

GUIDANCE NOTE TO CHAIRS ON DISRUPTION OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS BY MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

This Guidance Note is aimed principally at Chairs of Committees but should be noted by every Member attending at a Committee meeting who may feel intimidated or frustrated by the interruption of the due process of the Committee. The interruption by members of the public acting in a disruptive fashion not only undermines the due process, but also delays other members of the public intending to speak to issues which may affect them, causing frustration and disillusionment with the City Council and the Committee process.

1. Council Procedure Rules

1.1 **Council Procedure Rule 20** allows for the Chair to take action with regard to both individual and group disruption. It says:

“If a member of the public interrupts proceedings of a meeting the Chair shall warn him/her. If he/she continues the interruption or repeatedly interrupts, the Chair shall order his/her removal from the meeting room. In the case of meetings where there is a general disturbance in any part of the meeting room open to the public the Chair shall order that part to be cleared.”

1.2 Interruption through disturbance may take many forms and would include but is not limited to verbal interruptions such as shouting and swearing at Members, Officers and other members of the public or press present; engaging in a conversation with another member of the public whilst Members or Officers are speaking; overrunning any allotted time to speak to the issue or the singing of songs.

1.3 Sometimes an interruption may take the form of an allegation of misconduct, corruption or discrimination against Members or Officers which may or not be related to an item on the Agenda. It is not within the remit of the Committee to consider such allegations, or to order an investigation of such allegations, and any such allegation raised must therefore be considered to be a disturbance of the meeting. In such circumstances the Chair should first notify the member of the public that such allegations are not within the remit of the Committee, and that any such allegations, including any supporting evidence, should be made to the proper body given the nature of the allegation. If the member of the public refuses to accept this then the formal warning at paragraph 2.1 should be read out. Interruption through disturbance may also include physical interruptions and would include physical violence directed at a Member or an Officer, or a member of the public or the press present. It would also include non-violent conduct which

may be deemed to be intimidatory such as approaching or sitting next to a Member or Officer in the course of a Committee meeting and staring at them. It would also include more formalised demonstrations such as large groups of members of the public brandishing placards or refusing to sit until their matter had been dealt with or handing out late material to Members. Finally gestures and expressions may also fall within the ambit of physical disturbance.

- 1.4 Interruptions caused by mobile phones and other such equipment including the use of television camera and recording equipment will also fall within Council Procedure Rule 20 should they result in a disruption of the Committee. Note that in the absence of disruption the use of such devices will still be subject to the Chair's discretion under Council Procedure Rule 21.
- 1.5 It should be noted that the power granted to the Chair by Council Procedure Rule 20 is restricted only to the meeting room of the Committee and does not include any other part of the Town Hall. Persons seeking to disrupt the Committee meeting from outside the meeting room cannot therefore be removed from the building under this Procedure Rule. In all such cases it will be necessary to contact the Town Hall Security Services and obtain proper authorisation for any such persons' removal from the building. Where any disruption is due to criminal acts the South Yorkshire Police will need to be called.

2. **Warnings**

- 2.1 In the event of a disturbance the Chair should identify the person or persons causing the disturbance and if warranted read out the following formal warning:
“Due to the disturbance caused by you to the conduct of the meeting of the Committee, you are hereby issued with a warning in accordance with Rule 20 of Sheffield City Council’s Council Procedure Rules. Under this Rule should you create any further disturbance to the conduct of the Committee meeting I may order your removal from the meeting room.”
 - 2.2 The Chair should ensure that the formal warning and, if possible, the identity of the person or persons to whom the warning has been issued, is formally recorded by the Democratic Services Officer as part of the formal record of the Committee meeting.
 - 2.3 Instead of a formal warning the Chair may use his discretion to issue an informal warning if the disturbance is in the Chair’s opinion not serious or is not intended to disrupt the Committee Meeting (such as two members of the public in a conversation). In such circumstances
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the Chair should ask the persons causing the disruption to please cease immediately the conduct causing the disruption and remind them that this is a public meeting and that if they have private matters to discuss could they please do so outside. In this instance no record of the identity and warning should be made by the officer from Democratic Services.

3. **Removal From The Meeting**

- 3.1 After the issue of a formal warning under Council Procedure Rule 20 if the conduct is repeated by the same person or persons the Chair should read out the following statement:-
“Following the issue of a formal warning to you under Rule 20 I hereby order your removal from the meeting room for the duration of this Committee meeting in accordance with that Rule.”
- 3.2 The Democratic Services Officer should where this is possible, formally take a note of the identity of the person or persons whose removal has been ordered.
- 3.3 If the person or persons who have been ordered to be removed from the Committee meeting refuse to leave the meeting room, they may be physically ejected from the meeting room as a trespasser provided only reasonable force is used by the Town Hall Security Staff. They should be notified in the following terms:-
“You can remain outside the meeting room but should you seek to further disrupt the conduct of proceedings of the Committee then the Town Hall Security Staff will be informed of the situation which may lead to your removal from the premises and/or the South Yorkshire Police being called.”

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