



Subject:	Motion – Audio Recording of Area Based Working Groups
Date:	19 <sup>th</sup> January, 2018
Reporting Officer:	John Walsh, City Solicitor
Contact Officer:	Stephen McCrory, Democratic Services Manager

<b>Restricted Reports</b>	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

<b>Call-in</b>	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues</b>
1.1	To consider a Motion on the Audio Recording of Area Based Working Group meetings which has been referred to the Committee for consideration by the Council.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	The Committee is recommended to consider the matter and to take such action thereon as may be determined.

<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main report</b>
3.1	<u>Key Issues</u>
3.1.1	At the meeting of the Council on 3 <sup>rd</sup> January, the following motion was proposed by Councillor McReynolds and seconded by Councillor O'Neill:
3.1.2	"This Council recognises the important role that transparency, accountability and openness play in strengthening the trust of the public in their representatives; notes the important role audio recording of committee meetings since January 2016; acknowledges that the Area Working Groups perform a vital function in allocating sums of money to worthwhile projects across Belfast; that they will have an additional important role with the upcoming local area plans; and, agrees to commence recording of all Area Working Group meetings to demonstrate to the public that resources are being allocated openly, fairly and transparently".
3.1.3	In accordance with Standing Order 13(f), the motion was referred to the Committee for consideration.
3.1.4	In order to provide some relevant background information, the Committee is requested to take account of the following points when considering the Motion.
3.1.5	The Committee will recall that, at the first Annual Meeting of the new Council in April, 2015, it was decided that a traditional Committee style governance system would operate for the duration of the Council Term. This type of system provides for the establishment of a number of Committees which consider the operation of the Council services and (except where the Council delegates its powers to the Committee as in the Planning and Licensing Committees) make recommendations to the full Council which is, ultimately, the decision-making body.
3.1.6	The Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014, at Section 47, requires the Council, so far as is practicable, to make an audio recording of so much of any Council meeting as is open to the public and requires that the audio recording must be available to the public at the Council offices for a period of 6 years from the date of the meeting. The Council has, for a number of years, gone further than this requirement by providing for a live webcast of the Council meetings through the Council website.
3.1.7	There is no requirement in the 2014 Act for the proceedings of Committee meetings to be audio recorded. However, the Council in September 2015 agreed to provide for the audio recording of all of its Standing Committees which took place in the Lavery Room in City Hall. This decision was extended further in December 2015 to allow for the audio recording of the Planning Committee meetings which routinely took place in the Banqueting Hall at the City Hall.
3.1.8	Accordingly, the Council has been audio recording its Standing Committee meetings since January, 2016 based upon an operating protocol (attached at Appendix 1).
3.1.9	For a number of years, pre-dating the establishment of the new Council in 2015, the Council, in addition to the establishment of its Standing Committees, has established a number of Working Groups, the purpose of which is to allow for early consideration of matters by the political process before reports are submitted for formal consideration by the Standing Committees and ultimately the full Council. These Working Groups are not decision-making bodies and can only make recommendations for a Standing Committee to consider. They are not governed by the rules set out in the 2014 Act and are entirely

	<p>discretionary. Therefore, the Council decides itself upon the membership, remit and procedures for these Working Groups. Accordingly, the reports to be considered by Working Groups are not publicly available in the way in which Committee reports are published, as required under Part 8 of the 2014 Act. As such, officers can include details in Working Group reports which would, if the same reports were to be presented to a Standing Committee, require to be restricted from public view due to the confidential nature of the information provided. The Working Groups are a less formal way in which discussions commence on matters which will, ultimately, come before a Standing Committee for formal approval.</p>
3.1.10	<p>There are not any technical issues involved in the audio recording of Area Based Working Groups as the equipment used is portable and can be set up for meetings which take place in the Conor Room as easily as for those that take place in the Lavery Room. There would not be any significant additional expenditure involved should the Committee decide to proceed with the audio recording of those meetings.</p>
3.1.11	<p>Should the Committee decide to proceed with the audio recording of the Area Based Working Groups then this would be subject to the already established protocol (see Appendix 1). Therefore, if those meetings are receiving presentations from any third parties or deputations, then the prior approval of those persons will have to be obtained prior to the audio recording of that part of the meeting for which they are in attendance. If such approval is not forthcoming, then the audio recording would be paused during that person's presentation.</p>
3.1.12	<p>The Committee is requested to give consideration to the Notice of Motion and to take such action thereon as may be determined.</p>
3.2	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p>
3.2.1	<p>There are not any significant financial implications associated with this report. Any additional costs from extending the audio recording to include Area Based Working Groups can be met from within existing budgets.</p>
3.3	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u></p>
3.3.1	<p>There are not any equality or Good Relations implications associated with this report.</p>
4	<p><b>Appendices</b></p>
4.1	<p>Appendix 1 – Operating Protocol for the Audio Recording of Committee Meetings, as amended.</p>