



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.¹

(a) Allowances:

(i) Basic Allowances

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 payable 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.

¹ Further details are available within the DOE Circular No. LG 04/2015 (24 February, 2015) and LG 09/2014 (20 March 2014).

(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 will be 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.

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

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 per annum is 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 15-years-old or under
- a child over 15-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.

A carer is defined as a responsible person over 16-years-old who does not normally live with the councillor as part of that family and is not a member of the immediate family. A specialist carer is 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 and Councillors may claim only one DCA for each instance of childcare/carer service.

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

- Standard Care £6.70 per hour²
- Specialist Care £13.40 per hour

Claims are subject also to the undernoted limits:

- Standard Care £348 per month
- Specialist Care £697 per month

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 would be entitled to claim for an additional 10 meetings per year of the DPCSP. In addition the Chairperson of the 4 DPCSPs 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.

² Based on national minimum wage for 21+ as per Circular 29/2015

Forgoing Allowances

A Councillor may forgo all or part of any allowances to which he or she is entitled, provided he or she has given notice in writing to the Council's Chief Executive.

(b) Expenses

(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 of the Environment, following consultation with the Northern Ireland Joint Council for Local Government Services. Alternatively, Councillors may choose to travel by public transport and there is provision to reimburse the cost of these fares.

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. 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

	451-999cc	1000-1199cc	1200-1450cc
0-8,500 miles	46.9p	52.2p	65.0p
After 8,500 miles	13.7p	14.4p	16.4p

Other Mileage Claims

Please contact Democratic Services for pedal cycle or motor cycle 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 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 the their subsistence allowances or as incidental expenses. This relates to such things as meals, bus and taxi fares, necessary telephone calls, etc.

The following table shows the rates of subsistence that should be adhered to³:-

	BRITISH ISLES	LONDON
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Total</i>
Overnight	£100.70	£122.45
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Breakfast	11.50	11.50
Lunch	13.50	13.50
Tea	4.70	4.70
Dinner	20.95	20.95
Total Meal Allowance	£50.65	£50.65

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 of the Environment. There are differences in the subsistence arrangements for conference which take place outside the United Kingdom.

³ DOE Circular LG05/2015

Within the UK

Councillors do not receive a standard daily rate for attending conferences within the UK, however, they may claim for any expenses incurred as outlined above.

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

If a Councillor travels outside of the UK, the following Subsistence Allowance is given;-

The Council meets directly the cost of accommodation in terms of bed and breakfast

- The daily amount to cover other meals, etc. to be fixed at £75.00.
- In the event of a part day, the rate should be £45.00.

In exceptional circumstances expenses can be reimbursed on an actual cost basis to my approval and the submission of vouchers and receipts.

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 of the Environment 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 District Partnerships
- attendance by appointed Councillors at meetings of community centre committees
- attendance on a Council or Committee deputation relevant to the functions of the Council

- 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.

SUBMISSION OF CLAIMS

Please note there is a **3 month** time limit for submitting claims for the claimable Allowances above i.e. Dependants' Carers' Allowance and Travel and Subsistence Allowances. Any claims made outside of this time limit cannot be processed.

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.

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 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 packages based on either a desk-top personal computer or a laptop computer and an iPad. iPhones are also provided to Councillors under the terms of a Council contract.

Computer consumables such as memory sticks are also provided to Councillors and should be requested from Democratic Services staff.

Councillors will be provided with print cartridges when required.

At the end of its life cycle (4yrs), Councillors are given the option to purchase the IT equipment which had been loaned to them and this cost would be based on the age and quality of the computer equipment. If IT equipment is purchased, all Council supplied software licences, such as Microsoft Office, are removed.

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 3GB of mobile data per month. Any mobile data costs incurred above the monthly 3GB 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 include;-

- a. the cost of all phone calls to landlines or mobile phones within the UK;
- b. the cost of all text messages to landlines or mobile phones within the UK and
- c. 1GB (iPhones) and 500mb (Blackberry's) 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 is subject to change.

Home Telephone

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

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

- View the schedule of meetings
- Access agendae, reports and minutes of Committees
- Search for historical decisions.

The system is used as a vehicle to alert Councillors that Committee summonses, agenda, minutes and reports have been published 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.

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.

Councillors' Rooms

The Members' Common Room is located on 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 in the Common Room. The Members' Attendant is responsible during office hours for facilities in this area and will take messages and provide general assistance to Councillors.

Located nearby are the Party Rooms and individual meeting rooms.

A photocopier for the use of Councillors is located in Room G42.

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, 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. A printer is also located in each Party Room for reasons of confidentiality.

Correspondence

Items for typing may be left in Room G42 or G35, where a confidential secretarial service will be 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. Circularised mail to large numbers of people 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 Room G42 or in the Members' Common Room beside the post boxes.

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 at home or at work, if contact is possible, and other messages will be emailed or left in their mail boxes.

Council Stationery

Personalised headed notepaper, compliment slips and business cards with the Council logo will be provided for each Councillor during his/her term of office. Standard Council stationery items will be available also 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 will be organised by 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 – Located in City Hall, Room G42

	Staff Member	Extension / Direct Dial	Location
Members' Services	Kate McCafferty (Democratic Services Assistant)	6308 / 028 9027 0553	Room G42, City Hall
	Jill Thompson (Business Support Clerk)	6319 / 028 9091 8739	Room G42, City Hall
	Aaron McMullan (Business Support Clerk)	6468	Room G42, City Hall
Members' Common Room	Mary Houston (Members' Attendant)	6318 / 028 9027 0253	Room G04, City Hall
Members' Development	Julie McCormick (Democratic Services Officer)	6321 / 028 9027 0607	21 Linenhall Street