

Protocol on the Representational Role of Councillors

In undertaking their duties in relation to the governance of the Council, Members tend to operate, for the most part, within a political environment in which their views and opinions are fed into, and influenced by, the political policies of the political party or group to which they belong. But Members also fulfil a separate, though related role, in representing the views of their constituents and acting as a link between constituents and the Council. Even within a political environment, the representative role is at the heart of local democracy. Within the Executive/Scrutiny model of governance, this representational role takes on added importance, particularly for those Councillors who are not Members of the Cabinet. It provides a vital conduit between the Council and the electorate through which the public can seek to understand and influence the decisions which the Council takes. The Councillors' representational role is integral to the other activities of the Council in consulting the public on key decisions, policies and strategies and also in explaining and informing the public about the work of the Council.

This protocol sets out the ways in which constituents might seek to contact and influence their local Councillors and also the ways in which Councillors might seek to represent those views and concerns within the Council's governance arrangements.

1. Receiving Representations from the Public

As the elected representative of a particular Ward, Councillors have an obligation to make themselves available and accessible to their constituents. This obligation could be fulfilled in a number of ways, though it is for individual Members to make their own arrangements. The following means of contact are listed by way of example:

- by letter (either at a home address or via the Civic Offices)
- by phone (either at a home or business phone, or via the Civic Offices)
- via e-mail – at home/work or via the Civic Offices
- at Ward surgeries
- at Area Meetings
- during canvassing for election purposes
- during everyday contact with the public

2. Supporting and Representing Constituents

The Council has established a number of formal ways in which Councillors may seek to support or represent their constituents. These include:

- asking questions at Council
- proposing Motions at Full Council
- seeking to place items on Committee Agendas, in particular the Scrutiny Committee.

In addition, there are a number of other, informal ways in which Councillors may seek to support and represent their constituents and these are set out in the following paragraphs.

3. At Meetings of the Council

In speaking during discussions or debates at Council meetings, Members may wish to express a view on behalf of constituents, or to explain the impact of a decision or Council policy on their constituents.

4. At Scrutiny and Select Committees

The Scrutiny and Select Committees present the ideal forum at which Councillors (whether or not they are Members of the Committee) may give expression to the views and concerns of their constituents. This may be as part of a formal review, or in developing policy or monitoring service delivery. Members of Scrutiny and Select Committees may also requisition topics, which they would like the Committees to review and this would include items of specific interest or relevance to their Ward or or their constituents. The Select Committees in particular are expected to work much more informally than traditional Committees and there should be ample opportunity for Members to represent constituents' views.

5. Regulatory or other Committees

Even where they are not Members of the particular Committee, Councillors will be able to attend and (with the consent of the Chairman) speak at meetings of Regulatory Committees in relation to issues such as planning or licensing applications which affect their Ward.

6. Area Committees

Any Member is entitled to attend these meetings. Area Committees will provide an ideal opportunity for Councillors to both listen to and represent the views of their constituents.

7. Executive

It will be open to Councillors to contact Members of the Executive Committee to express views or concerns on behalf of local constituents. Councillors will also be able to attend public meetings of the Executive Committees and (with the consent of the Chairman) speak at those meetings.

8. Dealing with Officers

Councillors will continue as at present to take up problems and complaints with officers of the Council and this is a vital part of Members' representational role.

9. Support for Councillors in their Representational Role

The Council has agreed to provide a range of support services to all members of the Council to assist them in the conduct of constituency business. This includes stationery, typing assistance and access to computers and word processing equipment. In addition, Councillors have rights of access to a

range of information and can expect to receive advice and information on request from any of the Council's senior managers.

10. Matters outside a Member's own Ward

(a) Members of the Council will, if approached regarding a matter outside their own Ward, normally refer the enquirer or objector to their local Member.

(b) If the Member approached considers that there is good reason for them to be involved in the matter instead of or in addition to the local Member, then they should notify (preferably in writing) the local Member of that fact and the reasons as soon as possible.

(c) Where Members are invited to or wish to attend meetings taking place outside their own Wards but which relate geographically to another Ward (for example Parish or Town Council meetings or Community Association meetings), they should first consider whether it would be more appropriate for the local Member to attend and if so, give them the opportunity to do so.

(d) If a Member decides that, notwithstanding (c) above, they will attend such a meeting outside their own Ward, then they should notify (preferably in writing) the local Member they intend to so do.

(e) In the event of both the local Member and another Member attending the same meeting, then in making their own views known to that meeting, the Member who is not the local Member should make that fact clear to the meeting.