

ITEM 13

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

5 July 2011

AUDIO RECORDING OF MEETINGS

Report of the Head of Transition

Purpose of Report: To consider the future arrangements for the recording of meetings following the trial period of audio recording as approved by the Authority in September 2010.

Legal and Equality Implications: Local Government Act 1972 and subsequent acts set out the procedures for holding a reporting on meetings of the Authority. Audio recordings may be taken but the approved minutes from the meetings form the formal legal record.

The equality and human rights impact of the recommendations of this report have been assessed as having no adverse impact on any particular group or individual.

Financial and Risk implications: The resources associated with the audio recording of meetings of the Authority and its committees are covered by the Core Budget. Risks are that the equipment could malfunction and that comments made during debates could lead to allegations that the Authority/committee was misled or failed to take account of correct considerations particularly in relation to the Planning Committee.

Business Plan References: D. Support Services – Corporate and Customer Support – Support to Authority Members.

RECOMMENDATION: Members are invited to decide:

- i. whether to continue with the practice of audio recording of meetings and
- ii. whether to make audio recordings available either by disc or via the website.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Authority agreed the principle of the audio recording of its meetings and those of its Committees at its meeting on 7 September 2010 for a trial period until its Annual Meeting in 2011. At its meeting on 9 November 2010 it approved a protocol for the audio recording of meetings and adopted amendments to Standing Orders to enable this to take place (these were subsequently updated at the meeting on 19 April 2011 following a detailed review of Standing Orders and the Scheme of Delegation). Attached as an Appendix for information are Standing Order 32, covering the Audio Recording of Meetings, and the Protocol.
- 1.2 Since the Protocol has been adopted there have been three meetings of the Authority, seven meetings of the Planning Committee and two meetings of the Resources and Performance Committee, a total of twelve meetings. This has resulted in requests for discs from:

- Exmoor Uprising, for nearly all these meetings (one of the requests was for five copies which whilst supplied on that occasion, Mrs Groves was informed that in the future this would be restricted to one disc per request).
 - The West Somerset Free Press for the Resources and Performance Committee meeting on 1 March 2011.
 - An objector to a planning application who was unable to attend the Planning Committee meeting.
- 1.3 There have been very few 'hits' to the recordings on the website (averaging about 20 per month) and the determination of just how many are external 'hits' is compounded by the fact that it is not possible to differentiate between an internal 'hit', which could be a member of staff checking the information is available on the website, etc, and a member of the public or the press seeking the recording.
- 1.4 As indicated previously, from an administrative point of view it takes a few minutes after each meeting to load the recordings on to the website or to copy the recordings on to a disc. It is not therefore onerous, although it is another operation that has to be carried out, often when time is at a premium.
- 1.5 Members agreed to carry out the trial in the interests of improving transparency and accessibility to the public. It is therefore for the members to decide, based on their views of the trial to date, whether the aims have been fulfilled and whether the Authority should continue with the practice of audio recording the meetings of the Authority and its Committees and making them available either by disc and/or via the website.

Charles Burrows
Head of Transition
June 2011

EXTRACT FROM STANDING ORDERS: 32. AUDIO RECORDING OF MEETINGS

- (a) Meetings of the Authority, the Planning Committee and the Resources and Performance Committee will be audio recorded for that part of the meeting open to the public and the press.
- (b) The Chairman of the meeting has the discretion to terminate or suspend audio recording if it is felt in his/her opinion to be interfering with the proper running of the meeting or likely to prejudice the proceedings of the meeting.
- (c) The official record of any meeting remains the approved minutes in accordance with Standing Order 8.

PROTOCOL FOR THE AUDIO RECORDING OF MEETINGS

- 1.1 All meetings of the Authority, the Planning Committee and the Resources and Performance Committee will be audio recorded for that part of the meeting that is open to the public and the press. The copyright in all audio recordings and any transcript of those recordings will remain in the ownership of the Authority. The Authority does not permit the broadcasting of the audio recording other than for proper news reporting by those persons or bodies authorised in writing in advance by the Authority.
- 1.2 At the start of each meeting the following statement will be made by the Chairman:

“Please note that this meeting will be audio recorded and therefore when speaking please remember to use the microphones. As Chairman of the meeting, I have the discretion to terminate or to suspend audio recording if in my opinion continuing to do so would prejudice the proceedings of the meeting.”
- 1.3 Notices will be displayed inside and outside the Committee Room stating that meetings will be audio recorded and a notice to this effect will be printed on the front of each agenda.
- 1.4 The Chairman of the meeting has the discretion to terminate or suspend audio recording if it is felt in his/her opinion to be interfering with the proper running of the meeting or likely to prejudice the proceedings of the meeting.
- 1.5 The official record of any meeting is the minutes that are produced and approved in accordance with the Local Government Act 1972. Those minutes will comprise a short summary of the discussion and a record of the resolutions made and will be the only true record of that meeting.