

USE OF RESOURCES

D. SECRETARIAL SUPPORT

1. Secretarial support is provided for all Members to support them in carrying out their Council duties. The level of support depends on the varying demands of different roles and responsibilities. Officers should not be requested to deal with personal or political matters and if any such request is made, they are required to politely refuse any involvement and refer the matter to their manager. Examples of personal or political matters that cannot be handled by officers include:
 - Making arrangements for social or other personal activities, unless directly related to Council business.
 - Correspondence between Members that is party- related rather than on matters of Council business.
 - Correspondence, telephone calls and other communications that relate to Group meetings other than that which is relevant to Council business.

Additional guidance is provided in the Protocol on Member/Officer Relations.

2. For the Executive and Group Leaders

Personal assistance and secretarial support is provided to give individual support to the Leader of the Council, Cabinet Members and Opposition Group Leaders in relation to their work on Council business. This includes:-

- ◆ Diary management and arranging meetings with officers, residents, community organisations, businesses and other organisations that relate to Council business.
- ◆ Dealing with correspondence, drafting replies to correspondence, typing and IT support. Where multiple letters are to be sent out to residents informing them on items related to the Cabinet Member portfolio area then the cost for this should be borne by the portfolio area. All information sent out should be communicated via the most cost effective method ie email, newsletter, city view.
 - Letters should not duplicate information sent out by service areas; for example, information relating to Planning Applications or official letters on behalf of the Council should normally be sent in the name of the appropriate Officer rather than the name of the Member.
 - If the Cabinet Member is copying councillor colleagues in on the letter or communication then this should apply to all councillors in the relevant ward(s) and not just those in the same political party.
- ◆ Obtaining information from officers and other organisations as required by Cabinet Members and Group Leaders.
- ◆ Dealing with the public and organisations on the telephone or in person to provide information and help to resolve queries and problems referred to individual Cabinet Members and Group Leaders.
- ◆ Arranging travel, accommodation and conference or other bookings for Approved Duties as defined in the Members' Allowance Scheme.

All Members

The Members' Services Team provides secretarial services and administrative support are provided for all Members. These services include dealing with Members' enquiries, typing, letter monitoring, photocopying, conference attendance, stationery, IT and other support.

The A-Z of Members Services and Support fully details the services and support available to Members

The Members' Services team ~~Members~~ will also be provided with administrative support for Group Secretaries and other Members in booking rooms for meetings and in the servicing of Group Rooms.

3. Signatures on Letters

Any resources supplied by the Council are for Council purposes and may not be used in whole or in part to effect public support for or to promote a political party, a candidate or group of candidates in an election or in an electoral or party political campaign.

Standards and Governance Committee on 18th October 2005 determined that Members may be permitted to generally sign their correspondence using their name, party and ward. Where Members hold a particular office or position, they may use the appropriate title, specifically Leader, Cabinet Member, Group Leader, Opposition Spokesperson, Chair or Vice-Chair of a particular committee where appropriate. No signatures should be used that aren't appropriate to the content of the correspondence. For example, if a Cabinet Member is writing regarding something that is appropriate to his/her appropriate portfolio area then it would be right and proper to sign off the correspondence with the Cabinet Member title. However when writing about a ward matter then the sign off should only be the Ward Councillor title.

If a councillor sits on a committee which is not council appointed/related then this title should not be used in any communications or sign off.

No other alternative or variation is allowed. It is important that, in the heat of political fray, Members should not use or be perceived as using public resources for political battles or to make political points. A factual statement reflecting the fact that a particular Councillor was elected to represent a particular party in a particular ward or holds a particular position within the Authority is a matter of fact and record.

In addition, where a request is made to use an electronic signature, they will not generally be utilised. If an electronic signature is essential for publications or similar reasons, then an original signature should be obtained from the Member and scanned, with the electronic signature then deleted from systems immediately after use. Officers shall not retain the electronic signature of any Member. In all other cases, the use of Members' electronic signatures shall only be used in exceptional circumstances and approved on a case-by-case basis by the ~~Solicitor to the Council~~ Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services.

4. Multiple copies

Any resources supplied by the Council are for Council purposes and may not be used in whole or part to effect public support for or to promote a political party, a candidate or group of candidates in an election or in an electoral or party political campaign.

The principles that relate to dealing with correspondence, drafting replies to correspondence, typing and IT support for Cabinet Members will also apply to all members (see 2 above)

Standards and Governance Committee considered this issue on 18th October 2005 and ruled as follows:

- a. Where it is clear that the content is clearly direct "politicking" (see paragraph below) and/or has no discernable service related context and/or is clearly self or party promotional, regardless of numbers, the Solicitor to the Council will disallow the usage.
- b. Any letters delivered, sealed in envelopes to be posted out with the Council paying the postage will either be returned to the Councillor or opened and, if discovered to be a breach of these rules, will be the subject of a report to the Standards Board for England.
- c. ~~Whilst there is no numerical limit,~~ Democratic Services will refer any request for more than 250 letters per mail shot to the ~~Solicitor to the Council~~Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services for consideration ~~(although any mail out over 50 will be monitored)~~ and once a single Councillor has sent out more than 1000 letters in a municipal cycle using this process, any further requests will be referred to the ~~Solicitor to the Council~~Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services for consideration.
- d. When the ~~Solicitor to the Council~~Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services considers that this is an abuse, the ~~Solicitor to the Council~~Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services will rule accordingly, but the Member will have a right of appeal to a specially convened meeting of the Standards and Governance Committee (if one is not imminent).

There is a difference between "politics" and "politicking". "Politicking" can usually be characterised and/or identified as saying what others want to hear, or promoting oneself at the expense of others, a self-serving agenda. Therefore, characteristics such as exaggeration, grand-standing, egocentric behaviour, personalisation and/or abuse of others would tend to be indicators of "politicking" which would be unacceptable in any such correspondence.

It should also be pointed out that timing will be material. During the time prior to any election – local, parliamentary, European or indeed a referendum – it is likely that a firmer line will be taken in terms of what can and cannot be said, as the perception of "politicking" and the use of public resources for political purposes is more likely to be carefully scrutinised. The Council's Code of Conduct on Publicity, which forms an appendix to the Officer / Member Protocol, is clear that in the period of time leading up to an election, all forms of publicity – and that would include letters produced by Members and sent to constituents – must conform with additional safe-guards and requirements. Members, therefore, need to refer to that in considering the content (as well as the circulation) of any correspondence during this time.

As always, this is an issue that is predominantly one of subjective judgement and, as a result, Members may wish to seek advice on a case-by-case basis, and this is always available, in confidence, from Officers.

