

**Pickles urges council to open 'digital doors' to meetings: Eric Pickles has said the public should be able to film council meetings.**

Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has issued a plain English guide explaining how members of the public can not only attend council cabinet meetings, but also report them online using social media and film them.

The Guide states that under new nationwide regulations introduced last year designed to introduce greater transparency into meetings of a council's executive, committees and sub-committees, authorities must provide reasonable facilities allowing any member of the public to report.

It continues that councils should also permit the filming of councillors and officers at meetings that are open to members of the public and the Data Protection Act does not prevent such open filming of public meetings.

However, councils can ask for filming to be undertaken in an unobtrusive and non-disruptive manner and members of the public wishing to film are asked to liaise with council staff before proceedings begin.

The guide states the new rules permit citizen journalists, including bloggers, tweeters, Facebook and YouTube users, to use social media to report on meetings. It also sets out circumstances under which council meetings could be held in private, and how records of executive decisions should be made available.

Communities secretary Eric Pickles said: 'I want to stand up for the rights of journalists and taxpayers to scrutinise and challenge decisions of the state. Data protection rules or health and safety should not be used to suppress reporting or a healthy dose of criticism.'

'Modern technology has created a new cadre of bloggers and hyper-local journalists, and councils should open their digital doors and not cling to analogue interpretations of council rules,' Mr Pickles added.

'Councillors shouldn't be shy about the public seeing the good work they do in championing local communities and local interests.'