

## **PART 5 – E**

### **PROTOCOL ON THE USE OF COUNCIL RESOURCES AND FACILITIES**

#### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The Council only has power to provide facilities that assist members in discharging their role as members of the Council. Services can therefore only be used on Council business and never in connection with party political or electoral campaigning activity or for private purposes.
- 1.2 This protocol was approved by the Council's Standards Committee on 8 February 2006 and adopted by the Council upon the recommendation of the General Purposes Committee on 5 April 2006.
- 1.3 It covers the use of Council resources and facilities by councillors particularly those provided under the member services budget.

#### **2. Printing**

##### **2.1 Basis of Provision**

Printing facilities are available to members of the Council in their capacity as ward councillors for the purpose of the provision of information to constituents in their wards about:

- The work of the Council, its committees and sub-committees or any matter being or likely to be considered at any such meetings;
- Services in the area provided by the Council or partner authorities [e.g. GLA, Police, Fire, Transport, Health];
- How to contact their local councillors or MP and raise issues; and,
- Meetings, consultation and local initiatives for the area organised by or on behalf of the Council.

2.2 The facilities are not available for the production of material which in whole or in part appears to be designed to affect public support for or to promote:

- A political party;
- A candidate or group of candidates in an election; or
- An electoral or party political campaign.

Under no circumstances can the name of a political party appear on the printed material, other than in a councillor's letterhead. Slogans, titles or phrases which are associated with a political party cannot be part of the text. The Council's Standards Committee has also imposed specific requirements (set out in the Member/Officer Relations Protocol) which must be adhered to at all times.

Material produced should include an indication that it has been printed by Merton Council under the arrangements for members printing. This can be by use of the Council's logo or the acknowledgement 'Printed by Merton Borough Council'.

Political groups can send welcome letters to residents on Merton letterhead paper so long as they comply with a template agreed with Monitoring Officer.

Letters on ward business must be cleared by the Monitoring Officer. The council will not pay for postage and letters must be hand delivered.

- 2.3 In addition to the names of members of the Council, printed material can contain the name of the MP or MEP for the area and the names of relevant officers of the Council.
- 2.4 These can be incorporated on the same basis as that which applies to the inclusion of names.

### **3. Processing of Requests**

- 3.1 Printing requests should be submitted to the Head of Civic and Legal Services or an officer appointed for the purpose by him for approval under the above arrangements. The text of all publications must be approved by or on behalf of the Head of Civic and Legal Services before publication. Any decision not to process the request will be advised to and discussed with the Member.
- 3.2 The opportunity will be available to discuss any aspect further with the Head of Democracy Services or the Managing Director of the South London Legal Partnership.

### **4. Photocopiers**

- 4.1 Short run copying facilities are provided in group offices for use on a self-service basis by members of the Council or party group support staff in connection with Council business only. Members will be provided with controlled access to these facilities and use will be monitored on an individual and overall basis.

## **5. The Coat of Arms and Logos**

- 5.1 The Council's Coat of Arms and the Council's logo are only available for use in connection with Council business. Use of the Coat of Arms is restricted to formal Council documents and correspondence and invitations of the Mayor.

- 5.2 Use of the Council's logo by members of the Council is only acceptable on material produced under the arrangements for members' printing, on members' personalised stationery or in relation to an approved activity. The use of logos or slogans developed in relation to particular projects may only be used in communications relating to those particular matters.
- 5.3 Under no circumstances should the Coat of Arms or the Council logo be used as part of material produced by or on behalf of members of the Council outside of the approved arrangements described above.

## **6. Personalised Letterhead, Compliment Slips and Business Cards**

- 6.1 These are provided for use only in connection with Council business and are available to all members of the Council and can be customised to show positions held as Leader of the Council, Deputy Leader of the Council, Cabinet Portfolio Member and Chair of a committee
- 6.2 Letterheads, compliment slips and business cards can, as a matter of fact, state the name of the political party group to which the councillor belongs and the ward they represent and details of surgeries.

## **7. Postage**

### **7.1 Basis of Provision**

Facilities are available to Members of the Council on the basis of posting individual letters for the purpose of:

- Responding to individuals or small groups of constituents on specific matters raised by them;
- Communication with other organisations as a part of dealing with issues raised by constituents or in relation to members' responsibilities e.g. Cabinet portfolio or role as committee chair;
- Providing information on a one off basis to new electors in the ward on the work of the Council, its Committees, services in the area provided by the Council or joint authorities [e.g. GLA, police, fire, transport, health] and how to contact their local Councillors or MP; and
- The circulation of information to individuals or groups of individuals within wards or the conduct of surveys or consultation processes.

- 7.2 The Council's facilities are not available for ward-wide mail shots, the distribution of leaflets or the posting of general information to constituents other than in the circumstances described above. They are also not available for posting any material which could not lawfully be printed by the Council. In considering those issues members should seek the views of officers above there is doubt.

7.3 Clarification on any proposed use of postal facilities can be obtained from the Head of Democracy Services.

## **8. Mobile Phones**

8.1 Where mobile phones are issued to certain councillors, e.g. Cabinet members, it is on the basis that the making of any private calls will be recorded and the cost of any private call will be reimbursed.

## **9. Support Staff**

9.1 All staff working in the units providing support for party groups within Democracy Services are subject to the same constraints as other Council employees in relation to political activity. They may be instructed and employed to provide the services set out in their job descriptions to assist councillors in carrying out their roles. These staff may facilitate the work of councillors by undertaking tasks related to any of the activities permitted by this guidance. This may involve typing, data processing, photocopying, progress chasing and diary management in relation to ward and Council activities and commitments.

9.2 Support staff may also assist in the preparation and issue of agenda for meetings of statutorily established political groups of Council members where such meetings relate to Council business.

9.3 In no circumstances may any member of staff perform any task which in whole or in part appears to be designed to affect public support for, or to promote, or is related to the work or activities of:

- A political party;
- A candidate or group of candidates in an election; or
- An electoral or party political campaign

9.2 The only exception will be staff employed as Political Assistants in accordance with section 9 of the Housing and Local Government Act 1989. Such officers may provide support to political groups and the councillors who comprise them in relation to the activities of those councillors arising from their functions as elected office holders. Such officers are however prohibited as employees from providing other support to the political activities of the groups or members.

## **10 Equipment**

## 10.1 Information Technology

The Council supplies to members equipment to assist them in carrying out their duties as Councillors. Equipment may only be used for lawful purposes related to the Councillor's elected office. Council equipment may not be used for party political purposes. The acquisition, maintenance and use of information technology equipment provided to members are regulated by the Council's various IT policies. The four to particularly note are:

- The Email and Internet Usage policy, which gives guidance and requirements for the way that email and the Internet connection may be used;
- The IT Security Policy, which says what you may and may not do with the IT equipment and facilities, and gives guidance on matters such as effective use of passwords;
- Remote Access to Merton's Network regarding security of access; and
- The Software Management Policy, which gives the reasons why the acquisition and use of software has to be strictly controlled

These policies are published on the Council's intranet on the policies page, and are also obtainable from IT Services if required.

10.2 In accepting ICT equipment a member agrees to be bound by the policies. If he is satisfied that any councillor has failed to comply with the requirements of the policies the Chief Executive may require the member to cease using the Council equipment and surrender it to the Head of IT Services.

10.3 The Council will provide printer paper and ink cartridges for use on Council business. Members proposing to produce a significant number of copies of any document are encouraged to contact officers and to arrange for the documents to be photocopied or printed at the Civic Centre.

## 11. Particular Needs

11.1 The Council recognises that certain members may have need for specific equipment to assist them in carrying out their duties. The Council will aim to provide such equipment both in order to meet any legal obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, and in order to maximize the capacity of the councillor to carry out the functions of being an elected member of the Council.