

C P 03 Visits by Groups to the Council

Policy Title & Ref Number	C P 03 Visits by Groups to the Council
Policy Prepared By	Corporate Services
Policy Owner	Director of Services
Consultation Process	Management Team Protocol and Procedures Committee
Policy Adopted by Date of Adoption	Longford County Council 13 September 2023
Review Period	2 years or earlier if required
Implementation Date	13 September 2023

Policy Revision History

Revision No.	Date	Details of Revision
Rev 00	May 2023	Original

1. Background and Context

- One of the Council's key Corporate Objectives is to support and strengthen local democracy. It aims to promote public participation and involvement in the democratic and decision-making processes through active consultation and communication with citizens.
- This policy sets out the process by which Longford County Council will consider requests from schools, groups and organisations to visit the Council to learn more about how our Council works.

2. Purpose of this Policy

Longford County Council recognises the need for a policy to manage requests to visit the Council buildings or Council Chamber. It is important for Longford County Council to establish a policy on this matter because of the need to have clarity regarding the policy and procedures for the consideration of requests from schools, groups and organisations.

3. Scope

This policy applies to schools, groups and organisations who would like to visit the Council's building or Council Chamber to learn about the Local Authority and can demonstrate a business or educational requirement.

This policy does not apply to requests from individuals, companies, businesses, groups, or organisations to meet with officials of the Council or Elected Members in relation to the business of the Council.

4. Key Roles and Responsibilities

5.1 Council

- Put in place an appropriate structure for the effective implementation, monitoring, review and approval of the Visits to the Council Policy.
- Comply with the requirements of the Visits to the Council Policy.
- Review the Visits to the Council Policy as required.
- Consider and approve recommendations from the Corporate Policy Group for final decision.

5.2 Corporate Policy Group (CPG)

- Consider all applications deemed to be valid under the terms of this policy. The Committee may, at its discretion, request additional information on any request.
- Make recommendation to the Council for consideration and approval.

5.3 Corporate Services

- Provide support to the Corporate Policy Group.

5. General Principles

- The Council is a working environment, therefore certain areas or parts of the Council buildings are closed to the public.
- Organisations, groups and schools are encouraged to attend the public Council Meetings and sit in the public gallery. Here, they will have an opportunity to hear Council business being discussed and decisions being made which impact on the citizens of the county.
- The Cathaoirleach, if his diary allows, can engage with groups and schools, either in person or virtually using Microsoft Teams. If the topic requires, the Council will arrange for the Cathaoirleach to be accompanied and supported by an employee with expertise in the relevant area.
- Longford County Council encourages young people to get involved with Comhairle na nÓg.
- The Council cannot accommodate individual visits. Individuals who wish to learn more about the Council are encouraged to consult the rich resources available on the Council's website.
- Visits include access to the Council Chamber where information about different levels of government and the Council's roles and responsibilities can be provided.
- If required, the Council will be represented by the Cathaoirleach of the County and a representative from the Executive.
- Employees working at the Council will share their knowledge and experience about working in the Council and the services provided to the citizens of County Longford. Information sessions are interactive, and visitors are encouraged to ask questions.
- Education programs are tailored to the needs of each individual group and workshops will be specific to the group. Groups can request a particular topic to be discussed or included in the workshop. Information sessions can either be:
 - A general introduction to the Council
 - A more specific topic
- The Council may be forced to cancel visits that have already been confirmed, even at short notice, in exceptional circumstances resulting from political developments or unplanned Council meetings. The Meetings Administrator will contact the representative from the school, group or organisation to give as much notice as possible if that rare situation arises and to reschedule visit to a mutually suitable date.
- Visits are only accommodated during normal working hours and are not available at weekends and public holidays.

- As far as is practicable, the Council will do its utmost to make visits as rewarding, enjoyable, informational and educational as possible.

6. General Procedures

- Request for visits must be made by a representative of the organisation, educational establishment or student body who must also accompany the group during the visit.
- Requests must be submitted in writing and sent to the Chief Executive's Office, Longford County Council.
- Longford County Council may organise visits to the Council Chamber for groups of a maximum of 20 participants.
- Visits are free of charge and suitable for everyone over the age of 15.
- Group visits last between 1 and 2 hours depending on the programme.
- Groups must apply to Longford County Council at least 3 months in advance.
- In the case of a school visit, the request must be accompanied by confirmation that the Board of Management and Principal have considered and approved the visit.
- School groups or groups of young people must be accompanied by at least one adult for every 10 pupils.
- Accompanying teachers have responsibility for the safety, supervision and care of all children attending the Council building.
- The following information should accompany all requests:
 - The purpose of the visit, demonstrating a clear business or educational need.
 - The specific focus of or agenda for the visit.
 - A list of those attending.
 - Proposed date and timing of the visit.
- Requests will be referred by the Chief Executive to the Corporate Policy Group for consideration.
- The request will be assessed by the Corporate Policy Group to ascertain if it demonstrates that it achieves a specific business or educational requirement and supports the delivery of clear objectives.
- The Corporate Policy Group will forward their recommendation to the full Council which will decide if it will approve/not approve the request.
- Corporate Services will notify the relevant organisation of the Council's decision.

7. Safety and Security Considerations

- The right to refuse admission is reserved in all circumstances.
- By asking permission to visit the Council buildings, participants and attendees agree to abide by the conditions of entry.
- Items which may cause offence, disruption or danger must not be brought into the Council building.
- The instruction and direction of Council employees must be adhered to.
- On request, arrangements will be put in place to meet and special requirements for visits by way or access, communication, etc.
- Visitors must comply with directions regarding such matters as:
 - Emergency situations such as evacuation from the building.
 - Safety situations requiring evacuation from the building.
 - Storage of personal possessions.
 - Switching off mobile phones or other electronic devices.
 - The use of cameras and other recording equipment.
 - Eating and drinking in the Council Chamber or other areas where it is not permitted.
 - The display of objects, banners or other articles that may be used to convey statements.
 - Being dressed appropriately and displaying the appropriate level of respect for the surroundings to reflect the dignity and decorum of the Council Chamber.
 - Access to public and non-public areas of the building, or areas unconnected with the visit.
 - In the event that a Council meeting is in progress, not to engage approvingly or disapproving with the Elected Members, Executive, Council employees, debate or session in any way, for example, by speech, applause, or other exclamation or noise or visual manifestation.
 - Smoking, including the use of electronic cigarettes, is not permitted in the Council buildings.

8. Data Protection

Longford County Council processes personal data for a variety of purposes and this may include sensitive personal data. Longford County Council will only process personal data where it has a lawful basis for doing so. Details about the type of data held by the Council, the purpose of the data processing and the lawful basis on which the data is processed in keeping with Longford County Council's Privacy Statement can be found on the Council's website.

You can contact the Council's Data Protection & Information Compliance Officer at dpo@longfordcoco.ie.

9. Freedom of Information

The Council receives regular Freedom of Information requests from the public. Some of these requests seek details of those attending the Council. Visitor names will not be released to a person requesting such information. However, if a visitor is representing a business, company or organisation, the business, company or organisation name may be released.

10. Review

The Council, having regard to changing circumstances, shall from time to time review this policy statement and shall conduct such review in accordance with the provisions in the policy.