

Members' Use of Council Facilities

Policy and Guidance Notes

1. Summary of Council Facilities Available

The Council recognises that in order to effectively undertake their role as an elected Member, councillors require access to a range of services, including officer advice and secretarial support, accommodation, ICT and stationery supplies. A schedule of the services which the Council provides for Members is set out below.

1. **An Induction Pack for new councillors and opportunity to attend an induction session.** The Induction Pack contains key information about the Borough of Rossendale, relevant Strategies, Codes of Conduct, Data Protection Advice, members Allowances, the Complaints procedure. All Councillors are invited to an induction session either as part of a group of new councillors or on a one to one basis.
2. **Production and drafting of letters.** The Member Support Assistant provides a letter writing service to councillors for matters of Council business only. Members may use the Councils official "Rossendale Alive" letterhead for this purpose.
3. **Sending, receiving and distributing mail.** The Member Support Assistant will receive and redirect mail between elected Members.
4. **Sending and receiving facsimiles.** The Member Support Assistant will receive and send facsimiles on behalf of elected Members.
5. **Arrangements for meetings with officers.** The Member Support Assistant will make arrangements for meetings between elected Members and senior officers of the Council to discuss any matter with their area of responsibility.
6. **Room bookings and use of meeting rooms.** The Member Support Assistant will make arrangements for councillors to use meeting rooms for the purposes of transacting Council business free of charge. Meeting rooms are available for use at Hardmans Mill, Futures Park and the Town Centre Offices. Meeting rooms should not be used for any personal, business-related or party political matter, or on behalf of any community groups of which the councillor is a members, unless payment has been agreed with the Head of Legal and Democratic Services. Further information is set out in Section 6 of this document.
7. **A range of Member Development opportunities.** The Council approves an annual Member Development Strategy, an annual Training Schedule and a quarterly Member Development Programme, to ensure that Members have access to a wide range of learning opportunities and materials free of charge.
8. **Arrangements for conferences and Member development sessions and associated travel arrangements.** The Member Support Assistant will provide advice about applying to attend conferences and external training events and will make any necessary booking arrangements. Travel arrangements can be made through the Member Support Assistant where advance bookings are required.

9. **The printing of business cards.** Members are entitled to 200 corporate style business cards each year free of charge.
10. **Stationery equipment and photocopying.** Members are entitled to a reasonable amount of stationery for use on Council business, including compliment slips; letter-headed paper, pens and one writing pad/notebook per year. The Council does not undertake to replace stationery on demand, although would not normally refuse to meet any reasonable request. Paper for printers and ink jet cartridges will not be provided. Photocopying can be arranged through the Member Support Assistant for work as a Member of the Council. No charge will be made for copying provided that a reasonable limit is not exceeded. Further information is set out in Section 5 of this document.
11. **The Member Enquiry Service.** The Member Support Assistant operates a Member Enquiry Service, which logs any official request for information about Council services and undertakes to provide a response within 15 working days. Requests can be submitted in writing by pro-forma or by telephone enquiry.
12. **Arrangements for official photographs and Identity Badges.** The Member Support Assistant will make arrangements for Members to have an official photograph taken for use in the Council's leaflets, documents and on the website. Newly elected councillors will receive an Identity Badge.
13. **Setting up surgeries.** The Member Support Assistant will book accommodation for Members' surgeries and arrange for a suitable advertisement to be published in the local press.
14. **Use of Council ICT.** Members will have access to the Council's Intranet and remote access to their own files within the shared area of the Local Area Network. All councillors will receive a Council e-mail account, so that they may send and receive electronic mail.

A flexible approach will be taken to the provision of hardware to elected Members based upon the Member's own preference. Those members who already have access to their own personal computer are encouraged to utilize this for the purposes of accessing files, e-mails and the Intranet from home. Members may request a Council lap top or personal computer, although availability may be limited. Priority will be given to Members without access to their own hardware.

All members will be provided with a Blackberry portable device.

The Council will provide a broadband connection for Members who have no such connection to the world wide web. The Council will pay the equivalent cost towards a Member who uses their own existing broadband connection.

The service of Agendas for formal meetings of the Council its Committees and the Cabinet is by electronic means.

The Council will provide a low volume ink jet printer if requested by a Member, subject to any budgetary constraints.

Further details of the ICT provision to elected Members is contained within the Council's ICT Strategy. A separate ICT Security policy is also in place in order to regulate computer and internet usage.

15. **Provision of Members Allowances claim forms and advice.** The Member Support Assistant will supply forms for the purposes of claiming Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances and Members travelling and subsistence allowances. Advice can also be obtained on eligibility for allowances within the Scheme of Members Allowances.
16. **Use of the Members' Library.** A Members' Library has been established at Hardmans Mill. The facilities include access to books, journals, periodicals and learning materials. A hot drinks machine is also available. Access to the Library is by prior arrangement with the Member Support Assistant. The Library is normally available for 30 minutes prior to any formal Council, Cabinet or Committee meeting at Hardmans Mill.
17. **A biennial Personal Development Plan.** Members should receive a Personal Development Plan at least every two years, based upon a structured interview with a member of the Democratic Services Section. Members may request a more frequent review of this document.

2. **General Usage of Council Facilities:**

Members must only use Council facilities provided to them in their role as Member strictly for that purpose and no other. For example, Members must not use Council rooms or any of the Council's paper, computers, photocopiers, or printers for any personal, business-related or party-political matter (subject to the provisions below), nor on behalf of any community groups of which you are a member, unless a payment has been agreed for the service with the Head of Legal and Democratic Services.

Under Sections 95 and 96 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA), Candidates at both Parliamentary and local government elections are entitled to use publicly funded accommodation to hold election meetings.

The following rules apply:-

RPA Rules

1. Candidates at parliamentary or local government elections are entitled to the use of premises in a school or other community meeting room, at reasonable times.
2. Use is free of charge, but candidates must meet the costs of preparing, heating, lighting and cleaning and restoring it to its usual condition after the meeting.
3. Candidates must pay for any damage to the room or premises.
4. Reasonable notice must be given by or on behalf of the candidate.
5. At local elections, meetings must be for the purpose of promoting or procuring the giving of votes in the forthcoming election.
6. The meeting must be open to the public.
7. The Council will keep a list of suitable rooms within as well as outside the constituency. The list must be available for inspection at reasonable hours by a candidate or their agent.

3. The Members' Support Service

Secretarial assistance is available, through the Member Support Assistant, to help with work such as casework, meetings and correspondence that deals with Council matters. Councillors should not ask staff to assist them with any personal, business or party political matter, or decide how casework will be dealt with, although advice can be given.

Further details are set out in the Protocol on Member/Officer relations at Part 5 of the Constitution.

4. Advice from Council Officers

Officers can only be asked to provide advice to Members on matters which clearly relate to those matters which arise from being an elected Councillor. Further guidance is provided in the Protocol on Member/Officer relations at Part 5 of the Constitution.

The Council can only provide legal representation to an individual Councillor where the action is taking place in the name of the Council and the individual deserves the protection of the Council. All such matters should be raised with the Head of Legal and Democratic Services in the first instance.

5. Political Party Workers

Councillors may, from time to time, be assisted by political party workers. This is a legitimate practice, but no non-elected party worker has any legal entitlement to:

- information to which Members have access only in their role as Councillors;
- use Council facilities provided for the use of Councillors.

However, the Council may accord the same rights of access to party workers to Council facilities, photocopying services, room usage and officer support, if it can be demonstrated that the activity is ancillary and incidental to the Council's activities.

6. Guidelines for Use of Photocopying Services for Council Members

The Council provides a photocopying service as part of its range of Support Services to Council Members. Photocopying can be arranged through the Member Support Assistant based at Futures Park.

There is no maximum number of copies which can be requested, provided that a reasonable limit is not exceeded. Where the reasonable limit is in question, the matter will be referred for decision to the Head of Legal and Democratic Services.

The Council may, upon request, arrange for the copying and distribution of Agendas and reports to Political Groups represented on the Council, as this is considered to be ancillary and incidental to the Council's activities.

Neither of these services (or any other Member Support Services) is to be used for the conduct of party political activities. The Council is expressly prevented by legislation and a Publicity Code from publicising, or assisting others to issue publicity on behalf of Political Groups or organisations. Subject to the following paragraphs, documents containing a party logo will not normally be photocopied by the Council.

Notwithstanding the above, it is recognised that Councils are usually politically controlled. In publicising the activities of the Council there will often be reference to the controlling Political Group. This is permitted if the intention is to publicise the Council's activities.

There will be occasions when documents produced by a political organisation, e.g. a briefing paper on a particular policy, or new initiative affecting Local Government, are to be considered at a Political Group Meeting or a Council Committee Meeting. If the document is intended to assist the Council's activities or is ancillary to them it is legitimate for that document to be copied and distributed.

It is important to make the distinction between where the document originates and its intended use. The fact that a document is produced by a Political Party is not sufficient in itself to prevent the Council arranging for it to be photocopied and circulated. However, If the document was intended to be used to affect public support for a political party then, by law, the Council cannot arrange for it to be copied or circulated.

Given the above considerations, the following guidelines are in place:-

Photocopying Guidelines

1. The Council may photocopy for and distribute to Political Groups represented on the Council, documents to be considered at Political Group Meetings.
2. Political Groups are required to restrict their requests for the copying and distribution of documents to those items to be considered in connection with the Council's business.
3. No documents intended to publicise the work of Political Groups or organisations will be printed or published by the Council and Council Members or Political Group Officers are required not to contravene this guideline.
4. The Council can photocopy material for individuals or for Political Parties at a commercial charge but care must be taken to ensure that there is no breach of the law.
5. All documents intended to be copied and or distributed on behalf of Political Groups are to be handed to the Head of Legal and Democratic Services. No Council Member or Political Group Officer should give those documents to the Council's photocopying operator or issue instructions for copying to the operator.
6. Any queries on these guidelines should be raised with the Head of Legal and Democratic Services.

5. Guidelines for use of Rooms by Political Groups

The Council's Policy on the use of Council accommodation for Party Political meetings is as follows:-

Use of Rooms by Political Groups

"The rooms shall not be used for the purpose of holding Party Political Meetings or Party Political exhibitions (other than meetings attended wholly or mainly by Members of the Council and which are ancillary to or incidental to the Council's activities)."

This policy is intended to permit the use of Council accommodation for Political Groups represented on the Council only.

The use of rooms at Hardmans Mill, Futures Park and the Town Centre Offices is permitted under this policy will be free of charge. The policy also applies to the use of rooms in other Council accommodation but a charge may be made for that use if, in the opinion of the Service Manager responsible for that accommodation, it would result in a loss of income from other bookings.

All Members will be supplied with a magnetic key fob for access to Futures Park. Members of the Cabinet and Political Group Leaders will have a full set of keys, to enable access and egress from Futures Park outside of the hours of normal business. All Members must take care to abide by the rules in relation to securing the building after use.

Members of the Cabinet and Political Group Leaders will be provided with a key for the facilities at Hardmans Mill.

All keys and fobs must be signed for upon their issue and must be returned when the councillor ceases to be an elected Member.

All rules about use of rooms (e.g. No Smoking, fire safety and other health and safety requirements) must be observed.

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