



BLYTH TOWN COUNCIL

MAYOR'S HANDBOOK

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Introduction

The aim of this handbook is to provide an explanation about the role of the Mayor. It also provides guidance to an incoming Mayor with advice and support as they plan and work through their civic year. This will commence at the Town Council's Annual General Meeting in one year and conclude the following May at the next Annual General Meeting when they hand over to their successor.

Blyth has had a mayor since 1923 when the town was granted the Royal Charter. The role of Mayor carries a significant historical importance, and anyone who is elected Mayor becomes part of local history. Today, the Mayor serves a civic role, acting as the First Citizen of the parish and representing a bridge between Blyth's heritage and its present day. The position also stands as a symbol of unity and cohesion within the community. As the largest parish in Northumberland, the office for Mayor of Blyth holds considerable value and prestige amongst parishes across the county.

Role of the Mayor

The Mayor is elected by the Full Council at the Annual General Meeting held in May each year. A new Deputy Mayor is also elected at this meeting. The new Mayor makes a declaration of Acceptance of Office when accepting the Term of Office at the Annual General Meeting. The Mayor's term of office is for one year and during this time the Mayor will continue to be a member of the Council and presides over meetings of the Council and other meetings as delegated.

The role of the Mayor is principally a ceremonial one, acting as host on behalf of the Town Council at civic functions by invitation, both within and outside of the town area.

The role of Mayor does not confer any powers to be exercised other than those at a Town Council meeting as set out below. During the civic year, the Mayor undertakes official openings or presentations both within Blyth and throughout the County.

The Mayor receives invitations to a range of events, and every invitation is considered equally. If the Mayor cannot attend a function, the Deputy Mayor may attend on behalf of the Mayor.

Considerations

Anyone chosen or considering putting themselves forward for the role of Mayor needs to bear in mind that the role is different to that of a Councillor. The role can be physically and mentally tiring, particularly if you are also an elected County Councillor; and will undoubtedly have an

impact on family and friends due to the time spent carrying out Mayoral duties. However, the role can also be hugely enjoyable and rewarding.

Many mayoral engagements take place during the daytime or at unsociable hours. Discussions would need to take place with the Mayor's employer regarding any provision they could make to allow the Mayor to fulfil this public role.

Duties which the Mayor may carry out include:

- Acting as host on behalf of the Town Council at civic functions.
- Attending functions by invitation within the Town Council area or the County and at times outside of the County area.
- Undertaking official openings or presentations at places throughout Blyth or the County, and at times outside the County area.

It is expected that the Mayor will open/attend a number of events delivered by Blyth Town Council during the year of office. These include:

- Events organised by the Town Council, e.g. Fireworks Display, Christmas Lights Switch On
- Blyth in Bloom Presentation Evening
- Remembrance Service.
- Town Twinning events e.g. Civic Dinner

It is customary for the Mayor to attend the Remembrance Sunday service. It is protocol that the Mayor takes the salute where organisations and public bodies parade. The Mayor should remove his hat for a short period of time when taking the salute. Instruction from the organising bodies of events and functions should be adhered to at all times when presiding at a civic event with military and wider civic representation.

The Mayor also has a number of statutory functions to undertake as set out below:

- If present at Town Council meetings, must chair the meeting. (Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12, paragraph 5 (1)).
- Has a casting vote in the event of a tie in any voting at a Town Council meeting.
- Should ensure together with the Town Clerk that the Council makes legal decisions.
- Has a duty to ensure that the items in the Agenda are properly followed.
- If the Mayor is not present at a Council meeting, the Deputy Mayor must preside.

Ceremonial Role of the Mayor

- To serve the residents of Blyth.
- The Mayor is the figurehead and public face of Blyth Town Council.
- To act as the Council's ambassador in promoting the Town.
- Attending events and functions organised by other organisations etc.
- Attending Council approved events and functions outside of the Town

Council area organised by other organisations and bodies. Observing civic protocol is essential to upholding the dignity of the Mayoral office and the traditions it represents. Mayors are expected to follow agreed procedures and listen carefully to instructions at civic events and when in the ceremonial role to ensure proceedings run smoothly, respectfully and safeguard the Office of Mayor and the reputation of the Council.

There are Chains of Office to wear and protocols to follow. When representing the Town Council, the Mayor would normally wear the official chain of office at all official functions within the Town. Traditionally the Ceremonial robes are worn for the Remembrance Sunday Service. The Mayor should not be embellishing civic dress or regalia in any way, without expressing permission from the Town Clerk.

When the official chain of office is worn the wearer should be addressed as Mayor. The chain would normally also be worn at functions outside of the Town Council area when invited in an official capacity, following permission granted from the local authority they will be visiting.

These chains are heavy and not particularly easy to attach – assistance is required. The chains come in a storage case, and it is the responsibility of the Mayor to undertake the safe keeping of the mayoral chain or to collect and deposit it from the Town Council office following use at any function.

The Council maintains insurance to cover all civic regalia and insignia. It is important that the Mayor reports any damages or any wear and tear to the Chain of Office or the Ceremonial Robes. The Mayor should inform the Town Clerk immediately if the Chains of Office are lost, mislaid, stolen or otherwise missing in order for the Council's insurers to be informed.

Meet the Mayor Sessions

The Mayor may also wish to organise a series of "Meet the Mayor" sessions during their term of office. These sessions could be used to share information with residents as well as listen to any concerns or issues they may have. It is expected that they would be held at different venues in the town to ensure all age groups etc have the opportunity to attend.

The Democratic Services Officer will liaise and co-ordinate with both the Mayor, and Deputy Mayor regarding attendance at functions and engagements.

Mayor's Allowance

A Mayoral allowance of £2,000 is allocated each year by the Town Council to assist in performing civic duties. The allowance is paid monthly through Northumberland County Council directly to the Mayor, and will typically fund:

- Tickets to fundraising events
- Raffle tickets
- Mayoral receptions
- Clothing
- Mileage/travelling.

When an engagement requires purchases, this should be done by the Mayor and logged on the Mayor's Spending Record. This Record should be sent to the Democratic Services Officer regularly for the ongoing review of the allowance in line with the Council budget.

Gifts to the Mayor

If there is any doubt as to whether a gift is personal or intended for the Town, advice should be sought from the Town Clerk.

Where gifts which are deemed as personal the Mayor will need to follow the rules which apply to all Councillors in that they must declare gifts or hospitality received in their capacity as Councillor (please refer to the Council's Gifts and Hospitality Policy for further advice).

This includes circumstances where the use of the Mayoral Allowance results in a prize, for example a raffle prize following the purchase of raffle tickets at a charity engagement. In such cases, the Mayor should either politely decline the prize, or accept it on the basis that the prize will be recorded in the Council's Gifts and Hospitality Register upon notifying the Town Clerk and then donated to a local organisation. Alternatively, if the Mayor wishes to keep the gift or prize, they must not claim the cost of the raffle tickets on their Mayoral Spending Record.

The Mayor's Consort

The Mayor may choose a Consort who could either be a partner, fellow Councillor, family member, or friend. This may be difficult for certain individuals who are suddenly thrust into the public eye. Attendance at public events is entirely at the Consort's discretion. Although the role has no Civic standing the support given to the Mayor is invaluable and only the Consort shall wear the official ribbon provided.

Should the Mayor like to attend an engagement with their Consort alongside them, they should inform the Democratic Services Officer upon receipt of an invitation to the engagement to ensure their Consort is accounted for. The Mayor may choose a different Consort for different functions.

Mayoral Cadet

A young person as part of youth uniformed services may be selected to support the Mayor in the role of Mayoral Cadet.

Their purpose is to assist the Mayor in civic engagements and promote youth involvement in civic life and the role symbolises respect, tradition and support for Cadet Forces and the Armed Forces Covenant.

The selection process for the Mayoral Cadet will begin in the February prior to mayoral election where eligible uniformed organisations in Blyth will be invited to nominate one candidate to be considered for the roles. Nominations are reviewed and final appointment is made by the Mayor, Deputy Mayor, Town Clerk and Deputy Town Clerk prior to mayoral election.

The Cadet will support the Mayor for a 12-month term for the period of the civic year.

The Mayor should not be alone with the Cadet at any point during their service.

DBS Check

The Mayor, like all members of Blyth Town Council, should undertake an Enhanced DBS check. It is important that this is in place before taking on the role of Mayor to ensure safeguarding procedures are in place.

Relationship with the Press

The press may ask the Mayor to comment on issues. As civic representative the Mayor should only speak about matters directly relating to their fundraising activities or events which they are attending. All other media requests should be forwarded to the Town Clerk/Deputy Town Clerk, who may be able to provide more detail etc prior to the Mayor commenting officially. The Mayor should not comment on any political matters under any circumstances.

Reporting to the Council

The Mayor is asked to provide an update at each Full Town Council meeting.

Mayor as Chair of the Council

- Is seen as the Principal Councillor representing Blyth Town Council to outside bodies and is the interface between the Council and the public.
- The main duty is to preside over Full Town Council meetings, and the Mayor must be obeyed when issuing lawful direction in line with Standing Orders.

Public Meetings and Politics

Once appointed the Mayor is apolitical and should not get involved in controversial organisations. The Mayor, as Mayor, should not take part in a political conference other than to open it. The Mayor is at liberty to chair any Public meeting although it is advisable not to get embroiled in anything likely to be too controversial.

The Mayor is traditionally neutral and steps back from politics for the full term of office. The Mayor would still have a vote in Council and continue to play a role in the decision making of the Council.

The Mayor may be asked for a statement on behalf of the Council but should only express the agreed views of the Council, not personal views. The Chair cannot make decisions on behalf of the Council.

It is important that the views of the Mayor's dress, speeches, personal conduct, and overall presentation avoid conveying personal political views, so that the neutrality of the Mayor is maintained.

Being a Mayor during Purdah (the run up to Council Elections)

During the run up to elections, the period officially known as purdah, there are statutory guidelines the Town Council must follow regarding publicity. Guidance should be sought from the Town Clerk to ensure that the Mayor operates within the guidelines. Unlike all Councillors who cease office 4 days after the election, the Mayor remains in Office until his/her successor is appointed at the Council's AGM.

Administrative Assistance

Day-to-day administrative support for the Mayor is provided by the Democratic Services Officer. This Officer will deal with most correspondence to the Mayor, normally invitations to attend various functions. The Democratic Services Officer will prepare as much guidance information as possible regarding any function. Where the Mayor receives invitations directly, it is important that these should be passed on to the Democratic Services Officer for attention. If the Mayor is unavailable for a period of time the Democratic Services Officer should be notified, giving as much notice as possible.

Dietary, Access and Medical Requirements

The Mayor needs to notify the Democratic Services Officer if they have any specific dietary requirements, access needs or any medical conditions or requirements to help notify those inviting the Mayor to attend an engagement, ensuring that they are catered for.

Personal and Religious Beliefs

The elected Mayor, as the “Principal Person of Blyth” represents all sections of the community and shows favouritism to no-one. It is the Mayor’s role to acknowledge, celebrate and support diversity in the locality. The office of the Mayor belongs to the public, not the individual who occupies it or the Officers who advise it.

Life outside of the Mayoral Role

The Mayor needs to be conscious of, and act within the Councillors Code of Conduct, constantly bearing in mind the high expectations the public have of the Mayor, particularly in terms of acceptable behaviour.

The Deputy Mayor would also be expected to follow this protocol.

If there are any questions or considerations that have not been addressed in this handbook, please contact the Town Clerk or the Democratic Services Officer.