



Flitwick Town Council

Civic Protocol

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1. Introduction

The Local Government Act 1972 gives parish councils the power to give themselves the title 'Town Council', and the Chairman of such a town council is entitled to be called Town Mayor. The Town Mayor takes precedence over everyone except the King (or the Lord Lieutenant) and the Chairman of the District Council.

In general, the Mayor should be prepared to take the lead in all matters of concern in the life of the town – e.g. an appeal or supporting local organisations and will lead all civic events.

The Civic Protocol is provided for the guidance of the Town Mayor, Deputy Mayor and Councillors of Flitwick Town Council during their term of office. This protocol is not intended to be an addition to and not a substitute for the advice and assistance from the Town Clerk. The Mayor will receive all possible support and assistance based on past experience and the close working relationship between the Mayor and officers.

2. The Mayor and Deputy Mayor

2.1. Titles

Under the provisions of the Local Government Act 1972, the Chair of a Town Council is entitled to the style of 'Town Mayor' and the Chair of the District Council to the style of 'Mayor'. Locally, however, there is no ambiguity since the Chair of Central Bedfordshire Council does not use the term 'Mayor'. As a result, many local documents use the terms 'Town Mayor' and 'Mayor' interchangeably. Nevertheless, invitations and other documents widely distributed outside the town should always be written correctly. The terms 'Town Mayor' and 'Mayor' are used interchangeably in this document to mean the Mayor.

2.2. The Mayor

The primary legal function of the Mayor is to act as Chairman of the Council and preside over meetings of the Council; if they are present at the Full Town Council meeting, they must preside. If the Mayor is not present and the Deputy Mayor is present, the Deputy Mayor must preside.

As the person presiding at Council meetings, they have a second or casting vote in the event of an equality of votes. Where a casting vote is necessary, it is generally regarded as necessary to preserve the status quo.

The Mayor will receive guests and preside at the town's civic functions as a matter of course. The Mayor is also the proper person to represent the town on ceremonial occasions elsewhere.

The Mayor and Deputy Mayor are elected by Members of the Council at the Annual Statutory meeting of the Full Town Council in May of each year. The Mayor remains in office until immediately after the new Mayor is elected at the next Annual Statutory Meeting of the Council. In an election year, the outgoing Mayor has a statutory duty to preside (until the new Mayor is elected) at the first meeting following the election, even if they are no longer a Councillor.

During the term of office, the Mayor should, as near as humanly possible, be impartial on controversial matters regardless of their personal views. It can be particularly helpful in chairing the Council Meetings if the Mayor, at the outset, demonstrates that they intend to be impartial.

Difficulties can arise from time to time because many outside the Council do not understand the role of the Mayor and assume the office controls the Council and its workings. In addition, some misunderstand the role and function of the Town Council. The Mayor should be sensitive to the possibility of such misunderstandings and deal with them appropriately.

Choosing to be the Mayor

If you are considering standing as Mayor, you will already know that it can be hugely enjoyable and rewarding. However, you should consider the following factors you may face during your year of office:

- Do you have adequate experience to chair a meeting of the Town Council competently, ensuring a fair debate and that clear, legal decisions are made?
- The significant impact on your family and friends: your family and social life will be disrupted.
- How will you balance the demands of attending events with your job (if you work), including attending some events during the working day?
- There is a need to be non-political for the year, especially when engaging with residents online. The view of the Mayor can often be misunderstood as the view of the Council.
- The pomp, circumstance and expectations of the Office of Mayor can be very traditional. The challenge is to bring your personality and flair to the proceedings while appropriately representing the Council and our Town.
- You should ensure that you are in a position to accept as many engagements as possible, expecting the Deputy Mayor to be involved only in the case of unforeseen illness, annual holiday or double booking.

2.3. The Deputy Mayor

The primary role of the Deputy Mayor is to discharge all the functions of the Mayor if, for any reason, the Mayor is unable to act or the office of the Mayor is vacant. In the absence of the Mayor, the Deputy is entitled to the Mayor's right of precedence, but they do not wear the Mayor's chain or adopt the title of 'Mayor'.

Official invitations to represent the Council will be sent to the Mayor's Secretary at the Town Council offices. They will invariably be for the Mayor to attend, but the Mayor may ask the Deputy to attend if they are available. No invitation may be entertained if it is a direct invitation to the Deputy Mayor in that capacity. The Deputy Mayor may accompany the Mayor to events as the Mayor's consort, but care should be taken to ensure that the Mayor as a "First Citizen" is afforded clear and full precedence.

The Deputy Mayor chairs meetings of the Council in the Mayor's absence. The Deputy Mayor has full legal status as a Vice-Chairman and should be given precedence immediately after the Mayor.

2.4. Partners

The Mayor is referred to as the 'Town Mayor' (or 'Mayor'), whatever their gender. Here in Flitwick, we refer to the Mayor's partner as 'consort', and we do not use the term 'Mayoress' under any circumstances, considering this term outdated.

The consort has no official standing, although the supporting role is fully appreciated. There will be occasions when the host of an event feels it appropriate to invite the Mayor alone without a partner or the Mayor and the Town Clerk. The Mayor should respect the host's wishes and remember that it is the Mayor, and the Mayor alone, who represents the Council.

Provision is made for spouses or consorts to be seated in reserved seats in the Church or at other events before the civic procession arrives.

When the official Consort is not available to accompany the Mayor to the engagement, the Mayor may ask another person to accompany them, i.e. a member of the Mayor's family, the Deputy Mayor, another Councillor, a Council Officer or a personal friend. While it breaks formal tradition in many towns, past mayors have found it particularly valuable to invite the Deputy Mayor as their consort.

In the interests of security and the dignity of the office, a Consort appointed by the Mayor or Deputy Mayor should be over the age of entitlement to vote in Parliamentary Elections. No person below this age may wear the consort's badge.

2.5. Former Mayors

Former Mayor's have no role.

3. The roles

3.1. Introduction

Although there is no formal job description and each holder will approach the task differently according to personality, interests and the time that can be made available, the Mayor has two distinct formal roles:

- They are the legal Chairman of the Council, responsible for chairing Council meetings and ensuring sound legal decisions are made.
- They will take a prominent and leading role in the civic life of the Town. This generally includes representing Flitwick Town Council, attending various civic functions across the district, and acting as a host at Civic gatherings.

In addition, it has become the custom (although not strictly necessary) for the Mayor to lend support and raise money for charitable organisations of their choice through the Flitwick Mayor's Charity CIO.

The political leadership of Flitwick Town Council is provided by the Leader of the Council, with the role defined in the Councillor Officer Protocol.

3.2. Council meetings

Anyone considering the post of Mayor should have experience chairing committee meetings before they are required to chair a Council meeting. The principles are similar to chairing a committee meeting but with an added level of formality and challenge.

At meetings, the Mayor (or committee chair) sits at the head of the table, with the Town Clerk or senior officer sitting to their immediate right to provide advice.

In Flitwick, the Council expects the Mayor to:

- Have a good general knowledge of the Standing Orders and have a printed copy available at every meeting.
- Avoid bias and be firm in ruling on points that arise during the meeting.
- Ensure the quality and clarity of resolutions. It is helpful for the Mayor to repeat or summarise the resolution before requesting a motion to be seconded.
- Meet with the Town Clerk and Leader of the Council before each meeting, if required, to ensure a clear understanding of the business to be transacted.

Training is available – contact the Town Clerk for assistance.

3.3. Remembrance

Arranging Remembrance events and/or parades is a civic duty for local authorities; in Central Bedfordshire, this responsibility falls to parish councils. The Royal British Legion (RBL) plays a supporting role in Flitwick and attends remembrance events. Remembrance is a civic event hosted by the mayor in their role as the town's 'first citizen'.

The Order of Precedence included in Appendix 1 will be followed at all remembrance parades in the town – see section 5. All councillors will be invited to participate in the parade.

The Council traditionally hosts the annual Remembrance Sunday Parade:

- Organising appropriate road closures and providing a public address system
- Hosting a meeting with interested parties to arrange the proceedings, including the Bedfordshire Lieutenancy, St Peter & St Paul's Parish Church, Sea Cadets and the RBL.
- The Vicar of St Peter & St Paul's Parish Church traditionally leads the service, with ministers from other denominations in the town being invited to participate.
- Advertises the event, with invitations being sent in the name of the Town Mayor.

In accordance with national RBL policy, the local branch should not arrange remembrance events unless the Council formally declines to host and support an event. Senior Officers will discuss any request for additional events from the RBL with the mayor, who will make a recommendation to the Council on whether to decline to facilitate an event and the Council's level of participation.

3.4. Attendance at functions

There are no rigid rules about which invitations should be accepted and which should be refused; this is for the Mayor to decide. Some caution should be exercised, considering they represent the Council and are not attending as individuals. Attendance should not bring the Council into disrepute or show commercial or political bias. While it's not possible to attend every event, it is important to attend as many events as possible, especially those of neighbouring towns or events organised by the Central Bedfordshire Council Chairman.

Where there are clashes, acceptance would normally be on a 'first come, first served' basis, with preference given to events within Flitwick. However, should the Mayor have accepted an engagement outside of the Town, it would not normally be acceptable to cancel in favour of another engagement within the Town. The Deputy Mayor should attend in their place.

Procedures in relation to invitations and acceptance by the Mayor are well established and dealt with in writing by the Mayor's Secretary:

- If the Mayor judges it appropriate to attend but cannot accept an invitation, it would be normal practice for the Secretary to explain this and ask whether it is acceptable for the Deputy Mayor to attend, if available.
- All hosts receive advice on receiving the Mayor and the usual protocol.
- The Mayor's Secretary will seek information on the dress code, whether the Mayor should be accompanied, and whether a speech is expected.
- The Mayor's Secretary will endeavour to ascertain and inform the Mayor when a speech is required.

If the Mayor needs any special assistance at an event or has special dietary requirements, they should ensure that the Mayor's Secretary is given as much notice as possible so that appropriate arrangements can be made with the host.

At functions, it is often preferable that the Mayor should leave ahead of the last guests. On the other hand, the Mayor should not leave an event earlier than is socially acceptable to avoid offending the host. In cancelling attendance at a function due to ill health or unforeseen circumstances, giving as much notice as possible is important to enable the Mayor's Secretary to make arrangements for a replacement, normally the Deputy Mayor, to attend and inform the function organiser accordingly.

Advice is given to organisations that the Mayor has agreed to visit, but occasionally, problems occur, and the Mayor is not afforded the courtesy that the office dictates. The dignity of the office must be upheld, and if there are serious breaches of protocol, they should be discussed with the Town Clerk and the Leader.

3.5. Annual Civic Reception

The Mayor and Consort will host the annual Flitwick Civic Reception, traditionally a civic dinner with live entertainment attended by Town Councillors (without partners), invited guests and dignitaries at The Rufus Centre. This event is an important

opportunity to network with, recognise, and thank the many people in our community who give up their time to make Flitwick a great place to live. Traditionally, this event has a strong focus on the community of Flitwick. However, it is acceptable to invite other people who have supported the work of the council or community or given the Council support.

- The cost of the Civic Reception is met from the Mayor's Allowance with the use of the Rufus Centre provided 'at cost.'
- Officers will assist with organising the event, including selecting menus and decorations, booking entertainment, sending invitations, and tracking responses.
- Care should be taken to ensure the event is as inclusive as possible while using the opportunity to bring your style and flair to the occasion.

3.6. Annual Civic Service

Traditionally, the annual civic service is usually held in October at St Peter and St Paul's Parish Church. The mayor usually meets with the Vicar to agree on the format, theme and content of the service. The mayor may choose an alternative venue, hold a secular service, or not hold a service at all, but should take advice from the Town Clerk before making a decision.

- Councillors and the Town Clerk are requested to attend regardless of personal, religious or political beliefs.
- It is customary to invite representatives from local organisations, dignitaries and residents.
- Funding for the service is provided in the Council's revenue budget.
- Money received from the collection will be split between the Town Mayor's Chosen Charities and the host organisation, provided it is a charity or established community group.
- Refreshments, including wine or sparkling wine, are provided for guests after the service.

3.7. Charity Events

It is the prerogative of the Mayor to decide whether to include a fund-raising element to their role and, if so, which charity/charities to support. The chosen charity/charities should have local significance, and the Council has previously found that working with local charities/groups often leads to ongoing relationships that benefit the town.

The Flitwick Mayor's CIO exists to assist with fundraising and includes arrangements for banking, online fundraising and logistic support. See 3.6 below.

Confusion can arise over the level of support provided by the Council to the Mayor's charity activities, and the following guidelines are intended to clarify:

- Council-owned facilities are available to the Mayor to use free of charge (subject to any prior commercial bookings) for charity activities, which are both organised and promoted by the Mayor and in aid of the Mayor's Chosen Charities.

- Facilities the Council does not own must be negotiated and, if necessary, paid for by the Mayor out of the allowance or profit from any event.
- The Council will meet the costs of incidental stationery used in Charity events.
- Council Officers will provide limited support to the Mayor's Charity Events, including secretarial support (maintaining a list of potential invitees, issuing invitations and collating responses), online promotion through social media and the flitwick.gov.uk website and assistance welcoming guests and selling raffle tickets.

3.8. Flitwick Mayor's Charity CIO (FTMC)

The Flitwick Mayor's Charity CIO (FTMC) has been set up to support the Mayor in fundraising for their chosen charities and to raise general funding for the community projects and initiatives of the Council.

The charity's operation and governance are wholly separate from the Council, governed by the constitution document and run by a committee of trustees consisting of the Town Clerk (ex-officio), Mayor, and up to two other councillors. If the Mayor isn't a charity trustee, they will be invited to become one, although this is not required if that is their preference. The Mayor usually serves as the charity's Chair, although this is not strictly necessary and will be decided by the trustees.

The trustees will work to support the Mayor with their fundraising, with any money raised for the Mayor's Chosen Charities ringfenced from other funds.

4. Facilities and support for the Mayor

An administration officer employed by the council is assigned as the Mayor's Secretary. They will provide the administrative support necessary to enable the Mayor to perform their official duties, including receiving and replying to event invitations and supporting the organisation of the Civic Service and Civic Reception. The support provided to charity events is set out above. The Mayor's Secretary does not provide secretarial support for the Deputy Mayor, except when the Deputy Mayor is acting in the Mayor's place.

Meeting facilities at The Rufus Centre are available for the Mayor and other Councillors to use for official Council business, subject to bookings and other functions. The Mayor's Secretary will make arrangements in advance on the Mayor's behalf.

5. Precedence at Civic Occasions

5.1. Introduction

Precedence, the make-up of Civic Processions, and order of precedence at events can be a source of considerable tension, confusion and potential embarrassment. The Local Government Act 1972 states that the Chairman of the District Council "shall have precedence in the District, but not so as prejudicially to affect His Majesty's Royal Prerogative". Central Bedfordshire Council is a Unitary Authority combining the functions of a non-metropolitan county council and a non-metropolitan district council; in the Local Government Act 1972, the Chairman of Central Bedfordshire Council is classed as the Chairman of the District Council.

Thus, the Chairman of the District is entitled to and should receive precedence throughout the District over all Mayors. Where the town council organises an event, the Mayor, as host, will take precedence over the Chairman of Central Bedfordshire Council, including on Remembrance Sunday. This is purely because it's inappropriate for someone to supersede their host and, as a matter of courtesy.

In the absence of the Mayor, their Deputy is entitled to the Mayor's right of precedence, but they do not wear the Mayor's chain of office. Spouses of members of the Council and others, with the exception of the Mayor and Deputy Mayor consorts, should not be included in a civic procession, but arrangements should be made for them to be seated in reserved seats in the Church before the civic procession arrives.

The Town Clerk may, on occasions, accompany the Mayor, both on ceremonial occasions and at other times. Although the Town Clerk Officer is not entitled to precedence (except for royal visits), they should be very close to the Mayor, both as the Council's Chief Officer and the main officer providing support. Custom and practice usually give the Town Clerk a billing at the Mayor's right hand.

Please see Appendix 1 for the current adopted Order of Precedence for events held in the Parish of Flitwick.

5.2. The Lord Lieutenant

When the Lord Lieutenant is visiting, officially representing the King, they have precedence over everyone present, including the Mayor. In procession, if the Lord Lieutenant is present, they must be accompanied by the Mayor and at a civic service, they would normally sit with the Mayoral Party. If the particular church service is not solely civic, they may prefer to be given a special seat, arriving last in the Church after the civic procession and leaving at the end of the service before the Mayor.

If the Lord Lieutenant requests a Deputy Lieutenant to attend the function in their place, they should be accorded the precedence due to the Lord Lieutenant themselves. On other occasions, the Deputy Lieutenants have no status as such, but they may be included in the Mayoral Party, placing them next after the Members of Parliament.

5.3. High Ranking Visitors

Where a distinguished visitor (e.g., a high-ranking Officer of the Armed Forces) is attending a civic ceremony or service, and the Council considers them worthy of the honour, they may be invited to walk in procession behind the Mayor.

5.4. Members of Parliament

The Member of Parliament is usually placed between the Mayoral Party and the Councillors unless they are Minister of the Crown, in which case they should be included in the Mayoral Party.

5.5. Representatives of Local Organisations

In some areas, there is a local custom that representatives of local organisations should be included in any procession. However, excluding Remembrance Sunday,

this is not the case in Flitwick. At Civic services, they will be asked to attend the Church as congregation members with reserved seats.

6. Civic Regalia

The mayoral regalia comprises a chain of office for the Mayor, a more modest badge of office and ribbon for the Deputy Mayor, and a badge and ribbon for the Mayor's consort. The Mayor would normally wear the regalia at functions to which they are invited, which take place within the Parish boundaries.

Where functions occur outside parish boundaries, it is customary to ask permission from the Mayor (if there is one) before regalia are worn. It is customary in Bedfordshire to specify whether Chains of Office should be worn on invites; the Mayor's Secretary will confirm with the organiser that permission has been sought should there be any ambiguity. Where there is any ambiguity, the Mayor should wear the badge of office on the ribbon necklet to avoid offence.

Civic regalia are to be worn only when on official Council business; the Council does not permit using the regalia for personal purposes. The Mayor usually wears the chain of office when presiding at meetings of the full town council, but not at any other meetings.

It is unacceptable for anyone other than the mayor, including children, to wear the Mayor's chain of office.

The Mayor's Secretary will arrange for the chain of office to be cleaned and maintained and engraved with the previous Mayor's name and year of office at a convenient point when the chain isn't needed, i.e., when the current Mayor is on holiday.

The chain of office must be safely stored in the supplied carry case in a secure location; there is no need to return it to the Rufus Centre after each use. The Mayor will ensure the chain is not left unattended in a public place and that it is stored safely in the boot of their car, out of sight, when travelling.

Care must be taken on the death of the Sovereign to ensure that chains of office are worn appropriately. At the Mayor's discretion, it is acceptable to either wear the chain of office with the badge of office covered with a black pouch or to wear the badge of office on a black ribbon necklet.

6.1. Past Mayor's Badges

When they leave office, Past Mayors are presented with a badge in recognition of their service to the town at the Annual Statutory Meeting. They also wear their Past Mayor's Badge at civic occasions.

7. Dress Code

There is no formal dress code for the Mayor, but the Mayor is expected to dress appropriately for the occasion. Unless the occasion warrants it, there is no expectation in Flitwick that the Mayor should dress in formal attire.

In general:

- The Mayor (or Deputy Mayor) and consort should wear formal attire when attending church services.
- Historically, women were expected to wear hats or fascinators in church, a tradition often followed in Bedfordshire, especially when the Lord-Lieutenant is present. It is important to seek advice from the organiser to avoid embarrassment.
- Tailored shorts are acceptable in the summer, especially when attending outdoor events in Flitwick.

8. Specific Events

8.1. Attending civic events

The Mayor, Deputy Mayor and all Councillors are requested to attend several civic occasions during the year, including:

- Annual Town Meeting
- Annual Statutory Council Meeting
- Annual Civic Service
- Annual Civic Reception
- Remembrance Sunday

8.2. Attendance at Funerals

The Council may wish to be represented at the funeral of a prominent person; however, in all circumstances, the wishes of the deceased's family should take precedence. The following guidance is given and may be used where this is consistent with the wishes of the family:

- **Former Mayors of the Town** - The Mayor and Town Clerk should normally attend the funeral, and a wreath would normally be sent. A Minute's silence may be held at the beginning of an appropriate meeting of the Council at the Mayor's discretion.
- **Serving Councillors** - Depending on the scale of the funeral, the Mayor, Town Clerk, Council Members, and Officers of the Council may attend as a sign of respect, and a wreath may be sent.
- **Former Councillors and prominent local people connected with public life** - Cases of this kind should be treated on their merits, and the Mayor should decide in consultation with the Town Clerk.

A letter of condolence should be sent on behalf of the Mayor to the next of kin in all the above cases and other cases that may be considered necessary in the light of prevailing circumstances.

If the Mayor is invited to a funeral, they should attend purely as a mourner without wearing a chain or badge unless the family express a wish to the contrary.

9. Appendix 1 – Order of Precedence

(Persons to be omitted depending on the nature of the event but order maintained)

Members of the Royal Family.
Lord Lieutenant and Consort.
High Sheriff and Consort.
Mayor and Consort.
Central Bedfordshire Council Chairman and Consort*
(Military Representatives - Remembrance Sunday Only)
Town Clerk and Chief Executive
Deputy Mayor and Consort.
Member of Parliament for Mid Bedfordshire
Flitwick Town Councillors (In order of length of service)
Honorary Citizens (In order of length of award – if any)
Central Bedfordshire Ward Councillors
Visiting dignitaries
Police or Fire Officers

* The Chairman of Central Bedfordshire Council will have precedence over the Mayor at events not organised or hosted by the Town Council.