

KETTERING BOROUGH COUNCIL

PROTOCOL FOR USE OF ELECTRONIC DEVICES AND SOCIAL MEDIA BY MEMBERS AT COUNCIL MEETINGS

**Purpose**

1. The purpose of this protocol is to provide you with guidance on acceptable conduct with regard to the use of hand held electronic devices (mobile phones, tablets, iPads or similar devices) and social media at Council meetings.
2. This protocol recognises growing use of social media by councillors as an effective method to engage with their constituents and support local democracy. It also recognises that you, as participants in a meeting, are in a different position to members of the public. Members have an obligation to pay close attention to the debate and to be seen to play an active part in the proceedings. They must also show respect and courtesy to other members and other participants at the meeting.
3. This guidance aims to help you and ensure that:
  - There will be no interference or disruption to the proceedings of any meeting of the Council by the use of electronic devices and social media.
  - The democratic process is and is seen to be properly conducted in the public interest with members fully engaged in the decision making process.
  - The risk of challenge to council decisions is minimised, particularly for contentious planning or licensing decisions, where Members are required to come to a decision on the merits of the case. Challenge to a decision on the grounds that members failed to properly consider the facts must be taken into account.
  - Members of the public, staff and other councillors are treated with mutual respect
  - There is a consistent approach to the use of electronic devices and social media by members
  - Members comply with Members Code of Conduct and the rules relating to bias and predetermination.

**Use of Hand Held Electronic Devices**

4. Electronic Devices have a wide range of uses including:
  - Phone call
  - Text messages

- Reading and Sending Emails
- Accessing Facebook, Twitter, and other social media sites
- Accessing agenda papers and background information
- Taking and sending photographs
- Filming
- Audio recording

### Rules of Good Practice

5. The following rules of good practice on use of hand held electronic devices and social media during council meetings seek to avoid issues and complaints arising from their use:
  - 5.1. Use of devices should be kept to a minimum. Do not appear to spend most of your time at the meeting concentrating on your mobile phone or other device.
  - 5.2. Consider the impression you are giving to others, particularly members of the public who may be attending to speak on a matter of concern to them.
  - 5.3. Devices should be kept on silent mode during the meeting.
  - 5.4. Use of Social media during Planning and Licensing meetings must be given special consideration. Members act in a quasi-judicial role and must come to a decision based on the merits of a case. It is important that members are seen to be fully engaged in the process.

***It is suggested that the use social media in Planning and Licensing Committees should not be permitted***

- 5.5. Acceptable uses:
  - Reading meeting papers and accessing relevant background papers
  - Accessing applications relevant to the decision (eg maps of sites)
  - Access to social media to report the outcome of an agenda item after the decision has been taken and the meeting has concluded.
  - Comply with the Member's Code of Conduct (see 5.7 below).
- 5.6. Uses to be avoided:
  - Accessing social media sites during the meeting to give contemporaneous comment on the discussion prior to conclusion of the debate.
  - Accessing social media sites at Planning and Licensing Committees.

- Direct contact or debate with a member of the public on social media during a council meeting. The Council operates a right to speak policy for public engagement during meetings. In the interests of openness and transparency decisions must be taken on the information available to the committee as a whole.
- Checking emails and text not related to the meeting. In exceptional circumstances, with the consent of the Chair, members may check text messages necessary for domestic purposes.
- Audio recording and filming of the meeting other than in accordance with the Council's adopted Protocol on Filming and reporting of meetings.

**5.7. The Members' Code of Conduct.**

- 5.7.1. Remember to consider the seven principles of Public Life which underpin the Code of Conduct. These are; selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.
  - 5.7.2. Treat others with respect. Avoid personal attacks and disrespectful, rude or offensive comments. Stick to the facts.
  - 5.7.3. Comply with equality laws. Take care not to publish anything that may be considered to be sexist, racist, homophobic, anti-faith or any in breach of the Equalities legislation..
  - 5.7.4. Do not publish anything that you have received in confidence. Social media, recording or filming must not be done in private session of any meeting.
  - 5.7.5. Do not bring the Council or your role as a councillor into disrepute.
6. The Mayor or Chairman of the meeting will have the discretion to stop use of any or all personal electronic equipment if they consider the use to be disruptive and it is detracting from the proper conduct of the meeting.