

AGENDA ITEM:

REPORT TO:	MERSEYSIDE FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY
DATE:	4 OCTOBER 2012
REPORT NO.	CFO/119/12
REPORTING OFFICER:	CLERK TO THE AUTHORITY
CONTACT OFFICER:	JANET HENSHAW DIRECTOR OF LEGAL, PROCUREMENT AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES, EXT 4301
OFFICERS CONSULTED:	HELENPEEK DEMOCRATIC SERVICES MANAGER, EXT 4112, STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT GROUP
SUBJECT:	AUDIO RECORDINGS OF MEETING

THERE ARE NO APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT

Purpose of Report

1. To ask Members to note the recommendations of the Executive Leadership Board contained within this report to no longer have audio recordings of any meetings of the Authority.

Recommendation

2. That Members
 - a) note that unless they instruct otherwise, all recordings of meetings of the Authority will cease with immediate effect because:
 - The requirement/need for use of audio recordings of meetings of the Authority no longer exist; and
 - The reduction of staff within the Democratic Services Team, has resulted in Audio Recordings placing considerable demand on resources within a small team; and
 - b) Instruct the Clerk to the Authority to undertake an administrative review in 12 month's time to assess the outcomes of the decision

Introduction & Background

3. Meetings of the Authority have been recorded for many years and it is unclear when this began, as there are no records of the Authority formally approving the recordings of all meetings.

4. Long standing Members of the Authority may be aware that all open meetings of the Authority are recorded, however not all Members may be aware of this. By law all Members should individually be consulted about meetings being recorded before each takes place and this has not been happening as a matter of course.
5. In previous years there were some requests by individual Members, for transcripts to be produced in relation to matters discussed within the meeting and at this time the Authority had a typing pool of staff to carry out this task. Requests of such nature would take considerable time, sometimes days for an audio typist to produce the transcript. Due to the voluntary severance programme the Authority no longer has a typing pool. Therefore any such requests would now be the responsibility of the Democratic Services Team who are not trained or resourced to provide such a service.
6. No Member has requested any such transcript in recent years and there are no records to indicate that a member of the public has ever asked for a copy or transcript of meetings.
7. As Members are aware, full Minutes are taken at all meetings of the Authority and its Committees and sub Committees and these are published on the Authority's website and are available for viewing by any members of the public at the Authority's premises. Equally, meetings of the Authority and its Committees are all open to the public (subject to the requirements of confidentiality pursuant to Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972).
8. The Democratic Services Team has reduced considerably over the past three years, due to the current financial challenges. Therefore from a team of three full time staff, each meeting of the Authority requires two members of staff to be in attendance at the meeting. This places resource issues upon a small team, preventing those staff from performing other duties required of them.
9. No other Local Authority as far as is known, undertakes audio taping of its meetings and the legalities of ensuring that each and every Members is asked before each meeting places practical and resource difficulties upon the Authority. However, should recording be required in respect of any individual, "one off" matter this can easily be accessed.
10. Although the Authority did not formally approve the recording of meetings, the Executive Leadership Board has referred this report to Members and Members are therefore asked to note that the practice of audio recording will cease unless Members wish it to continue however that this will be subject to administrative review in 12 months' time to assess outcomes.

Equality & Diversity Implications

11. There are no equality or diversity implications directly linked to this report. All meetings of the Authority are open to the public, unless items are deemed exempt or confidential.

Staff Implications

12. There are currently resourcing implications in recording meetings of the Authority, which would be resolved should Members approve the recommendations in this report.

Legal Implications

13. Full Minutes of all meetings are taken and when approved are published and available for inspection by the public as required by the Local Government Act 1972 ss 100C and 100E. In addition all Members should be asked to agree to recording of each and every meeting of the Authority or its Committees and sub Committees as required by the Local Government Act 1972 section 100A(7).

Financial Implications and Value for Money

14. There may be cost implications in terms of installing recording equipment in the new conferencing facility for the Joint Control Centre. There are also potential cost implications in officer availability for recording.

Risk Management, Health & Safety, and Environmental Implications

15. There are no Risk Management, Health and Safety or Environmental implications related to this report.

Contribution to Our Mission – To Achieve; Safer Stronger Communities – Safe Effective Firefighters”

16. Minutes which are available to the public ensure that the decisions of the Authority are made transparently and with safety of the communities of Merseyside in mind.