chairman;
- Excessive noise in recording or setting up or re-siting equipment during debate/discussion;
- Intrusive lighting and use of flash photography; and
- Asking for people to repeat statements for the purpose of recording.

Can I leave recording equipment in a public meeting room and record without being present?

There is no legal prohibition, however, under this guidance and council standing orders, the committee may require any such recording to stop if at any stage the meeting become private and so someone is required to be present to stop the equipment. In addition, the Council shall not be responsible for any security of any equipment left unattended.

Are there any limits to what I can say in a tweet or video or report I publish?

The law of the land applies including the law of defamation and the law on public order offences. Freedom of speech within the law should be exercised with personal and social responsibility, showing respect and tolerance towards the views of others.

Will I be able to provide commentary during the meeting?

Any person can provide written commentary during a meeting, as well as verbal commentary outside or after the meeting. The rules do not permit verbal commentary during a meeting, as this would be disruptive to the good order of the meeting.

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Recording by Houghton Parish Council

1. The Chairman will state at the start of the meeting that an audio recording is being made, which will be made available on request up until the next meeting.
2. The recording will be kept until the meeting minutes are approved at the following meeting at which time the recording will be deleted.
3. If a request for a copy has been made, then the original will be kept for three years, or until such time then the Parish Council is dissolved, whichever comes first.
4. The recorder will not be used for any part of the meeting deemed 'confidential' where the public and press are excluded.

Record of Adoption, Review and Amendment made to the Houghton Parish Council's 'Recording, Photography and Social Media Policy'

Review/Adoption Record:

Minute Item 10d - 22nd May 2018

Minute Item 10, 14th May 2019.

Minute Item 7, 7th July 2020.

Minute Item 12, 4th May 2021.

Minute Item 13a, 17th May 2022

Minute Item 10a, 16th May 2023

Review date: Annually