**School visit protocol - FAQs for Councillors**

**Q Does this mean that the current arrangements I have agreed with the schools in my ward need to change?**

A No, if you already have pre-existing arrangements in place with head teachers in the schools in your ward as an individual ward member there is no requirement to change these.

**Q.  I regularly visit schools in my ward as a local member but sometimes I want to bring other people with me (MPs/MSPs/media/other).  Do I need to seek permission as set out in the protocol?**

A. Yes, if this has not already been agreed, you should follow the steps set out in the Protocol.

**Q Does this mean I need to seek permission to attend parent council meetings?**

A. No, All members are automatically invited to the parent council meetings that take place in the schools in their wards.

**Q. I am a parent/carer for a pupil in a school – do I need to seek permission through the Protocol to attend parent activities or to collect/drop off my child?**

**A.** No, you are not acting in your councillor capacity as a parent or carer of a child/children in a school.  In this situation you have parental rights and responsibilities and the Protocol does not apply.

**Q. I volunteer in a school, do I need to seek permission as set out in the protocol?**

A. No, if this is a pre-existing arrangement you do not need to seek further permission.

**Q. I have been invited to attend a HT Recruitment Panel, do I need to seek permission as set out in the protocol?**

A. No, if you have received an invitation to a recruitment panel you do not need to seek further permission.

**Q. If I have been invited to the school by the Head Teacher (e.g. school fair/school play/ walk round/ opening ceremony etc..) do I need to seek permission as set out in the protocol?**

A. No, if you have received an invitation from the school or Service you do not seek permission in addition to this.  If you are at all unsure about the status of an invitation it is best to check with the Head Teacher that it has been issued with their approval.  It is intended that invitations to launches and openings are fair and equitable to local ward members. You do not need permission to attend any public event at a school, but always should take care around getting permission for taking any photographs of staff or pupils.

**Q. Can my request to visit a school at a particular time be refused?**

A. Yes. Whilst the presumption is in favour of supporting visits from elected members wherever possible – councillors, MSPs and MPs – it is important that this isn’t overly disruptive to the school day and doesn’t prevent any of the school staff from undertaking necessary duties.  Schools sometimes receive multiple requests and they also need to be able to manage this over a number of days or weeks to avoid clashes.  Schools may have pre-arranged activities that are not compatible with a visit.  An alternative date will always be sought.

**Q. If our ward budget has funded something for a school, can I organise a media opportunity to announce this at the school?**

A. Any such media announcements and media opportunities must be coordinated through the corporate communications office.

**Q. If I have raised some money for the school can I organise a media opportunity to hand over a cheque at the school?**

A. You will need to seek permission through the protocol. This should usually not be an issue, provided photograph permissions are in place, unless this is during a pre-election period in which case a later date would need to be organised.

**Q. Do Head Teachers have a say in whether elected member visits can go ahead or not?**

A. Absolutely. Head Teachers must always be consulted on any arrangements to visit their school. There will be many variables which need to be taken into account in managing a visit during the course of a school day.

**Q. Why has it been necessary to introduce a Protocol?**

A. It is important that visits are not overly disruptive to the school day and don’t prevent any of the school staff from undertaking necessary duties.  Schools sometimes receive multiple requests and they also need to be able to manage this over a number of days or weeks to avoid clashes.  An alternative date will always be sought.

It is reasonable for the head teacher to be given notice if there is an intention to bring additional people and/or involve the media, not least because they have a duty of care to the children and young people in the school who could be adversely impacted by any unplanned activity.

The Communications Office need to be informed if there is potential media interest and the Office will also check and ensure there are no clashes with Elections requirements that the school may be unaware of.

The absence of a protocol has at times meant that schools have been made aware of visits at short or no notice, or through the media, which has been disruptive for the schools to accommodate.  In some cases visits have been refused because of this, which has then led to criticism. At other times school staff have felt pressurised to accept visits even when the time was not right or day to day school activities were not conducive to having visits.

The Protocol is based on best practice examples from local authorities elsewhere in Scotland to provide a framework that offers the best opportunity for visits by politicians to be well managed, supported and successful.  Schools’ primary purpose is to provide education and learning for their pupils and the Council’s role is to support school staff to deliver this.  The Protocol is intended to ensure this remains the paramount consideration.