AGENDA 11, Enc viii) Ashington Town Council Building Security and Visitor Management Protocol

1. Purpose

This protocol establishes procedures for managing visitors and maintaining security at The Town Hall, particularly during council meetings held outside normal office hours. It aims to ensure the safety of staff, councillors and legitimate visitors while maintaining the council's commitment to open and accessible meetings.

2. Scope

This protocol applies to all Ashington Town Council staff, councillors and any contractors or volunteers working on behalf of the council when using the shared building.

3. Key Principles

- **Vigilance:** Everyone has a responsibility to be aware of who is in the building and to report concerns
- **Challenge:** Unfamiliar faces should be politely challenged and directed appropriately
- **Escort:** Visitors must be accompanied at all times
- **Documentation:** All visitors must sign in and out for fire safety, building security and emergency evacuation purposes

Note: The requirement to sign in and out is solely for fire safety, building security and emergency evacuation purposes. It is not used to record attendance at council meetings for the purposes of meeting minutes or any other purpose.

4. Procedures During Office Hours

- All visitors to Ashington Town Council must be met at the ground floor entrance.
- Staff expecting visitors should notify colleagues and, where possible, meet their visitor personally.
- On arrival, visitors must sign in using the visitor record, noting their name, organisation (if applicable), who they are visiting, and time of arrival; and be escorted to their destination.
- The member of staff hosting the visitor is responsible for them throughout their time in the building.
- On departure, visitors must be escorted back to the ground floor and asked to sign out.
- Visitors should not be left unaccompanied in any part of the building.

5. Procedures for Council Meetings (Out of Hours)

Before the Meeting

- Two members of staff will be positioned at the ground floor entrance from 15 minutes before the scheduled meeting start time.
- Staff should position themselves to have clear sight of the entrance and be ready to greet arrivals.
- All persons entering the building for the council meeting must sign in using the NCC building sign-in sheet.
- One member of staff will escort visitors upstairs to the meeting room.

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During the Meeting

- A mobile contact number will be displayed on the door for late arrivals. Late arrivals should contact this number, and a member of staff will come to greet them, sign them in and escort them to the meeting room.
- Any person leaving the meeting temporarily should be accompanied.

After the Meeting

- At the conclusion of the public session, or at the end of the meeting, visitors will be escorted back to the ground floor.
- All visitors must sign out before leaving the building.
- Town Council staff should ensure that the spaces used by Ashington Town Council are clear, including the Council Chamber, Council Offices and Remscheid Room, before NCC staff lock the building.

6. Guidance for Councillors

Councillors entering the building out of hours should be vigilant about who enters with them or immediately behind them.

If someone unknown attempts to enter alongside you and states they are attending the council meeting, ask them to take a seat and let them know that a member of staff will come to sign them in.

If you have concerns about someone's behaviour or presence, alert a member of staff immediately. Councillors should not attempt to physically prevent someone entering. If possible, get through the second door and call for help.

7. Challenging Unknown Persons

All staff and councillors are encouraged to politely challenge anyone they do not recognise in the building.

Suggested approaches include: "Hello, can I help you?", "Are you here for the council meeting?", and "I'll get a member of staff to sign you in."

Most people will respond positively to a friendly challenge. The aim is to establish who they are and what their business is.

If someone is evasive, refuses to identify themselves, or gives cause for concern, do not attempt to detain them. Instead, note their description, alert colleagues, and contact the police if their behaviour is threatening or they refuse to leave.

8. Responding to Difficult Situations

Signs of intoxication or erratic behaviour:

If a person appears to be intoxicated or behaving erratically, they should not be permitted to enter the meeting. Staff should calmly explain that they cannot be admitted and offer to arrange an alternative way for them to engage with the council, such as submitting written comments.

Refusal to leave

If someone refuses to leave when asked, remain calm and do not escalate the situation. Clearly state that they are being asked to leave. Warn them that the police will be called if they do not comply. If they still refuse, contact the police on 101 (or 999 if there is an immediate threat). Do not attempt to physically remove anyone.

Aggressive or threatening behaviour

Prioritise personal safety and move away if necessary. Do not engage in arguments. Call 999 immediately. Alert colleagues by any safe means.

After any incident, please speak to the Executive Officer as soon as possible, who will then update the Building Manager.

9. Councillor Access to Office Spaces

Although councillors may hold building access passes, they should only access Town Council office spaces (Council Offices, Remscheid Room) when officers are present.

This requirement protects both councillors and the council by ensuring appropriate oversight and accountability at all times.

10. Responsibilities

Role	Responsibilities
Executive Officer	Overall responsibility for security arrangements; liaison with building management; reviewing incidents
All Staff	Following this protocol; challenging unknown persons; escorting visitors; reporting concerns
Councillors	Vigilance when entering the building; not admitting unknown persons; reporting concerns to staff; only accessing office spaces when officers are present

11. Communication with Building Management

Any security concerns or incidents should be reported to the building manager promptly.

The Executive Officer maintains maintain regular contact with building management regarding shared security arrangements.

Any changes to access arrangements or building security should be communicated to all staff and councillors.

12. Monitoring and Review of this Policy

The Executive Officer shall be responsible for reviewing this policy annually to ensure that it meets legal requirements and is fit for purpose. Changes will be approved by Council.