

Governance, Audit and Scrutiny Committee
15 July 2013

Report by the Secretary/
Director of People

**DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL
GOVERNMENT (CLG) – GUIDE FOR LOCAL PEOPLE**

REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CLG released guidance in June 2013 called ‘Your council’s cabinet – going to its meetings, seeing how it works’ (see Appendix 1). While the guidance is aimed directly at local authority ‘Cabinet’ governance structures (and therefore more relevant to the four constituent authorities) there are a number of parallels, particularly around openness and accountability.

The Committee should be aware of the Guidance, how it may apply to the Fire Authority and to what extent the Authority should give further consideration to the themes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Committee is asked to consider this report and make any such recommendations as may be appropriate to the full Authority.

EXEMPT INFORMATION

2. Members are well aware of what can be regarded as exempt information. These are set down in the Constitution. Bearing in mind the overarching public interest test and when exempt reports come forward, these are Officer recommendations, which do not bind the Authority, i.e. the Authority decides whether a report should be exempt or not. The rule of thumb should be all information is open unless there is a very good substantive reason why not, based on the advice of the Monitoring Officer. The Guidance simply repeats and reminds Members about what is (or rather can be regarded to be) exempt information.

FILMING OF MEETINGS

3. At present, like many Authorities, the filming of meetings is prohibited unless the Authority agrees otherwise. Obviously a number of Authorities have invested in webcasting of meetings, which was considered, albeit briefly, during the third review of corporate governance.
4. In terms of the Guidance, then the Constitution is essentially compatible, although there is no more detailed policy and it would be right to say that the recording of meetings has not been encouraged or ever requested. It is an area the Authority may wish to explore further and be better positioned to deal with a request should this arise.

TWEETING/BLOGGING

5. There has never been a blanket prohibition on the reporting of meetings on tweeting/blogging, but again the Constitution provides that where this may cause a disturbance then the agreement of the Chair is requested. The Constitution does need to be updated in terms of social media, but the Authority needs to determine, given the Guidance, the approach it wishes to take.
6. The Guidance suggests that anyone may attend an Authority meeting and tweet, without the need for consent. To that end the Constitution is at odds with the Guidance. It is suggested that anyone wishing to tweet or use other forms of media during a meeting, so far as possible, informs the Secretary in advance. Should this cause any disturbance then the activity could be prohibited at the particular meeting.

KNOWING ABOUT A PUBLIC MEETING

7. The Fire Authority is fully compliant and goes further in terms of publishing papers on the web, distributing copies to the media and not charging for copies.

KEY DECISIONS

8. The section of the Guidance relates to where Local Authority Executive arrangements are in place.

DECISIONS – RECORDS

9. In terms of the Fire Authority then so far as the Guidance is applicable to the Authority, then the Authority is fully compliant.

10. In respect to internal decisions, for example CMT or an internal board, then decisions are made available internally (by minutes and action logs). The external release would be subject to normal FOI rules.

STRATEGIC PLAN COMPATIBILITY

11. Good governance is a key enabler of the Vision and the Strategic Plan.

FINANCIAL/RESOURCES/VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS

12. None arising directly.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

13. As outlined above.

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT/HR IMPLICATIONS

14. None arising.

CORPORATE RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

15. None arising directly,

HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

16. None arising.

COMMUNICATION ACTIONS ARISING

17. None arising.

DETAILS OF CONSULTATION

18. None.

BACKGROUND PAPERS AVAILABLE FOR ACCESS

19. None.

RECOMMENDATIONS RESTATED

20. The Committee is asked to consider this report and make any such recommendations as may be appropriate to the full Authority.

R GRAHAM

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RG/SJ
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