AGENDA 9, Enc vi) Proposal For Consideration - Recording And Publishing Council Meetings (originally brought for consideration in August 2025)

Proposed by: Cllr Kerry Davison

Purpose

This proposal seeks Council approval to introduce the recording of Council meetings and to make these recordings available to the public online, thereby enhancing transparency, accessibility, and public engagement with the Council's work.

Background

Several local authorities across England now routinely record their council meetings and publish them online for public viewing. This practice has proven effective in:

- ✓ Increasing transparency in local government decision-making
- ✓ Improving accessibility for residents who cannot attend meetings in person
- ✓ Providing a fuller context to the formal minutes
- ✓ Enhancing community engagement with local democracy

Whilst Northumberland County Council livestreams its meetings, this proposal focuses on a more modest but meaningful step: creating recordings that residents can access after meetings have concluded. This would complement, not replace, our existing published minutes.

Rationale

Improved Transparency and Accountability

Video recordings would provide residents with direct access to the full debate and discussion that informs Council decisions, offering greater insight than written minutes alone can provide.

Enhanced Accessibility

Many residents are unable to attend evening meetings due to work commitments, caring responsibilities, health issues, or other constraints. Recorded meetings would enable them to engage with Council business at a time convenient to them.

Better Public Understanding

Seeing and hearing the debate allows residents to better understand the complexities of issues, the rationale behind decisions, and the diverse perspectives of their elected representatives.

Community Engagement

Making meetings more accessible could encourage greater interest in local democracy and potentially increase participation in consultations and other engagement opportunities.

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Accurate Record

Video recordings provide an objective record of proceedings, which can be valuable for reference purposes and for Councillors reviewing discussions on complex matters.

Scope

This proposal relates specifically to:

- ✓ Full Council and Committee meetings
- ✓ Post-meeting availability of recordings (not live streaming)
- ✓ Audio and visual recording of proceedings
- ✓ Online publication via the Council's website or YouTube Channel

This proposal is distinct from the anticipated Government provisions for hybrid meetings. It is focused on transparency and engagement rather than facilitating remote participation by Councillors.

Clerk's Note on Practical Considerations

Technical Requirements

- ❖ Recording equipment (camera, microphone, potentially multiple devices depending on chamber layout)
- ❖ Storage solution for video files
- ❖ Platform for hosting/publishing recordings (e.g., YouTube, council website)
- ❖ Basic editing capability to add introductory information if required

Procedural Matters

- ❖ Signage in the chamber notifying attendees that meetings are recorded
- ❖ Clear protocols on when recording starts and stops (typically formal business only, not confidential items)
- ❖ Strictly no recordings of confidential/exempt items
- ❖ Retention policy for recordings (to align with local government transparency requirements)
- ❖ Privacy considerations, particularly for members of the public addressing the Council

Resources

- ❖ Initial capital expenditure for equipment
- ❖ Ongoing costs for storage and hosting
- ❖ Widescope, or Officer time for operating equipment and managing uploads
- ❖ Potential training for staff and Councillors

Legal and Governance

- ❖ Compliance with Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR
- ❖ Update to Standing Orders if necessary

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- Privacy notices for attendees and speakers
- Protocol for handling requests for removal/editing (in exceptional circumstances)

Consultation

Before implementation, it would be appropriate to:

- Seek legal advice on data protection and governance requirements
- Obtain quotes for equipment and hosting solutions
- Consult with staff regarding operational implications
- Consider a trial period to assess technical and practical issues
- Review practices at comparable councils who have implemented similar schemes

Recommendations

Council is asked to:

Agree in principle to the audio and video recording and publication of Council and Committee meetings;

Instruct the Clerk to:

- Investigate technical solutions and obtain costings
- Seek appropriate legal advice on data protection and governance
- Develop a draft protocol for recording and publication
- Research best practice from other councils

Report back to Council with costs and consider allocation of appropriate budget for equipment purchase and ongoing costs in the next financial year, or sooner if feasible.