

PROTOCOL ON REPORTING AT AUTHORITY MEETINGS

Introduction

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority is committed to openness and transparency in how it conducts its business. This Protocol sets out its approach to certain types of reporting at its decision-making meetings. It outlines some basic principles and practical points aimed at balancing the requirements of those wishing to report the meeting and those attending and taking part.

Appended to this Protocol is a more in depth procedure which should be read in advance and adhered to by anyone wishing to attend Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority Meetings and Committees. ([Appendix A Procedure for attendance and recording of meetings of Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority](#))

Reporting

The Local Government Act 1972 provides that individuals may carry out reporting at meetings of local government bodies. This Protocol is primarily concerned with reporting that involves filming, photographing, and/or audio-recording of meetings.

Before the meeting:

There is no requirement to obtain permission or to make a prior arrangement to attend a meeting for the purpose of reporting upon it. However, if you are intending to film, photograph and/or audio-record, it would be helpful to contact Democratic Services (see contacts below) to ensure that suitable arrangements can be made to accommodate you.

Merseyside Fire & Rescue Authority's (MFRA's) Headquarters Building, where the majority of its decision-making meetings are held, is a secure building and a place of work for a significant number of people. It is therefore an extremely busy environment with a high number of visitors and employees, particularly within its Reception area. As such, although provision will be made to enable members of the public to attend decision-making meetings, for health and safety reasons and to avoid overcrowding in our Reception area, access to the building for attendance at decision-making meetings, will only be granted to you 20 minutes prior to the meeting start time.

Access to the meeting room itself will be granted 15 minutes prior to the start time of the meeting, to facilitate the setup of any recording equipment.

Whilst on MFRA premises to attend decision-making meetings, you will be expected to adhere to MFRA's General Security Guidance. Being a secure building, you will be required to remain in the Reception area until you are collected by an authorised member of staff and escorted to the meeting room. Whilst on MFRA premises, you will also be required to treat all members of staff and other visitors with courtesy and respect. Failure to do so, may result in you

being asked to leave the premises and being refused access to the meeting room.

Within the meeting room, there will be a designated area for you to observe the meeting and to allow you to film, photograph and/or audio-record it. Wherever possible, you will have access to a seat (although this may depend on how much space is available).

The Chair of the meeting will be informed if the reporting includes filming, photographing and/or audio-recording. Those attending the meeting who are not Members or officers will be made aware that they have the right to object to being filmed, photographed and/or audio-recorded by you.

You must not start filming, photographing and/or audio-recording until the Chair opens the meeting.

During the Meeting:

The Chair will announce at the beginning of the meeting that the meeting is being filmed, photographed and/or audio-recorded. He or she will then ask attendees whether they agree to be filmed, photographed and/or audio-recorded to allow them to register a personal objection. If anyone has a personal objection then the Chair can temporarily suspend filming, photographing and/or audio-recording to allow attendees to have their say.

Note: this does not apply to Members and officers.

If the Chair considers that the filming, photographing and/or audio-recording is disrupting the meeting he/she can instruct you to stop doing so. Therefore, it is worth noting that your equipment should not be noisy or otherwise distracting (e.g. flash and spotlights can be problematic).

You will not normally be allowed to give a live commentary on proceedings as this is highly likely to be disruptive.

If you refuse to stop filming, photographing and/or audio-recording when requested to do so, the Chair may ask you to leave the meeting. If you refuse to do so then the Chair may adjourn the meeting or make other appropriate arrangements for the meeting to continue without disruption. There are provisions in the Authority's Constitution that allow this.

When the meeting is officially closed by the Chair you must stop filming, photographing and/or audio-recording.

Exclusion from Meetings:

The majority of the Authority's decision-making takes place in meetings open to the public and press. You may only be excluded from a meeting when issues are being considered that involve confidential or exempt information (as defined in Section 100 of the Local Government Act 1972).

No filming, photographing and/or audio-recording is permitted during any exclusion. All equipment for filming, photographing and/or audio-recording must be removed from the meeting room.

Interpretation of this Protocol

Any decision taken by the Chair on the interpretation of this protocol before, or at the meeting in question is final.

Publication

This Protocol will be published on the website with Meetings Agendas, and Meeting agendas will carry a statement relating to this Protocol.

Contact Details

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Procedure for attendance and recording of meetings of Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority

Purpose

To inform all visitors attending Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority Headquarters with the intention to observe and/or record the proceedings of meetings, of the procedure to be followed during your attendance, for the purpose of clarity, safety and security.

(This procedure is in addition to, and should be read in conjunction with [MFRA Meeting Reporting Protocol](#))

Overview

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority is committed to openness and transparency in how it conducts its business. Anyone wishing to attend public meetings of this Authority are welcome, however the number of people who attend each meeting may vary making it difficult to predict how many people will turn up on the day. Therefore the following arrangements are in place to ensure that there is reasonable provision for your purpose of visit.

Prerequisite Information

The Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 came into force on 6 August 2014 and amended the Local Government Act 1972 regarding the governance of Authority, Committee and sub-Committee meetings, and the recording of certain officer decisions.

Whilst already open to members of the press and public to attend, the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 provides for any person to be permitted to report on the meeting, including the filming, photography, or making of audio recordings of proceedings of meetings. This does not include live commentary.

Safety, precaution, entry, admittance and departure.

Most meetings of Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority, including Committees, are held at their Headquarters, Bridle Road, Bootle, Liverpool, Merseyside, L30 4YD and usually commence at 1pm (unless otherwise published). It is recommended that you check the

location and start time of the meeting before starting your journey, to ensure you arrive at the appropriate time.

All meetings and agendas are published on our website (http://www.merseyfire.gov.uk/aspx/pages/fire_auth/authorityContent.aspx). Invitation letters are posted in the noticeboard outside the venue for the meeting, five days prior to the date of the meeting, or you can contact Democratic Services by ringing 0151 296 4113.

It would be helpful if you could contact Democratic Services to advise of your intention to attend the meeting to assist in the allocation of appropriate space within the meeting room. Should you have any special requirements which may impact upon your visit, please contact Reception tel.0151 296 4000, and advise ahead of your planned visit. This will enable details to be taken and the appropriate officer to be notified, to consider any reasonable adjustments or additional assistance which may be required.

If the number of visitors exceed that which is deemed safe for the size and capacity of the meeting room, you will be refused access on safety grounds.

All external visitors wishing to attend meetings of the Authority, are requested to arrive no earlier than twenty minutes prior to the opening of the meeting (e.g. meeting start 1.00 pm – do not arrive earlier than 12.40 pm). **Arrival before this time will result in you being refused admittance to the building until such time that your entry can be facilitated.** This is due to security and health and safety requirements for the building.

For your own safety, security and protection, and for that of others working and visiting the premises, all external visitors (including employees who do not work in the building) are required to identify themselves to reception upon arrival and departure. You will be required to provide your name, the purpose of your visit, who you are visiting, and provide the details of any vehicle which you wish to leave on the premises until your departure.

If you have equipment with you, you should inform reception and confirm for what purpose you intend to use such equipment during your visit. Examination of any equipment you bring, may be required.

When you sign into the building you will be allocated a coded visitor pass which you are required to visibly wear at all times, and must hand back to reception when you sign out of the building.

Once entry to the building has been granted and compliance with reception/security requirements have been met, Reception will inform Democratic Services of your presence and arrangements to escort you to the meeting room will be made. Access to the meeting room will be only be granted 15 minutes prior to the start of the meeting, to enable you to set up any recording equipment. However, staff will be preparing for the meeting, or escorting other visitors, therefore it may take a few minutes for a member of staff to be available to escort you. Therefore, your patience is requested in this regard. **Please note, you must wait to be escorted to the meeting room. Whilst waiting, you should not cause any disturbance or distress to any staff or other visitors, otherwise you will be required to leave the premises.**

Access to the Actual Meeting

ALL persons attending to observe meetings of the Authority, who are not Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority Members or Officers, **MUST** remain in the Reception area until such time that you are collected by an authorised member of staff and escorted to the Authority Meeting Room.

In the event of a fire or requirement to evacuate the building – all visitors must be accounted for. Therefore you must ensure you are with the person/s you are here to visit.

In the event of an evacuation you will be instructed where to go by Fire Marshalls and Officers, and procedures should be announced at the opening of business.

Equipment

The Authority does not accept responsibility for the loss or damage to any equipment or items it does not own. Therefore, any personal items and belongings you bring with you are your responsibility, which you bring at your own risk.

You may be required to have your equipment / belongings checked before admittance to the building.

You are requested to ensure that your equipment is not noisy or invasive, which could cause distraction to the proceedings.

During the Meeting

The Chair presiding over the meeting will request anyone present with the intention of recording the proceedings, to make themselves known to the Chair. The Chair will advise those present if the meeting is being recorded, and ask if any visitors object to being filmed. **In the event that someone requests not to be filmed you must not film them.**

The Chair has the right to request stoppage of recordings, or to stop the proceedings of the meeting (in line with procedural standing orders contained within the Constitution) should he/she feel there is unsuitable distraction or disturbance to the meeting.

Exclusion

All reports considered by the Authority are open and published to the Public unless there is confidential information contained within the report which under the Local Government Act 1972, is deemed Exempt. In such instances the Agenda will state by what section of the Local Government Act the item is Exempt; and during the preliminary matters on the Agenda, the Chair will announce if there are any Exempt items on the Agenda for which the Press and Public will be required to leave the meeting.

If there are Exempt items, the Chair will announce prior to consideration of those items that the Press and Public are required to leave.

All external visitors must then take their equipment and belongings and make their way back to the Reception area immediately. Equipment is to be packed away in the Reception area and not outside the meeting room.

Exit and Departure

You will be required to sign out at Reception and ensure that you hand your visitor pass back to Reception staff. You must then vacate the building and car park (if using the car park) immediately.

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