

**PE1731/F**

Aberdeenshire Council submission of 18 October 2019

Petition PE1731 – *Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to amend the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 to permit audio recording of all public council meetings by members of the public.*

**1. What is your policy on the audio recording of public council meetings?**

Aberdeenshire Council currently has the following provision within its Standing Orders (meeting rules) -

*Meetings may be webcast by the Council. Otherwise, no person or body shall be permitted, without the permission of the Meeting, to tape record, photograph, video, film or use any other form of electronic, digital or computerised sound or visual recording system during any Meeting.*

The above provisions do not generally apply in respect of the items of business at a meeting which are deemed to be Confidential or agreed to be considered as Exempt business.

Live webcasting of the publically available items of business at meetings is normally available for our Full Council, Audit Committee, Policy Committees (Business Services, Communities, Education and Children's Services and Infrastructure Services Committees) and Sustainability Committee meetings, if those meetings take place in the venues which house our webcasting equipment. Access to the archived recordings of those meetings are then made available on our website for a six month period after the meeting.

From information currently available, there have been no requests from members of the public to independently audio record council meetings.

**2. If your council does not permit audio recordings of public meetings, what is the rationale for this?**

See response above.

**3. What are considered to be the concerns of allowing members of the public to audio record public council meetings?**

That there could be disruption to the meeting as a result of the recording taking place.

That all attendees (including other members of the public) should be made aware of the recording taking place and have an opportunity to raise any

objections – which could be challenging to manage during a meeting when members of the public are free to arrive and leave at any time they wish.

That any published material as a result of audio recordings could potentially be taken out of context and/or edited in a way that might lead to misinterpretation or misrepresentation of the proceedings or comments made by attendees. However, any attendee at a public meeting is currently welcome to take comprehensive notes of the proceedings and there are no procedures in place to manage how those notes might be used.

**4. With regards to the actions being called for in the petition, are there any constraints faced by local authorities on what has been proposed?**

It is challenging to identify potential constraints should the proposed changes to legislation be introduced, without being aware of any associated regulations or procedures which might be put in place to manage that process nor the number of requests which might be received as a result. However, I can advise that Aberdeenshire Council welcomes public participation in its meetings and makes particular provision to accommodate such participation in its Standing Orders. The Council already live webcasts many of its public meetings and makes those recordings available via its Website.

Whilst permission is currently required should a member of the public wish to independently audio record a meeting, this is not with any intention to limit opportunities to do so it is merely a tool to enable any such requests to be managed appropriately. Access to the agenda and papers for public meetings is provided via the Council's website and, as indicated above, anyone attending a public meeting already has the opportunity to take detailed notes of the debate should they wish to do so.