

Advice on Operation of Multi-Member Wards

Purpose

This provides advice and guidance on the operation of multi-member wards.

Operation of multi-member wards

Multi-member wards have operated since the single transferable voting (STV) system of proportional representation was introduced for local government elections in Scotland at the elections held on 3 May 2007.

South Lanarkshire Council comprises 64 councillors across 20 multi-member wards made up of either 3 or 4 councillors. There are 16 electoral wards of 3 members and 4 wards of 4 members. Details of wards and councillors are provided at the end of this document.

General guidance

- ◆ councillors elected to multi-member wards have equal status and represent the whole ward
- ◆ when dealing with enquiries about who the local councillor is, officers should provide the names of all the councillors in a ward in alphabetical order along with their political affiliation

Ward Arrangements

Members will acknowledge that the key role of all councillors is to represent their ward and the people who live there, especially when it comes to representing individual constituents and dealing with their enquiries.

The work councillors do within their own local wards is at the heart of their role and of local democracy. It is recognised that councillors, when dealing with ward issues and constituent enquiries, do so within the established ward boundaries.

This is underpinned by The Councillors' Code of Conduct which states 'that elected members should respect other councillors and Council employees'. It is on that basis that councillors are expected to operate and in the event that councillors are asked to deal with specific issues or constituent enquiries that are outwith their own ward, then they should respectfully advise the constituent who their ward councillors are and/or pass the matter on to those ward councillors.

Consultation and meetings with councillors

- ◆ whenever the Council undertakes any form of consultative exercise on an issue local to a ward or wards, officers should notify all the ward councillors of the consultation and request their views on the matter
- ◆ whenever a public meeting is arranged by the Council to consider an issue local to one or more wards, all the ward councillors should be invited to attend the meeting
- ◆ where a councillor requests a meeting with an officer on a specific issue raised with that councillor by a constituent or organisation, then the officer is able to meet that councillor on that issue. Where the issue raised has general implications within a ward, then it is up to the councillor to extend the invitation to the other ward councillors

Events and official openings

- ◆ when hosting a civic event or function for a local group/organisation, all associated ward councillors should be invited
- ◆ when the Council is hosting an official opening of a new facility, all local councillors must be advised/invited

Parent Councils

Parent Councils have been encouraged to extend an invitation to those local councillors whose ward falls within the catchment area of the school. However, it should be noted that each Parent Council is required to produce a constitution under the Parental Involvement Act and whilst, in the spirit of partnership working, we do encourage an invitation to be extended to local councillors, this is not mandatory.

Correspondence with councillors

- ◆ when officers are providing general service information to councillors, eg forthcoming road closures, all affected councillors should be provided with that information
- ◆ where Services have a practice of advising or informing the local member of information, all ward councillors should be provided with that information
- ◆ when dealing with a routine or business as usual request received from a councillor, the Service should deal with this in the normal manner. There is no specific requirement to consult the other local councillors. Where, however, the matter falls outwith routine or business as usual requests then appropriate consultation with ward councillors should take place
- ◆ when officers write to a resident regarding an issue affecting one household, the local members are not to be informed. The exception to this is where a councillor has been involved in the issue. In this case, the relevant officer(s) should keep the councillor informed of developments until the issue is finalised. A copy of the correspondence should not be provided to the other ward councillors. At all times, officers and councillors must be alert to Data Protection issues and any confidentiality requirements
- ◆ where a councillor has been involved in an issue affecting the ward generally (eg fly tipping), then the relevant officer(s) should keep the councillor and all other ward councillors informed of developments until the issue is finalised

In respect of Committee Chairs and Depute Chairs, it is clearly important that they are kept informed by Executive Directors/Director of Health and Social Care of key service issues within their respective Resource and, for that purpose, correspondence received from councillors should be copied to the relevant Executive Director/Director of Health and Social Care who will determine, depending on the issues raised, if the Chair and/or Depute Chair(s) should be advised.

Member enquiries

In the context of multi-member wards, there is the potential for officers to be contacted by more than one member about the same issue. Officers should ensure that they give consistent responses to all members, and should check to see if other officers have dealt with similar enquiries to ensure consistency of response.

<p><i>For clarification on any of the matters covered within this advice, please contact:- Administration and Legal Services on 01698 454811</i></p>
