

Version Control

Version	Date	Author / Amendments	Status
5.0	28 May 2015	C Connolly	Agreed (G & A 12.05.15)
6.0	04 February 2016	A McCann	Agreed
7.0	12 December 2019	A McCann	Agreed
8.0	08 February 2023	C Adamson	Agreed

Introduction

This protocol has been developed in accordance with the provisions in Part 8 (Access to Meetings and Documents) of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 and the Council's Standing Orders.

With the exception of the provision relating to audio recordings, this applies to all meetings of the Council and Committees which are open to the public.

Summary of Provisions of the Legislation and Associated Actions

(1) Open Meetings

All meetings of the Council (and Committees) are open to the public except to the extent to which they are excluded (either during the whole or part of proceedings). They can only be excluded in accordance with Part 8 42 (2) of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014:-

- The public must be excluded from a meeting of Council during an item of business whenever it is likely, in the view of the nature of business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that, if members of the public were present during that item, confidential information would be disclosed to them in breach of the obligation of confidence; and nothing in this Part authorises or requires the disclosure of confidential information in breach of the obligation of confidence.

The legislation provides a definition of confidential business (Part 8 42 (3) Schedule 6 and exempt information (Section 51).

(2) "In Committee"

Where an item is deemed confidential, then this will be dealt with "In Committee" and the members of the public and, if appropriate, the relevant officers, will be asked to leave. This must be done by resolution of the committee with the Chairman identifying the following:

- what proceedings or part thereof will be dealt with " In Committee" and also
- the description of the exempt information giving rise to the exclusion of the public.

Please see Schedule 6 Part 1 of the Act, attached under separate cover, for definition of what constitutes exempt information.

The agenda for meetings should include further information on confidential matters which gives rise to the exclusion of the public e.g. "Report from HR Business Partner on HR Matters"

Action – In preparing reports, the Chief Executive and Directors should ensure that items being dealt with 'In Committee' are separate from the main report, and the agenda provides appropriate information on what is being discussed in Committee. Members' Services will then place such items in the confidential folder on Sharepoint.

At the meeting, the Chief Executive / Director should advise the Chairman of the requirement to get a proposer and seconder to both go and come out of "In Committee" and for the Chair to give the description of the exempt information giving rise to the exclusion of the public.

(3) Notice of Meeting and Agenda

These are required to be available at the Council offices 5 days in advance of the meeting or if called later, as soon as possible in advance of the meeting. This is also a requirement under Standing Orders.

Action – Members' Services have arrangements in place for the agenda to be placed at the concierge desk at LVI Rotunda. In addition, the Schedule of Meetings, on a quarterly basis, has been placed on Council website.

Note: - In order to comply with the above, for Committees where Members' Services currently draft reports (G&A and Corporate Services), all relevant information should be with Members' Services by close of play on the Monday of the week prior to the meeting. In relation to the Planning Committee report, which is issued 7 days prior to the meeting, the report should be with Members' Services at latest by 9am, 7 days prior to the meeting taking place.

For all other Committees, all relevant information should be with Members' Services by close of play on Tuesday.

Note:- For all tabled and additional reports for Council/Committee, the relevant Director should have the prior approval of the Mayor/Chairman.

Note:- Special meetings of Committee and Council should only be held in exceptional circumstances such as to deal with timebound funding and contractual issues which cannot wait to next Council or Committee meeting.

(4) Access to reports

Reports are required to be available for inspection (excluding confidential items) by members of the public at least five days before the meeting or as it becomes available. Members should be sent the reports in the first instance and then made available to the public.

Action – Reports will be available for inspection between 9.00am and 5.00pm from Members’ Services at LVI.

- (i) At the meeting a reasonable number of copies of the agenda and reports, subject to exclusion of any item deemed confidential, must be made available for inspection by members of the public in attendance.
- (ii) Hard copies of reports will be provided by Members’ Services for the Chair of Committee (Mayor for Council meetings).
- (iii) As an interim, it has been agreed that hard copies of the Planning Committee reports will be circulated to all Members of the Planning Committee.

Action - Members’ Services will provide 3 copies of the report (excluding items deemed confidential) and the agenda for all meetings with 6 copies for meetings of the Planning Committee and Full Council. This will be kept under review. Directors are to advise if there is an item which is likely or has potential to warrant increased public attendance.

Agreed -

- that agenda and report for all meetings (excluding confidential items) be placed on the Councils Website at least 5 days prior to the meeting or as soon as they become available

(5) Minutes

Draft minutes are required to be published 2 days after the meeting.

Action – Members’ Services will produce the draft minute and following approval by Chief Executive / Director and then Chair of Committee, will place these in the relevant committee folder in Sharepoint and email Members to advise of this.

The legislation requires that a Council “as soon as is reasonably practicable” place on its website a copy of the minutes.

Action - After the minutes of a meeting have been agreed (i.e ratified by Council), Members' Services will forward to MCU for posting on the Council website. Once there are trained administrators, Members' Services will undertake this task.

(6) Audio Recordings and Webcast

The legislation requires a Council to make an audio recording of any meeting of the Council which is open to the public. The recording must be made available at the Council offices for a period of 6 years from the date of the meeting and published on the Council website for two years.

Whilst this only applies to the monthly meeting of Council it was agreed in October 2022 to provide the following:

- Audio recordings of standing committee meetings;
- Livestream of Council Meetings;
- Webcast recordings of Council meetings.

Audio recordings of standing committee meetings

- Where an item is deemed to be confidential and considered "In Committee" the recording will be paused.
- Audio recordings will be uploaded to the Council website within two days following ratification of minutes at the monthly Council Meeting.
- Audio recordings will be available on the Council website for a period of two years and available at the Council offices for a period of 6 years.

Livestream and webcast recordings of Council meetings

- Council meetings will be livestreamed through the Council's website.
- Where an item is deemed confidential and considered "In Committee" the broadcast and recording will be paused.
- A webcast recording will be published on the Council website following approval of the minutes by the Mayor and Chief Executive.
- Webcast recordings will be available on the Council website for a period of two years and available at the Council offices for a period of 6 years.

Action – At this juncture, Centre Management will arrange for a technician to be in attendance at monthly meetings of Council to facilitate the livestream and record these meetings (excluding any items deemed confidential and “In Committee”). After the meeting Member Services will check the recording to ensure that any item “In Committee” has not been recorded and that the audio quality is adequate. Dependent on the items discussed at the meeting, the Chief Executive or relevant Director may also be asked to review this. Members’ Services will then forward to MCU a copy of the linked recording and this will be posted on the website.