

Protocol for Members Use of Council Resources

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This protocol governs the use of Council resources in relation to your role as a Councillor.
- 1.2 The Council provides a range of support services and facilities to enable you to carry your duties as a Councillor.
- 1.3 It is a requirement of the Council's Member Code of Conduct that you comply with this Protocol on the Use of Council Resources.
- 1.4 Council resources should be used exclusively for the purpose of Council business or to enable Councillors to carry out their role as Councillor. Use of Council resources for political purposes may be a breach of the Members Code of Conduct.
- 1.5 Council resources include:
 - Accommodation
 - Council email
 - Council logo
 - ICT
 - Photocopiers
 - Postage or use of the Council's postal system
 - Staff time
 - Stationery (paper, headed paper, business cards etc.)
 - Telephones (including mobiles)
 - Transport
- 1.6 The rules regarding the use of these resources are set out in the Schedule attached to this Protocol.

2. Council Business

- 2.1 You may use Council resources in connection with the following Council business:
 - Matters relating to the decision-making process of the Council, e.g. Council, Cabinet and Committee meetings;
 - Representing the Council on an outside body;
 - Holding Electoral Division surgeries;
 - Meeting, communicating with and dealing with correspondence from residents, other Councillors, Officers, Government Officials, Members of Parliament etc. in connection with Council business; and
 - Matters for discussion by a political group of the Council, so long as it relates mainly to the work of the Council (e.g. briefings on decisions to be taken by the Cabinet) and not your political party or group.

3. Principles for the Use of Council Resources

- 3.1 You must always seek to conduct the business of the Council/your duties as Councillor in the most cost-effective way.
- 3.2 You must have regard to the need to ensure prudent and reasonable use of resources and value for money.
- 3.3 Use of Council resources for the purpose of representing individual or small groups of residents is acceptable. However, high volume use of resources such as sending out circulars and conducting wide-scale consultation exercises is not acceptable, even if these relate to Council business.
- 3.4 In the interests of economy and the environment, you are requested to use e-mail instead of post where possible.
- 3.5 You must not use Council resources for party political activity or campaigning. This includes using the Council's address as a digital imprint on election campaign material. The Council is prohibited by law from publishing any material which, in whole or in part, appears to be designed to affect public support for a political party or an individual Councillor.
- 3.6 Failure to comply with this Protocol on use of Council resources may amount to a breach of the Member Code of Conduct. Accordingly, any allegations that a Councillor has used Council resources inappropriately will be dealt with in accordance with the Council's Procedure for Complaints against Members. Allegations in relation to political campaign material are matters for the Electoral Commission and/or the Police to deal with.

Schedule to the Protocol on Use of Council Resources

1. ICT Equipment

- 1.1 You will be provided with appropriate equipment for the duration of your term of office including a tablet and/or laptop. Other peripherals and computer aids may be issued on occasion. On receipt of equipment, you are required to confirm that you have read the [Durham County Council Mobile Device Policy](#).
- 1.2 Support for technical matters is supplied by Members ICT Support.
- 1.3 User training is provided as part of the Member Induction, on the roll-out of new equipment/systems and ongoing training and support is always available on request.
- 1.4 You are required to return all Council supplied ICT equipment if you cease to be a Councillor or at the end of your term of office. The Council reserves the right to commence recovery action in relation to any ICT equipment, which is not returned.

2. The Council's Website

- 2.1 You will have a page on the Council's website, which includes your photograph, contact details, committee memberships, attendance records, appointments to outside bodies on behalf of the Council and your register of interests.

3. Security Pass

- 3.1 You will be issued with a photo security pass which must be worn at all times when you are in Council offices.
- 3.2 Your pass is programmed to provide access to particular areas in the Council offices depending on your political affiliation and roles of special responsibility.
- 3.3 Your card is also programmed to enable you to scan, copy and print from the multi-function devices situated around the Council's offices.

4. Arrangements for incoming mail

- 4.1 Written correspondence will be scanned and emailed to you by Member Services unless alternative arrangements have been made. Magazines or parcels will be placed within your locker within the relevant Group Room or within the Members Resource Centre. If you do not have a locker this information will be retained for you by Member Services until this is collected from the office.
- 4.2 If you do not expect to attend the Council offices for an extended period of time, you should discuss your specific requirements with Member Services.

5. Arrangements of outgoing mail

- 5.1 You are encouraged to use email or hand-deliver outgoing post where possible.
- 5.2 If you wish to send outgoing mail by post, you should take this to the Member Services Team who will make the necessary arrangements. No Political correspondence can be sent via Member Services.
- 5.3 You must use the Council's pre-printed envelopes for mail to be processed in accordance with the Council's contractual arrangements with Royal Mail.
- 5.4 Unless there are exceptional circumstances, mail will be sent by way of second-class post.

6. Stationery

- 6.1 A limited range of stationery is available from Members Services.
- 6.2 Stationery provided by the Council must not be adapted to include political logos.
- 6.3 The multi-function devices are regularly re-stocked with printer paper. You should contact Member Services to re-stock if necessary, rather than taking paper from other locations in the building.
- 6.4 Electronic versions of Councillor letterheads are available via Members Services.

7. Use of Council letterhead, email and email signatures

- 7.1 Your Council letterhead and email signature may state your name, any position of responsibility (e.g. Cabinet Member or Committee Member) the electoral division you represent and if you have been elected on behalf of a political group¹.
- 7.2 You must not include any party-political logos or links to party political websites or blogs on Council letterhead or in emails.
- 7.3 You must use the Council email in accordance with the Council's acceptable usage policy, and never for political purposes. Members should be aware that use of the Council email system to conduct personal business may be misinterpreted as a Councillor seeking to misuse their position. In these circumstances, members should either use a personal email address or remove reference in email signatures to their role as Councillor and make it clear they are acting in a personal capacity.
- 7.4 The Council's "all member" email address must not be used to raise concerns regarding the conduct of Officers or Members. Such concerns should be raised in accordance with the relevant Council Procedures.
- 7.5 When sending an email to the "all Member" email address, Members are encouraged it using the "bcc" function so that only the sender of the email receives any replies.
- 7.6 Please contact Member Services for advice on the appropriate use of Council letterhead.

¹ It is acceptable to include a factual reference that you have been elected to represent a particular political party and/or that you are a member of a political group on the Council.

8. Business Cards

- 8.1 You can request a supply of business cards via Members Services.
- 8.2 Business cards may contain the same information as your email signature but cannot include political logos.

9. Printing

- 9.1 You can use your photo security pass to print, scan and photocopy from the multi-function devices located around the Council offices.
- 9.2 You should be economical with your use of printing facilities and seek to be “paper-light” as much as possible.
- 9.3 You should always print/copy in black and white unless colour is required to enable the document to be understood.

10. Room Hire for Electoral Division Surgeries

- 10.1 You should seek to use meeting rooms that do not incur a charge to the Council if you wish to hold ward surgeries. These can include community facilities and some Council premises.
- 10.2 If no suitable premises are available free of charge an application for the cost of hiring an alternative venue will need to be claimed in accordance with the Members’ Allowances Scheme.

11. Clothing

- 11.1 You may occasionally be required to wear Council clothing such as Council branded coats, high visibility items or other protective clothing when attending events or outside locations. In these circumstances, appropriate clothing will be supplied by the relevant Officers and must be returned immediately after the event.

12. Council Logo

- 12.1 You must not use the Durham County Council logo other than on stationery/business cards in accordance with this Protocol.²

13. Council Staff

- 13.1 It is the role of Council Officers, and in particular Members Services to provide support for all Councillors to assist them in carrying out their Council duties. The level of support provided will depend on the needs of individual councillors and the varying demands of different roles and responsibilities.

² Note there is a distinction between the Durham County Council logo and the County Durham Coat of Arms, which Councillors may use.

13.2 You must not ask Officers to deal with personal or political matters, this relates to all members regardless of whether you hold a position of special responsibility. Such requests will be politely refused and referred to the relevant Head of Service.

14. Recording of meetings of the authority

14.1 You must not use Council equipment to record meetings of the authority or use Council recordings of meetings for use for political purposes (e.g. on social media).

14.2 If you record meetings of the authority, you will be the data controller in relation to recorded material.