

HEXHAM TOWN COUNCIL **REPRESENTATIVE PROTOCOL**

Guidelines for Councillors representing the Council on another body/organisation or in general.

Scope

It is of paramount importance that Councillors represent both the Council and themselves in the correct manner to ensure that both are not misquoted or misrepresented and views belonging to one or the other are not confused in conversations or meetings. This protocol is a key document that will be referred to in any Councillor induction training.

Situations

Councillors may be requested or volunteer to be a Council representative on another body. This could include attending a group as the Council's representative or attending a meeting of another authority as the Council's representative to pass on information or ask a question.

Also, as most Councillors live or work in the town they may often be stopped by residents who have information, ideas, or problems which they wish to have resolved.

Councillor as a Representative

Hexham presently has a number of groups with Councillor Representatives attending on its behalf, such as Hexham Youth Initiative and Hexham Community Partnership. Whilst attending these groups, Councillors attending as a Hexham Town Council representative should only put forward the views agreed by the Council and not their own personal views. In principle, all Councillors should abide by the democratic decisions of the Council once made.

If you are attending a meeting as a Hexham Town Council representative but feel you have a view, questions or objection which you would like to express as an individual or as a view held by another group or committee then this must be clearly communicated to the meeting you are attending (see some examples below).

No member of the Council should misrepresent or do something 'in the name of the Council' which they have not been authorised to do so by the Council.

Examples

1. The Town Council agreed it supported a particular planning application but you have decided to attend the planning authority meeting because you personally did not like the planning application and have a strong objection towards its design and position.

If you speak and you introduce yourself as a Town Councillor for Hexham Town Council then you may only offer the Town Council view - which was that it supported the application.

If you wish to express your personal views at the meeting about the application, then you should not introduce yourself as a Town Councillor for Hexham Town Council and must make it very clear to the meeting that you are expressing your personal views.

If you do not make yourself clear about whose views you are expressing to the meeting then the Town Council could be quoted as not liking or objecting to the application when this was not the case.

2. You have been asked to attend a community meeting as the Council's representative, for no particular purpose but to gather information of what is happening and to see if any items will affect Hexham. You are only attending the meeting because you are the representative of Hexham Town Council and otherwise you would not have been invited.

The meeting goes off track and begins discussing an item which is not at all relevant to the town of Hexham but that you are interested in and have knowledge about. If you engage in conversation regarding issues, opinions or objections you should make the meeting clearly aware that this is your own personal view and not the views of the Town Council - remembering that you are only there because of the Town Council.

Councillor as a Resident

Councillors may sometimes be stopped by residents when they are out and about who have information or ideas for them to listen to or problems which they wish to be resolved or passed on. It is important that these queries are noted for either passing on or raising with the Council.

No member of the Council should promise to do something, or agree to do anything, which they have not been authorised to do by the Council.

Example

A resident approaches you because they know you are a Town Councillor. They ask if you might consider their idea which they feel would make things better for their age group.

You go to inspect, for example, an area of land where they are suggesting changes and meet with the land owner and discuss the project. You agree with the resident that the Council thinks this is a good idea and promise that the Council will carry out this project.

These actions, described above, **are wrong** in a number of ways.

- You should never be seen to be acting on behalf of the Council by getting involved in discussions which the Council is not aware of, such as with a land owner.
- You as an individual should not be giving the Council's 'endorsement' or 'agreement' to anything without its express permission.
- You should not be agreeing to carry out any works, however small, on behalf of the Council.

The recommended course of action to an approach of this kind from a resident would be to listen to the idea/suggestion, note the details, and then raise this idea at a Council meeting for the Council to consider.

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