



Dorset Police and Crime Panel

Protocol for Managing Programmed or Unprogrammed Disruptions to Meetings

Date of Meeting: 24 September 2019

Director: Jonathan Mair, Corporate Director, Legal & Democratic

Executive Summary: Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights provides the right to freedom of expression and information, subject to certain restrictions that are "in accordance with law" and "necessary in a democratic society". This right includes the freedom to hold opinions, and to receive and impart information and ideas.

The Panel must therefore accommodate peaceful demonstrations by protest or action groups at its buildings whilst ensuring the health and safety of employees, councillors and other members of the public.

The business of the July 2019 Dorset Police and Crime Panel meeting was disrupted by protesters. Whilst the attendance of the protestors was prepared for, it was recognised that improvements could be made to the way the activity was managed. Following the panel meeting, a debrief identified a number of lessons learnt to be proposed for adoption by the Panel should there be future disruptions, whether programmed or unprogrammed.

Dorset Council is in the process of establishing clear guidelines on managing protests at Council buildings. It is proposed that this document should form the basis of the Panel's response to disruption, supplemented by any specific response required by the Panel. Once this guidance has been approved, both the guidance and the Panel's addendum will be presented to a future meeting for sign-off.

In the interim, it is recommended that the guidance note at Appendix A is followed in the event of any disruption.

Equalities Impact Assessment:

N/A

Budget:

N/A

Risk Assessment:

Having considered the risks associated with this decision, the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: LOW

Residual Risk LOW

Climate implications:

N/A

Other Implications:

N/A

Recommendation: That the Dorset Police and Crime Panel:

- Note that a Dorset Council guidance note is being prepared to manage disruptions, to be supported by Panel specific guidance; and
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- Agree the interim proposed procedures set out in Appendix A.

Reason for Recommendation: To reduce the impact of future disruptions to meetings.

Appendices: Appendix A – Guidance for Managing Disruption to Panel Meetings

Background Papers:

Chair Note dated 23 Jul 19: Dorset Police And Crime Panel: Lessons Identified - Meeting Disruption

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Interim Guidance for Managing Disruption to Panel Meetings

Prior to the Meeting

1. A pro-active approach to polite early engagement via various communications channels with protest or action groups who are planning demonstrations has proven to be successful. This should include highlighting to the protest or action groups the scope of the Panels business.
2. Intelligence should be sought on the likely extent of protest. This can be achieved through-
 - a. Researching similar activity by the protest group, including liaising with organisations that have experienced previous action by that group;
 - b. Liaison with Dorset Police Ops Team
3. Where a potential protest has been highlighted, the Service Manager for Assurance will liaise with appropriate teams at Dorset Council, i.e.
 - Facilities Team at the relevant building
 - Communications Team
 - Democratic Services
 - Emergency Planning Team
 - Health and Safety Officer
4. Deployment of additional external security will be at the discretion of the Chair of the Panel, in conjunction with the Corporate Director for Legal and Democratic Services (or his nominated officer). Where appointed, the security team should be briefed on this plan.

Management of the Meeting

1. On the day, it may be prudent to deploy officers to 'meet and greet' protest or action groups outside Dorset Council buildings to explain health and safety requirements, e.g. keep exits clear, and to address any 'housekeeping' issues, and where possible to resolve any issues. However, the safety of any officers deployed must be considered.
2. Consider reserving a number of seats in the public gallery for representatives of specific protest or action groups (if known to be attending).
3. Where the press are in attendance, they should be briefed on:
 - The activist's issues;
 - The roles and responsibilities of the Police and Crime Panel; and
 - The process to be followed in the event of disruption

4. At commencement of the meeting the Monitoring Officer for the Panel (or his nominated representative) should read out the rules of the meeting and expected behaviour (for instance, no shouting, swearing or interruptions).
5. In the event that the rules of the meeting are breached and/or expected behaviours not maintained, the Chair will provide a warning that any further disruption will result in an adjournment of the meeting.
6. If disruption continues, the Chair will declare that the meeting is adjourned until the disruption ceases. In such cases:
 - Members of the Panel will withdraw to the Members Room (or other nominated location);
 - The Police and Crime Commissioner and members of his office will withdraw to an office in the secure part of the County Hall complex (or other nominated location);
 - The Monitoring Officer for the Police and Crime Panel and Service Manager for Assurance, where safe to do so, will liaise with the activists to attempt to diffuse the situation;
 - In the event that it is determined that it is not safe to liaise further, arrangements should be made to clear the public gallery, in cooperation with site security, and if necessary Dorset Police contacted on 999.
7. The Monitoring Officer for the Panel (or his nominated representative) will liaise with the Chair to determine whether the meeting can recommence. Prior to recommencement, the Monitoring Officer for the Panel (or his nominated representative) will again read out the rules of the meeting and expected behaviour.
8. Steps 5 to 7 will be repeated in the event of any further disruption.