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East Dunbartonshire Council

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PROTOCOL FOR
CORRESPONDENCE & ACCESS TO
FACILITIES
BETWEEN
COUNCIL AND MPs/MSPs/MEPS

June 2016

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CORRESPONDENCE

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This document sets out the arrangements for handling correspondence between East Dunbartonshire Council and MPs, MSPs and MEPs for the area. This is in recognition that all parties have a legitimate role in seeking to meet constituents' needs, and a desire to work together in this regard.
- 1.2 It is recognised that many constituents will not differentiate between the respective responsibilities of East Dunbartonshire Councillors, Westminster MPs, Constituency Members of the Scottish Parliament, List Members of the Scottish Parliament and Members of the European Parliament. The overriding principle which will apply to dealing with constituents' queries/letters will be that all parties will aim to secure as rapid a response as possible, regardless of who the constituent initially approached.

2. Correspondence with MPs/Constituency MSPs

- 2.1 MPs and Constituency MSPs should write to the Chief Executive or appropriate Depute Chief Executive of East Dunbartonshire Council regarding an issue raised by one of their constituents. Thereafter, and as delegated, the strategic or service lead will reply directly to the MP/Constituency MSP, copying their reply to the relevant Convener and the local ward Councillors (for ward specific issues). Where the issue is of a more general nature then the reply will be copied only to the relevant Convener. Where possible, correspondence will be sent via e-mail to reduce administration and costs.
- 2.2 There are also circumstances where correspondence from MPs/Constituency MSPs sent directly to a Depute Chief Executive should also be copied to the Chief Executive. This could be in cases where policy may be affected, the Council is subject to an investigation from the Ombudsman or even where criminal proceedings may ensue.

3. Correspondence with List MSPs

- 3.1 List MSPs may write raising constituents' queries and again, these should be sent to the Chief Executive or relevant Depute Chief Executive. These queries may have previously been raised by the Local Councillors or Constituency MSP, and in these circumstances, the service will respond indicating that the Local Councillors/Constituency MSP has previously raised the same query, enclosing a copy of the response to that query.
- 3.2 However, List MSPs may write to services about matters which have not been raised through the Constituency MSP. In these circumstances, the services

will reply directly to the MSP, copying their reply to the relevant Convener and the Local Councillors (for ward specific issues). Where the issue is of a more general nature then the reply will be copied only to the relevant Convener. Where possible, correspondence will be sent via e-mail to reduce administration and cost.

- 3.3 This reply will not be copied to the Constituency MSP (or MP). The Scottish Parliament has issued guidance to all MSPs about relationships between Constituency/List Members and, in the event of a constituent contacting a List MSP, it is for that MSP to advise the appropriate Constituency MSP of the contact.

4. Correspondence with MPs/MSPs outwith the area of the authority

- 4.1 There may be cases where the Council is approached by MPs/MSPs raising queries about matters even though they are representatives outwith the Council area. This may be where the MP/MSP is a spokesperson for a political party and these too should be made to the Chief Executive or relevant Depute Chief Executive in the first instance. Where the issue is in respect of a specific constituent then a copy of the reply from the service department will be sent to the relevant Convener and local ward Councillors. Where the issue is of a more general nature then the reply will be copied only to the relevant Convener.

5. Requests for Research Information

- 5.1 All requests for information which is publicly available should be directed to the Parliamentary Research Centre.

6. Correspondence from MEPs

- 6.1 Where the Council receives a query from a MEP, the same procedure should follow as for MSPs.

7. Correspondence between East Dunbartonshire Councillors/services and constituents.

- 7.1 Copies of any correspondence between East Dunbartonshire Councillors or services and constituents will not be copied, as a matter of routine to MPs/MSPs in circumstances where they have not initiated the query. The general principle will apply that MPs/MSPs will only be brought into the exchange of correspondence if a constituent chooses to approach an MP/MSP.

8. Council Responses

- 8.1 As a matter of course all correspondence will be replied to within 10 working days from receipt. Where this is not possible, an acknowledgement of receipt should be sent within five working days and the matter progressed as quickly as possible.

9. Conclusion

- 9.1 It is recognised by all parties that it is difficult to be hard and fast about matters and the application of this protocol will be kept under review.
- 9.2 A copy of this protocol will be sent by the Chief Executive of East Dunbartonshire Council to the Constituency MSPs, List MSPs, MPs and to the Councillors of East Dunbartonshire Council. The Chief Executive will also be responsible for advising all East Dunbartonshire Council employees of the protocol and reviewing its operation.

ARRANGEMENTS FOR ACCESS

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This document sets out arrangements to be followed when dealing with requests for visits to Council facilities or access to Council employees by MSPs/MPs for the area.

2. Requests for access by MSPs/MPs

- 2.1 All requests should be addressed to the Chief Executive or relevant Deputy Chief Executive stating the name of the person they wish to visit and the reason for the visit. The Chief Executive or Director, after consultation with Elected Members will then either grant authorisation for the visit or otherwise make alternative arrangements. A response to the request will be given within 10 working days, unless the request is of an urgent nature. All requests will be logged with a note of the outcome. The Council's Communications & Engagement Team will be notified in all cases in order that relevant briefings and publicity can be organised.
- 2.2 Publicity, including media relations, is the responsibility of the Council and the Council's Communications & Engagement Team will lead on all publicity related to such visits to Council facilities, meetings with Council employees or visits to Council-led initiatives.
- 2.3 There will be no difference in the procedures followed for Constituency MSPs, List MSPs, MP's and MEPs.
- 2.4 Should requests for visits by MPs/MSPs be received through Councillors, these should then be co-ordinated through the Chief Executive's or relevant Deputy Chief Executive's office as above. This will give consistency to the process and reduce the potential for confusion.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 By following this protocol, the Council will ensure consistency of approach so that equal treatment is given to all. There may be individual exceptions requiring an alternative process and these will be identified on a case by case basis.

Gerry Cornes
Chief Executive
East Dunbartonshire Council

June 2016