



This Scheme is made under the Local Government (Payments to Councillors) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016.

## **Councillors' allowances**

Councillors' allowances are governed by statute.

Provision is made for the following types of payments:

### **(a) Allowances:**

- (i) Basic Allowance
- (ii) Special Responsibility Allowance
- (iii) Civic Dignitaries Allowance
- (iv) Dependants' Carers' Allowance
- (v) District Policing and Community Safety Partnership Allowances (DPCSP)

### **(b) Expenses**

- (i) Travel
- (ii) Subsistence

In issuing the payment of allowances to elected members from 1st April 2015, the Council will follow the instructions set out by the Department of Environment in 'Guidance on Councillor Allowances' March 2012 and further circular updates.<sup>1</sup>

Information regarding the other provisions for Councillors is also included in this report:

### **(c) Additional Information**

- (i) IT/Phone Package
- (ii) Councillors' Support Services

### **(a) Allowances**

- (i) Basic Allowances
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<sup>1</sup> Further details are available within the DOE Circular No. LG 04/2015 (24 February, 2015), LG 09/2014 (20 March 2014), LG 14/2016 (6 July 16) and LG 23/2016 (14 December 2016).

A basic allowance is intended to recognise the time commitment of all Councillors, including such inevitable calls on their time as meetings with officers and constituents, including approved duties. Basic allowance is also intended to cover incidental costs incurred by Councillors in their official capacity, such as the use of their homes and the cost of any telephone calls, including mobile phone calls.

The annual allowance with effect from 1st April, 2015 will be £14,200 payable monthly.

These allowances will all be paid in equal monthly instalments via the Council's Payroll section and are subject to both tax, National Insurance and pension deductions where applicable.

If a Councillor ceases to be a Councillor before the end of his or her term of office, payment of the allowance ceases and a pro rata calculation is made to ensure that the Councillor receives the correct amount of allowance. If necessary, an adjustment for under or over payment may have to be made to ensure that the correct final payment is made, and the Council reserves the right to recover any overpayments of basic allowance.

#### (ii) Special Responsibility Allowances

The Council also pays Special Responsibility Allowances to those Councillors it considers to have significant, additional responsibilities over and above the generally accepted duties of a Councillor. These special responsibilities are related to the discharge of the Council's functions.

The maximum rate of Special Responsibility Allowance is determined by the Department of the Environment. The division of the Special Responsibility Allowance is based upon the positions held by individual Councillors as agreed.

- There Council agreed a special responsibility allowance threshold of £108,000 which the Council may pay to positions of responsibility. No more than 50% of the Councillors can receive a special responsibility payment and no individual member can receive more than one special responsibility payment from this overall budget.<sup>2</sup>

Special Responsibility Allowance is paid in equal, monthly instalments. Special Responsibility Allowances are liable for tax, National Insurance and pension deductions where applicable

In the event of a Councillor ceasing to hold an office which entitled him or her to receive a Special Responsibility Allowance before the term of office is completed, payment of the Allowance ceases, If necessary, an adjustment for under or overpayment may have to be made to ensure that the correct final payment is made, and the Council reserves the right to recover any overpayments of Special Responsibility Allowance.

#### (iii) Civic Dignitaries Allowance

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<sup>2</sup> DOE Circular LG04/2015. See also Council Minutes of September, 2016.

Section 32 of the Finance Act provides that a council may pay to the Civic such allowances as it considers reasonable to meet the expenses of those offices and they should be considered totally separate from SRA arrangements.

The Civic Dignitary Personal Allowances are paid in equal, monthly instalments and are also liable for tax, National Insurance and pension deductions where applicable

The entitlement for the financial year 2015/2016<sup>3</sup> per annum was as follows:-

- Lord Mayor £34,800
- Deputy Lord Mayor £6,250
- High Sherriff £6,250

(iv) Dependants' Carers' Allowance

This allowance is open to all Councillors who are the main carers of a dependant where care is required to enable the Member to perform an Approved Duty. The allowance may be paid for a dependant who requires full-time care and who resides with the Councillor as part of their family. Councillors may claim this Allowance for periods when they are carrying out any 'Approved Duties'. This includes travel time associated with the Approved Duties. The list of Approved Duties forms part of this scheme and is detailed below.

The rates of Allowances are determined by the Department of the Environment.

Dependants' Carers' Allowances are liable for tax and National Insurance deductions.

A dependant is defined as:-

- a child 16-years-old or under
- a child over 16-years-old, where there is medical / social work evidence that full-time care is required
- an adult with recognised physical/mental disability where there is medical / social work evidence that full-time care is required
- an elderly relative requiring full-time care.

For the purposes of this allowance, a carer is defined as a responsible person over 16-years-old who does not normally live with the councillor as part of that household; and is not a parent/guardian of the dependant child.

A specialist carer is defined as a qualified person who is needed where it is essential to have professional assistance. Receipts must be obtained from specialist carers and must accompany the claim form.

Councillors may claim only one DCA in respect of each occurrence of approved duty. Only one DCA rate is payable even if there are 2 or more children/dependants being cared for.

The rates of Allowances are determined by the Department for Communities and are currently:

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<sup>3</sup> Any changes to the Civic Dignitary Personal Allowances for the financial year 2016/2017 will be updated in June 2016.

- Standard Care £7.20 per hour<sup>4</sup>
- Specialist Care £14.40 per hour

Claims are subject also to the undernoted limits (capped at the equivalent of 52 hours per month):

- Standard Care £375 per month
- Specialist Care £749 per month

The process includes flexibility to allow for care for the period of essential travel time, councillors may claim for a period starting up to a maximum of one hour before the approved duty starts and ending up to one hour after it finishes.

Councillors must disclose any financial support provided under DCA, when applying for other care services offered by another public body.

To claim Dependants' Carers' Allowance, Councillors must complete the relevant form which is available from the Council's Democratic Services Section (City Hall).

#### (v) District Policing and Community Safety Partnership Allowances (DPCSP)

This allowance is paid to councillors who are members of the District Policing and Community Safety Partnership. Each councillor is allowed to claim £60 per attendance at each meeting and can only claim for up to 20 meetings a year. Each member can also claim for mileage for attending each meeting directly from DPCSP.

Chairpersons of each DPCSPs are entitled to claim for an additional 10 meetings per year of the DPCSP. In addition the Chairperson of the 4 DCPSPs also sit on the Belfast Policing and Community Safety Partnership (PCSP) and are entitled to claim for up to 20 meetings per year of this partnership.

### Renunciations

Councillors may, if they wish, renounce their entitlement to basic, chairperson, vice chairperson or special responsibility allowances. They can do this by writing to the Chief Executive. A councillor can subsequently withdraw the renunciation. They can also amend a renunciation (for example, to limit it to one kind of allowance only). The withdrawal or amendment cannot have retrospective effect.

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<sup>4</sup> Based on national living wage for 21+ as per Circular LG 10/2016

**(b) Expenses**

**Travel and Subsistence Allowances**

All claims for travel and subsistence should be submitted within three months. Any claims made outside of this time limit cannot be processed.

(i) Travel

- **Motor Mileage Claims**

The rates of Travel and Subsistence Allowances, including motor mileage and pedal cycle rates, are reviewed annually by the Department for Communities, following consultation with the Northern Ireland Joint Council for Local Government Services.

Claims can only be made where expenditure is incurred in relation to the Councillors undertaking Approved Duties.

Travel claim forms are prepared and circulated for Councillors' attention at the beginning of each month and include details of all Council and Committee meetings attended during the previous month. These are available to submit via hard copy or online via the Expenses app. It is a matter for each individual Councillor to ensure that the details are accurate and amend the claim form to include any other Approved Duties in respect of which they may be entitled to make a travel claim.

In some instances mileage claims may be liable for tax and National Insurance deductions. An awareness session will be held for Members on taxation issues relating to expenses and mileage claims.

The following rates are currently in use, with most Councillors getting the maximum amount of 65.0p per mile:

**Casual Users**

	<b>450-999cc</b>	<b>1000-1199cc</b>	<b>1199 + cc</b>	<b>Electric Car</b>
0-8,500 miles	46.9p	52.2p	65.0p	45.0p
After 8,500 miles	13.7p	14.4p	16.4p	25.0p

- **Other Mileage Claims**

Please contact Democratic Services for public transport, pedal cycle, motor cycle or passenger travel allowance rates.

**(ii) Subsistence**

If Councillors attend conferences or undertake visits as representatives of the Council they are entitled to receive appropriate subsistence allowances.

Before a Councillor attends an event, they must obtain Committee approval or they may also attend events as part of their Personal Development Plan (PDP).

Any hotel and flight arrangements for conferences are made by the Council departments concerned.

Councillors should take a careful note and keep receipts for any expenses they incur while they are away on Council business because they may be able to claim for these as part of their subsistence allowances or as incidental expenses. This relates to such things as meals, bus and taxi fares, necessary telephone calls, etc.

***Within the UK***

The following table shows the rates of subsistence that should be adhered to:-

<b>Maximum Subsistence Rates</b>		
	<b>BRITISH ISLES</b>	<b>LONDON</b>
<b>Accommodation Allowance</b>	<b>£100.70</b>	<b>£122.45</b>
<b>Meal Allowance</b>		
Breakfast	£11.50	
Lunch	£13.50	
Tea	£4.70	
Dinner	£20.95	
<b>Total Meal Allowance</b>	<b>£50.65</b>	

Departments will assist Councillors in the completion of claim forms and Councillors should make contact with an appropriate officer immediately upon returning from the conference to give details of additional expenses incurred and to sign the necessary claim forms.

The rates for subsistence allowance are determined by the Department for Communities. There are differences in the subsistence arrangements for conference which take place outside the United Kingdom.

Claims without receipts should rarely happen, however, Councillors must use the 'Lost or Unobtainable Receipt Voucher' to claim reimbursement for expenditure they have incurred when no receipt is available.

## **Outside the UK**

For subsistence outside the British Isles, the Councils will pay the Overseas Subsistence Rates produced by Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs (HMRC). Where these rates are applied receipts are not necessary. However, all other restrictions outlined in this section still apply.

HMRC overseas travel rates can be accessed via the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/scale-rate-expenses-payments-employee-travelling-outside-the-uk>

## **Approved Duties**

Under the existing Regulations Councillors are entitled to claim expenses in relation to an approved duty. An approved duty may be defined as:-

- (a) attendance at a meeting of the Council or of any of its Committees

Or

- (b) attendance approved by the Council for the purpose of, or in connection with, the discharge of the functions of the Council.

No real problems arise under (a), but it should be pointed out that Councillors would normally only be paid expenses (travelling allowance) for attending Committees to which they have been appointed. A Councillor, however, will be paid for attending a meeting of a Committee to which he or she has not been appointed if he or she is attending at the invitation of the Committee concerned or has been sent by another Committee to state a particular case.

Such difficulties as have arisen have mainly been concerned with the interpretation of the term "approved duty". The Department for Communities has issued guidance on what duties, apart from attendance at Council or Committee meetings, should be considered as approved duties. These include the following activities:-

- attendance by appointed Councillors at meetings of Advisory/Liaison Committees Steering Groups/ Working Groups;
- attendance at approved conferences, courses, study visits or seminars as a representative of the Council;
- attendance by appointed Councillors at meetings of PCSP's and DPCSP's;
- attendance by appointed Councillors at meetings of community centre committees ;
- attendance on a Council or Committee deputation relevant to the functions of the Council; and
- attendance by appointed Councillors at meetings of outside bodies.

This list is by no means exhaustive and the Council has also agreed that training courses and general briefing sessions should also be considered as approved duties. In addition, the Council's Chief Executive can authorise as approved duties certain miscellaneous functions.

In relation to the attendance of Councillors at meetings of outside bodies, the question of whether or not payment of expenses (travel/subsistence) are appropriate is determined by the functions exercised by the bodies concerned. If these relate to the statutory functions of the Council, expenses would be paid.

If they do not, no payments would be made. In addition, expenses cannot be claimed where remuneration is made to the Councillor from the outside body to which he or she has been appointed.

### **Councillors' Pension Scheme**

From May, 2009 Councillors are enabled to participate in the Northern Ireland Local Government Officers Superannuation Scheme. The main purpose of the scheme is to provide a pension in retirement for Councillors. The benefits paid under the Scheme are based on length of membership of the Scheme and career average pensionable pay.

The pensionable pay of a councillor consists of the Basic Allowance and Special Responsibility Allowance payments only. The contribution rate depends on how much each Councillor is paid but will be between 5.5% and 7.5% of the pensionable allowances received.

Useful information on treatment of tax for councillors could be found at Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs website via <https://www.gov.uk/hmrc-internal-manuals/employment-income-manual/eim65900>.



(c) Additional Information

(i) IT /Phone Package

Personal computer equipment can be provided by the Council to each Councillor on the basis that the Council owns the equipment and lends it to those Councillors who request it.

Councillors IT Package currently consists of the following;-

- Desktop or laptop (with case )
- Docking station (provided with laptop only)
- Keyboard
- Mouse
- All-in-one printer (printer, fax and scanner)
- Smartphone

Councillors have the choice of borrowing IT packages. Mobile phones are also provided to Councillors under the terms of a Council contract.

- **iPad**

Each Councillor is entitled to receive an iPad for the duration as a Member of Belfast City Council. The iPad device is provided by the Council to assist Councillors in undertaking their role more effectively. The main benefits are having online access to the council minutes system and other Council apps wherever they are and to engage more effectively with their constituents.

Belfast City Council will cover the cost of line rental which includes 5GB of mobile data per month. Any mobile data costs incurred above the monthly 5GB data allowance will be the personal responsibility of the Councillor and are deducted, at source, on a monthly basis from their basic allowance.

- **Broadband Internet Access**

In order to encourage Councillors to use the Council's IT system remotely (from home or office), Councillors may claim part of their broadband internet rental costs (maximum £25 per month).

As with phone line rental reimbursement, Councillors are required to pay the cost of the broadband in the first instance and, having submitted the appropriate bill, will then be reimbursed for this amount, subject to any tax deductions being applied through the Council's payroll.

Access to the Council's systems is provided by means of a virtual private network. Councillors should speak to officers in Democratic Services to arrange to have a virtual private network installed on their computer.

- **Mobile Telephone costs**

Each Councillor is entitled to receive a mobile phone for the duration as a Councillor of Belfast City Council. The device is available for upgrade every 24 months in accordance with the Council's mobile phone contract.

Belfast City Council will cover the cost of line rental which includes;-

- a. the cost of all phone calls to UK landlines or UK mobile phones whilst within the UK;
- b. the cost of all text messages to UK landlines or UK mobile phones whilst within the UK and
- c. 2GB (iPhones) of data usage per month.\*

All costs associated with calls, texts or data usage, outside of that detailed above are met by the Councillor and are deducted, at source, on a monthly basis from their basic allowance.

Hands free mobile phone equipment – The Council will contribute towards the cost of purchase and installation of hands free mobile phone equipment on the following basis;-

- Reimbursement will be made in respect of the costs of installation of the equipment in the Councillor's own private vehicle and shall be subject to the submission of appropriate receipts
- Councillors may claim such reimbursement twice per Council term
- The maximum amount of reimbursement on each occasion to be £250.00.

\*Please note the model of mobile phone offered by the Council is subject to change.

- **Home Telephone**

The Council may meet the costs of basic monthly/quarterly line rental of the home telephone of each Councillor. Councillors are required to pay the rental cost in the first instance and, having submitted the telephone bill, will then be reimbursed this amount, subject to any tax deductions being applied through the Council's payroll system.

The Department for Communities has determined that the Councillor's Basic Allowance covers incidental expenses involved in being a Councillor, such as the use of a home telephone, it is therefore not possible to reimburse the cost of telephone calls made on a landline.

- **Key contacts include:**

Help Desk		Ext 4444
Head of Digital Services	Paul Gribben	Ext 4237
ICT Portfolio Manager for Information & Systems	Deborah Colville	Ext 4453
ICT Portfolio Manager for Infrastructure & Customer Services	David Kelly	Ext 4350

- **Modern.gov System**

The modern.gov system is accessible on the Council's website as well as the corporate intranet. The purpose of the system is to have a range of information relating to councillors and the Council's decision-making process in one place.

The system allows Councillors and members of the public to:-

- View the schedule of meetings;
- Access agendae, reports and minutes of Council, Committees, and Working Group Meetings; and
- Search for historical decisions.

The system is also used to alert Councillors that Committee summonses, agenda, minutes and reports have been published and also any amendments or changes have taken place which Councillors can then access electronically.

If Councillors would like a demonstration of the system and how it can be of benefit and provide support in undertaking their Council related business please contact a staff member in Democratic Services.

## (ii) Councillors' Support Services

The Council provides Councillors with a wide range of support services to assist them in carrying out their work as Councillors. Support services include typing of correspondence, post, message and enquiry services, council stationery, research service, room bookings, Councillors training, travel arrangements, expenses and subsistence payments and general enquiries.

### • **Members' Common Room**

The Members' Common Room is located at the reception area of the City Hall, adjacent to the Committee Rooms. Individual mail boxes are located here and fruit, tea and coffee and daily papers are provided for Councillors. The Members' Attendant is responsible during office hours for facilities in this area and will take messages and provide general assistance to Councillors.

### • **Party Rooms**

In addition to the Members' Common Room, the Council provides Party Rooms for each of the main political party groups within the Council. These may be used for meetings, work or discussions with constituents.

All accommodation and facilities provided are for use in connection with Council or constituency business only.

In addition to a conference table, fax machine, printer, scanner, television, tea/coffee machine and filing space, each Party Room has computer facilities which are supplied with standard office software and has access to the Council's modern.gov system.

### • **Correspondence**

Items for typing may be left with Democratic Services, where a confidential secretarial service is available for letters, reports and all other correspondence related to Council or constituency work.

After typing, letters will be left either in the appropriate mail box or retained for collection in the office.

### • **Post**

A postal service is available for correspondence which relates to Council or constituency work.

Letters must be addressed to individuals living within the City boundary although letters to public bodies and government Departments with addresses outside the City will also be accepted.

Please note circularised mail will not be accepted.

Councillors can also be provided with prepaid envelopes for use in their routine correspondence to constituents etc. Please speak to Kate McCafferty, Democratic Services Assistant to request an allocation of prepaid envelopes.

Postal facilities are not available for party political issues.

Outgoing post, internal and external, may be left in Democratic Services or the Members' Common Room.

- **Message and Inquiry Service**

Democratic Services staff act as a point of contact for all enquiries and telephone messages concerning Councillors from the general public, constituents and Council officers.

The telephones in the party rooms are set to divert to staff on no reply and telephone messages for Councillors will be taken by staff. Urgent messages will be relayed immediately to Councillors, if contact is possible, and other messages will be emailed or left in their mail boxes.

- **Council Stationery**

Personalised headed paper, compliment slips and business cards with the Council logo will be provided for each Councillor during their term of office. Standard Council stationery items are also available in the Members' Common Room.

- **Civic Gifts**

A limited range of Belfast City Council branded gifts is available for use by Councillors. The gifts are designed for VIP guests to City Hall or for special individuals or groups which a Councillor wishes to recognise. Councillors may also request civic gifts when visiting special individuals or groups when on Council business in other countries. When requesting Civic Gifts, the Councillor must sign a receipt of goods and a database of what gifts have been issued is also kept.

- **Research and Information Service**

Democratic Services staff will be available to assist Councillors in obtaining information and carrying out research on items related to Council and constituency business.

- **Receiving Constituents**

Councillors often make arrangements to receive constituents or visitors. If a Councillor is not in attendance to receive such persons the receptionists will ask them to wait in the reception area at the main entrance hall. Visitors will not be permitted access to party rooms unless accompanied by a Councillor.

- **Car parking**

Councillors have access to the City Hall car park. A pass for display in Councillors' vehicles will be provided by Democratic Services.

Car parking for guests of Councillors is limited, however, if this is required, please contact Democratic Services staff. The visitors name, make and model of vehicle and registration number will be required for the purposes of admittance by Security staff.

- **Restaurant Facilities**

The Atrium Restaurant in the Cecil Ward Building, 4/10 Linenhall Street is available for Councillors to use. Councillors may bring a small number of guests with them when dining in the Restaurant.

**Key Contacts in Democratic Services**

	Staff Member	Extension / Direct Dial	Location
<b>Members' Services</b>	<b>Kate McCafferty</b> (Democratic Services Assistant)	6308 / 028 9027 0553	Room 123d, City Hall
	<b>Aaron McMullan</b> (Democratic Services Support Assistant)	6468 / 028 9027 0497	Room 123d, City Hall
	<b>Jill Thompson</b> (Business Support Clerk)	6319 / 028 9091 8739	Room 123d, City Hall
<b>Members' Common Room</b>	<b>Mary Houston</b> (Members' Attendant)	6318 / 028 9027 0253	Room G04, City Hall
<b>Members' Development</b>	<b>Julie McCormick</b> (Democratic Services Officer)	6321 / 028 9027 0607	9 Adelaide