

Essential Information

for newly elected councillors





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Welcome

Firstly, welcome to North West Leicestershire District Council.

To assist with your introduction into your new role, this handbook has been prepared to provide you with an overview of the information which you will need in order to carry out your duties as a District Councillor. More information can be found in the Library section in the Modern Gov app.

We hope you find the handbook useful.

The Local Community and Your Role

The local community relies on its Councillors and the local community can view your role in the following ways:

- You are the elected representatives of the whole community within the ward you serve.
- People who are from inside the local community know what is best for that community. They understand the issues and pressures and can offer solutions that best serve the community.
- As a voice within the local community Councillors can champion the users of local services.
- The effective function of democracy is a key factor within a local community and Councillors are seen as key to having effective democracy.
- Councillors play a very important role in helping to shape future services for the benefit of the local people. There are a number of guides which have been produced to help you understand the new roles and responsibilities for Councillors. These can be found on the Members Toolkit page www.nwleics.gov.uk/toolkit

Your Basic Responsibilities

By law, you must:

- Attend legally, at least one Committee or Council meeting every six months (however, it is expected that you would attend every Council and committee meeting you have been assigned to).
- Declare, and take appropriate steps to acknowledge the existence and nature of any interests.
- Comply with the Member Code of Conduct and other related protocols.
- Observe and keep to your Council's Member/Officer Protocol and other protocols that may exist, e.g. in relation to communication with the press.
- Keep confidential information confidential.
- Register all gifts received.
- Register under the Data Protection Act.

General Responsibilities for Councillors

- At all times ensure the highest standards of ethics and conduct are maintained.
- Balance the different interests within your ward and represent the needs of all people within the ward and the District and not just those people who voted for you or who are known to you.
- Become an advocate of and for your constituents by representing your constituents and bring their views into the Council's decision making process.

- Undertake casework such as representing an individual or a family at special appeals, perhaps related to housing benefit or school admission.
- Contribute to the good governance of the area and actively encourage community participation and citizen involvement in decision-making.
- In all outside activities be an ambassador for the Council and always act in a professional way to reflect the best possible standards.

Doing Your Job Effectively

A Councillor is able to provide to the community a service as they see best and it will be up to the Councillor to decide how they devote their time, energy and effort to provide this service, however there are a number of key fundamental areas that must be considered.

In order to provide a high standard of service a Councillor must:

- Participate effectively as a member of any panel, committee, forum, community Council or assembly, to which they are appointed.
- Plan and manage their time effectively to ensure objectives/targets are achieved.
- Be available and approachable to all of the constituents within their ward (either via a surgery or some other arrangements). They should respond to requests for assistance from their constituents within a reasonable time frame and keep them informed of the progress of inquiries.
- Represent the Council to the community and the community to the Council.

Committee Skills and Etiquette

Know Your Committee

- Read the 'Terms of Reference' and list of members before your first meeting
- Make sure you have attended any requisite training before your first meeting.
- Familiarise yourself with the deadlines for questions and motions.

Be Prepared

- Read the papers early so that you have time to clarify things before the meeting.
- Submit your questions/motions in good time.
- Ask Democratic Services for copies of old minutes/papers for background information, if necessary.
- Attend any necessary briefings
- If you cannot attend a meeting, give your apologies to Democratic Services as soon as you become aware.
- Seek any legal advice on interests BEFORE the meeting.
- Check the agenda for when and where the meeting is being held and make sure you're on time.

Committee Etiquette

- Get the attention of the Chair by making eye contact or raising your hand/pen to have your turn to speak.
- Stand when speaking, if able to do so.
- Use the microphone, if there is one.
- When voting ensure that your hand is clearly visible so your vote can be counted.
- Ask the questions you'd like answered: be assertive but try not to interrupt, be too pushy or rude.
- Try not to look too bored. Turn off your mobile phone or switch it to silent mode.
- Don't be intimidated; make the most of the opportunities to have your say.

Getting your point across

- Think through your arguments, don't repeat too much and speak clearly.
- Back up your arguments with evidence of what your constituency thinks to add weight where needed.

Follow Up

- You can ask questions in 'matters arising', if appropriate, to see what's been done (or not) on previous actions.
- Feedback to your constituency if you're representing it on a committee.

Protocol for Members

The Constitution (part 5.2) includes a set of rules which provides a guide to help maintain good working relationships between officers and members of the council. This protocol aims to help signpost you to the correct person/service area to assist you in your role as elected member.

If you wish to log an issue as part of your casework

- You may use the reporting processes which already exist, e.g reporting a missed bin; pest control; noise nuisance etc. See the 'report it' page on the Council's website.
- For a more complicated issue or something you need signposting/support on, contact Democratic Services either by phone, e-mail or by coming to the reception window located outside their office. The issue will be logged and forwarded to the relevant service for a full response within 10 working days.

If you wish to make a complaint

- Please put the details of your complaint in writing and send to Democratic Services. We will give you a reference number for your complaint, and will monitor its progress until it reaches a conclusion. We aim to resolve your complaint within 10 working days, but on occasions when that will not be possible we will tell you, and agree when we will respond to you.
- If the complaint relates to the conduct of another elected member, you will need to discuss this with the Monitoring Officer. Appointments can be made by contacting the relevant secretary or Democratic Services.

If you wish to discuss an issue about a specific service area

- Appointments can be made by contacting the secretary of the Director, Head of Service or by contacting Democratic Services who will arrange an appointment with the appropriate Team Manager. Alternatively you may put your issue to them by e-mail, phone or letter which will be acknowledged within 24 hours and a response will be provided within 10 working days. On occasions when that will not be possible we will tell you, and agree when we will respond to you.
- If you are already in the building and wish to speak with an officer, contact can be made with the secretary of the relevant Head of Service or with Democratic Services who can contact the relevant Team Manager to seek their availability.

If you are not happy with any responses you have been given

- You can discuss the matter with the Head of Service, Director or Chief Executive as appropriate. Appointments can be made by contacting the relevant secretary.

A quick reference contact card setting out the contact details has been made available to all Councillors. Further copies can be obtained from Democratic Services.

Contact us



Visit us at www.nwleics.gov.uk



Call us on 01530 454512



Tweet us @nwleics



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