

Whitworth Town Council.

Protocol on Use of Council Facilities by Members

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 Whitworth Town Council, relevant Strategies, Codes of Conduct and 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 Clerk can if necessary provide a letter writing service to councillors for matters of Council business only. Members may use the Councils official letterhead for this purpose.
3. **Sending, receiving and distributing mail.** The Clerk will receive and redirect mail between elected Members.
4. **Sending and receiving facsimiles.** The Clerk will receive and send facsimiles on behalf of elected Members.
5. **Arrangements for meetings with officers.** The Clerk will make arrangements for meetings between elected Members and officers of the Council to discuss any matter with their area of responsibility.
6. **Room bookings and use of meeting rooms.** The Clerk will make arrangements for councillors to use the Chamber for the purposes of transacting Council business free of charge.
7. **A range of Member Development opportunities.** The Council is developing an Member Development Strategy, 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 Clerk 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 Clerk where advance bookings are required.
9. **The printing of business cards.** Members are entitled to 100 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. Ink jet cartridges will not be provided. Photocopying can be arranged through the

Clerk for work as a Member of the Council. No charge will be made for copying provided that a reasonable limit is not exceeded.

11. **Setting up surgeries.** The Clerk will book accommodation for Members' surgeries and arrange for a suitable advertisement to be published in the local press.

12. **Use of Council ICT.** Members will have access to the Council's Internet.

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

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.

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**

Assistance is available, through the Clerk, to help with work such as casework, meetings and correspondence that deals with Council matters.

4. Advice from Council Officers

Officers can only be asked to provide advice to Members on matters that clearly relate from being an elected Councillor

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 Clerk 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 Clerk .

There is no maximum number of copies which can be requested, provided that a reasonable limit is not exceeded.

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.

