Protocol for multi-member wards – Members

About the Protocol:

This protocol sets out some of the key issue which will evolve in multi-member ward working. The protocol is not prescriptive, and there is acknowledgement that informal ward-based practice is most likely to produce effective local working relationships.

Areas covered:

There are key issues which will require to be addressed within each ward to help Members work together effectively. The list is not exhaustive but should serve as a starting point for successful joint working in a multi member ward.

Suggested issues to be considered are as follows:

- Surgeries
- Councillor listings
- Councillors code of conduct
- Use of council facilities
- Sharing information/dealing with constituents
- Attending meetings/accepting invitations
- Ward working practices
- Mail shots

Surgeries:

Councillors have a duty to act in the interests of the Council as a whole and all the communities served by it and a duty to be accessible to all the people of the area for which they have been elected to serve, and to represent their interests conscientiously. Advice surgeries are the traditional point of call for constituents wishing to contact their councillors. However some constituents feel comfortable and find it easier to contact their local member by telephone or email. It may be prudent to consider sharing surgeries or instigating a rota system amongst members. In all cases safety should be considered paramount, and members should review the council’s Personal Safety at Work Framework in MyToolkit.net which includes information on lone working, and risk assessment.

Sharing information/dealing with constituents issues:

Elected members are working in a political environment and individuals may choose to approach a particular councillor because of personal preference. However it is inevitable that casework will be duplicated as a result of constituents approaching each ward member in an attempt to get a quicker or ‘better’ response.

An electronic system has been introduced to record constituents’ enquiries. Members will receive training on how to use to system to best effect. Data protection laws prohibit councillors from sharing constituents’ personal details with other Members unless they have the approval of the constituent. Further details and the merits of the system are included in the Members Induction information.

Councillor listings:

It is appropriate for the council to provide factual information (such as contact details) to the public about councillors acting in their ward. Members’ services and council
officials will disseminate information equally and fairly between members. Council officers will always list ward members’ names in alphabetical order.

**Attending Meetings/ accepting invitations:**

There will be many outside organisations and bodies who will seek councillor representations at their meetings. The Council will approve the nominations to these outside bodies.

In addition ward councillors will often be invited to attend regular meetings of community councils, resident groups and school board etc. Attending every such event may prove a heavy workload.

Members may wish to consider local arrangements that divide representation by area, interest group or availability and/or agree to inform each other of attendance at events within the ward boundaries.

**The Councillors’ Code of Conduct:**

The Code of Conduct sets out the minimum standards of conduct for all councillors. It highlights that councillors have a duty at all times not to do anything that brings the council into disrepute. It also outlines how councillors should act and behave towards other councillors; this includes misusing the position of councillor to the disadvantage of others. The Code quite clearly specifies that councillors have a responsibility to treat each other with respect and dignity.


Members will require to consider the requirements of the Code when agreeing ward working practices.

**Ward working practices:**

The council has already adopted a decentralised management structure with the introduction of locality planning.

It is important to all members that they should be kept informed of, and have an input to, matters of council business that affect their wards. Therefore whenever a public meeting, photo-call, ward issue or launch local to a ward is being organised by the Council all ward members will be invited to attend the meeting. Similarly whenever the council undertakes any form of consultative exercise on a issue local to a ward or particularly affecting a part of a ward, the appropriate officers will notify the ward members of the consultation and request their views on the matter in issue.

With the change in legislation, not only is there more than one elected member representing a particular ward, but also the wards themselves are significantly larger in size and represent broader communities. It is therefore important for members to consider how they might collaborate to share the workload.

**Use of council facilities**

Guidelines on the use of council facilities have been designed to assist officers in supporting councillors in carrying out their roles within the council.

See Appendix 1 -- Use of Council Facilities by Councillors.
Appendix 1

USE OF COUNCIL FACILITIES BY COUNCILLORS

GUIDELINES

For Compliance with the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity and Councillors’ Code of Conduct

1. Purpose of Guidelines -

These guidelines are designed to ensure that council facilities are not used for purposes which would breach the statutory rules contained in the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity. They are also produced in accordance with the recommendation in the Councillors’ Code of Conduct that councils should have in place guidance for elected members on the use of council facilities.

In these guidelines, “council facilities” includes all resources, including council staff, electronic hardware, software and IT systems, emails, mailroom, telephones, post and postal facilities and equipment.

“Correspondence and communications” covers all forms and formats, including letters, emails, faxes and use of telephones and similar devices.

2. Correspondence and Communications and Publicity Material –

All correspondence and communications and publicity material prepared and issued using council facilities should follow these guidelines viz:-

(1) They must be concerned with the functions of the council or with the council’s policies in relation to these functions and the reasons for them. Publicity material can also be designed to attract people to the area or to use the area’s facilities.

(2) Descriptions of the council’s decisions or policies should accurately provide facts or explanations.

(3) Descriptions of the council’s decisions or policies should be presented in a balanced and reasonable way and should not be expressed in ways which could be seen as being designed to increase or decrease support for any political party.

(4) The use of political tags and nicknames should be avoided as should attacks on or caricatures of both national and local political figures or political parties.
3. **Use of Office Facilities** -

For correspondence and communications concerning council business conveying the official council line, Council headed notepaper should be used. All such correspondence and communications should be signed by councillors only in their council capacities, e.g., as Provost, councillors or as Chairs of Committees. Such correspondence and communications can be processed through Members’ Services and with the use of council facilities.

For correspondence and communications on council business conveying the political group’s views, Group headed notepaper should be used. Where such correspondence and communications are related to the functions of the council and are being sent internally then they can be processed through Members’ Services and with the use of council facilities. Where they are related to the council’s functions but are being sent to an outside person or body then they may not be processed through Members' Services or with the use of council facilities.

Correspondence and communications conveying a Group’s views on matters not connected with the council’s functions should be sent using Group headed notepaper. Such correspondence and communications should not be processed through Members’ Services or otherwise using council facilities.

To enable monitoring to take place, all mail for posting should be enveloped by Members’ Services staff and coded or recorded appropriately.

Each time a fax message is sent, the record sheet outlining details of sender and where the message is being sent must be completed.

The use of computers and similar devices should be restricted to council and Group business which complies with the above guidelines on correspondence and communications and publicity material. In addition, all such use should comply with the council’s policies on IT security and the use of the council Internet and email systems.

Members in their use and storage of information must comply with the terms of the council's policy and guidelines on compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and in particular with any need to register their systems of information and their use of that information with the UK Information Commissioner.

Members will have access to the photocopiers in the Members’ Services Unit. However, use of that facility should comply with these guidelines.

4. **Mailshots**

The use of council facilities to produce unsolicited mail shots is restricted to the council’s Civic Head in connection with the civic or ceremonial business of the council. No other elected members are entitled to use council facilities, including mail merges, to produce unsolicited mail shots.
No newsletters will be issued using council facilities.

5. **Election Periods**

Stricter rules apply to council publicity in the period in the run up to an election, i.e., between the date of publication of the notice of election and polling day. Specific guidance on the application of these tighter rules is contained in separate guidance.

6. **Further Advice**

Further advice on the implementation of these guidelines can be sought from Gordon Blair, Chief Legal Officer.

**Approved by Council Executive: 23 June 2009**
**Amended by Council Executive: 29 September 2009**

Contact: Gordon Blair
Gordon.Blair@westlothian.gov.uk
Tel: 01506 281695