

The Councillor Compact

What is the Councillor Compact?

1. Councillors are subjected to many pressures and conflicting demands on their time. The councillor compact aims to bring some clarity about your role as a councillor, how you perform your duties, and your approach to exercising those responsibilities. Just as importantly, it contains a commitment about the support; advice and guidance that will be provided to you by the council to help you effectively fulfil that role.
2. **This Compact:**
 - a) Defines the role of the councillor and performance standards, amongst other matters;
 - b) Sets out the council's expectations of you in your role, encouraging basic minimum standards of activity in each of the dimensions and functions of the role; combining specific tasks with suggested approaches, skills and behaviours;
 - c) Sets out the council's commitment to provide minimum levels of support and training for members;
 - d) Is underpinned by a number of protocols and agreements, some of which form part of the council's constitution, which include (this list is not exhaustive):
 - The Protocol on Member / Officer Relations (see paragraph 24 below)
 - Member Role Descriptions (including competencies and skill sets) (Please see Appendix 1)
 - Members' Code of Conduct
 - Planning Code of Conduct
 - Local Member Consultative Charter
 - Protocols/Agreements in relation to the use of ICT and other equipment
 - The County Durham Compact (which governs the relationship between Local Authorities/NHS with the Voluntary Sector in County Durham)

The Role of the Elected Member

3. Being elected as a councillor to represent the people who live and work in your area is a tremendous privilege. Councillors sit at the heart of their communities and have a key role in shaping communities. Being a councillor is a demanding role, so it helps if you are passionate about your area and working in the best interests of local people. The constitution of the council sets out in detail the various roles of councillors (i.e. cabinet members, chairs of committees, etc.), and the expectations of you in exercising those responsibilities. However, the following sections set out in more general terms what you may expect in undertaking the exciting and important role you are about to embark upon.

Frontline (Ward) Councillor Roles

4. “Ward Councillors and Community Leadership” (2007) – a report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (an independent organisation, working in partnership with all sectors to reduce poverty, empower people to take control of their own lives and to help build strong and cohesive communities) identified six key frontline (ward) councillor roles. All councillors, whether executive and non-executive, will undertake these roles as part of their frontline duties. The roles are:
 - a) **Political representative:** the ability to connect with all parts of the community, to represent everyone fairly and to balance local concerns with the demands of your political group manifesto. This will also include teamwork, close liaison, joint working and the sharing of responsibilities with your fellow councillor within multi-area wards, regardless of political affiliation.
 - b) **Community advocate:** be a skilled advocate for people from different backgrounds, cultures, and values; have the confidence to speak freely and challenge the executive. A good working knowledge, understanding of, and commitment to equalities and diversity issues will be essential for this role.
 - c) **Community leader:** exercise community development skills – support local projects and initiatives, educate people about local participation and involve them in policy development, service planning and decision-making; be a good communicator – explain what political decisions and structures mean to constituents and community organisations; be sensitive to difference and issues of diversity and equality; have knowledge and skills to engage people in a variety of ways (not just meetings); be a conflict broker. Work with all groups in your locality to build community cohesion.

- d) **Service transformer:** understand the complex business of local government and services provided both by the council and others; have the confidence and ability to hold service providers to account for performance/delivery (including developing local area charters); be able to work in partnership with a range of agencies and interests (including town and parish councils); have the ability to understand local problems and use this knowledge locally and strategically in local action planning; setting and monitoring service standards. As part of this role you may be required to work closely with the voluntary sector and/or lead community groups linked to specific projects. In so doing, there will be an expectation that you are familiar with and have regard to the County Durham Compact with the Voluntary Sector.
- e) **Place shaper:** be a local figurehead/role-model that people feel they can turn to; be able to shape the very local environment – provide direction, have the ability to identify priorities, work with officers and service providers to address public realm problems and to promote the Council’s vision for sustainable communities; manage delegated locality budgets.
- f) **Knowledge champion:** be the primary source of local intelligence flowing between the community and the council – i.e. from local surgeries and meetings, letters/e-mails, ‘phone calls etc., involving local stakeholders; have the skills to collect and analyse local information and use it to benefit the community.

Other Key Roles for Councillors

5. Although the frontline (ward) councillor roles outlined above reflect the increasingly important responsibilities of councillors as “place-shapers” for their areas, you will also have other duties and responsibilities as a councillor which you will be required to undertake and actively and regularly participate in. Whilst the following list is not exhaustive, it can include:

- a) **Acting as a member of the Executive:** Being selected as a member of the executive (cabinet) brings with it a significant workload and specific responsibility for an area (or areas) of service provision and policy formulation and development – this will require a considerable commitment if you undertake this role.

As a member of the executive you will be expected collectively to take key decisions and also to exercise specific responsibility in those areas where executive powers may have been delegated to you. This will mean you will have a high profile role and all that comes with it in terms of responsibility and media exposure.

You will need on occasions to take tough decisions on competing priorities; to provide leadership and direction; to challenge directors on their performance; develop with partners a clear vision for County Durham and a sustainable community strategy; and champion the County both regionally and nationally. At the same time you will need to ensure proper support for frontline (ward) councillors and be sensitive to local issues they raise. The duties of a cabinet member are set out in more detail in the role descriptions in Appendix 1.

- b) **Acting as a Non-Executive Member:** The non-executive (overview and scrutiny) councillor role is just as important as that of the executive member and can be just as demanding. The key roles of the non-executive member are to influence and comment upon policy development in the council (this is the overview element); to scrutinise decisions taken by the executive (including call-ins) and to undertake scrutiny investigations into specific areas of council activity, or those of other bodies (i.e. Council Plan partners), particularly performance in relation to local improvement targets. The role descriptions, contained in Appendix 1, set out in more detail precisely what is expected of you, including member leadership of the overview and scrutiny process.

Whilst overview and scrutiny should be robust and challenging (acting as a critical friend to the council and its partners); for it to be respected (and, as importantly, to be effective) it is essential that it operates in a non-partisan, non-political way in line with government guidance. You will be expected to adopt this approach in the exercise of your duties as a non-executive member.

- c) **Acting as a Member of a Regulatory Committee:** As a member of a regulatory committee, you will be expected to participate and make decisions about issues such as planning, licensing and registration, and rights of way. As some of the decisions will be quasi-judicial in nature, you must undertake appropriate training (including regular refresher training) about the issues **before** you can make decisions. This is to protect both yourself and also the council from any potential costly legal challenge. Your role in some of the processes associated with these decision making committees also requires that you should be aware of and must abide by the code of conduct for members which is contained in the constitution of the council and, in relation to planning matters, the relevant planning code of conduct.
- d) **Partnership Working and Representing the Council on Other Bodies:** As part of your role, you may be asked to represent the council on outside partner bodies and agencies. To ensure that you are able to effectively represent the council and perform your role effectively, it will be necessary to familiarise yourself with the functions of the relevant bodies; to regularly attend and participate in meetings of those organisations; and, where necessary, to report back to the council about issues which require action or on which the council needs to be updated.

What the Council will do to ensure Councillors are Effective in their Role

6. **Defining the role:** The Council has established role descriptions (Appendix 1) which provide a clear-cut definition of councillor roles and reflect the competencies and skill sets necessary.
7. **Skills, learning and development:** Aligned to the role descriptions - all councillors will have a personal development plan linked to the competencies and skill sets required to perform their role.
8. Councillors will be offered opportunities to undertake more personalised and flexible training that takes into account specific local challenges, such as dealing with community conflict, understanding equalities and diversity, community cohesion issues, or new approaches to community engagement, including social networking. As regards equalities and diversity, the council (in its role as an employer, in provision of services and in decision making), has positive duties under the Equality Act in relation to age, disability, gender – including pregnancy, maternity and transgender, race, religion or belief and sexual orientation. The Council is also required to comply with the Human Rights Act. It is essential that councillors have an understanding of equalities and diversity issues and training will be offered to you in these areas which you **must** undertake. This will be particularly relevant in relation to your involvement in any council (or partnership body) officer appointments, or appeals regarding discrimination or harassment issues, where you must have undertaken equalities and diversity training **before** you can make decisions in these areas. Similarly there is a requirement for you to have undertaken Corporate Parenting training in order for you to carry out your role as a Corporate Parent, and in order that you fully understand the statutory duties of both the Council and its Members in relation to safeguarding children and vulnerable adults. Such issues can arise through a number of different Member responsibilities such as appeals in a disciplinary context and matters that may arise within the part of the community that you represent.
9. Training will be more flexible to reflect the time pressures which councillors face, and will also be offered as “refresher” and “ongoing”. It will include opportunities for councillors to undertake validated skills training via models of accreditation and more formal course-based qualifications. When councillors have given a commitment to attend a training course or conference (which often has cost implications), there will be an expectation that they attend the course or conference, other than because of exceptional circumstances.
10. Where councillors attend conferences as part of their development, it will be a requirement that conference documentation and, where appropriate, feedback, is provided to other councillors to allow information to be cascaded to other members.
11. Member development will also be supported by partnering opportunities for members with mentors, either within or outside the Council. This will also include opportunities for non-executive members to shadow executive members and vice-versa.
12. Arrangements will be made for a directory of services and relevant officer contacts in the new authority to be provided for all members to better assist them in undertaking their role.

13. **Information:** Councillors will be provided with access to high quality intelligence about council business, service performance and local issues in order to make more informed decisions. This will include information and consultation by officers about what is happening within member localities in line with the councillor consultative charter which forms part of the constitution.
14. The Council will resource and more proactively promote the role of the councillor and the activities of elected members through use of media and communications resources to work to build positive relations with the local media; it will support members with websites, newsletters, texting, blogs and other publicity. This will not extend to activities which are considered political (in line with government guidance), but surgery support and case work support will always be considered legitimate. This will also include improved mechanisms for publicising and communicating decisions made by the council (including web-casts).
15. Councillors will also be provided with tools (i.e. e-mail addresses, mobile computing/telephony/webcams, printers, faxes etc.) which will enable members to make more active use of digital and social networking technologies.
16. Direct contact between councillors and the public will be provided through the identification and provision of venues where councillors can meet constituents face to face and which place councillors at the heart of well-supported area and neighbourhood based structures.
17. **Officer support:** Officer Support is essential in enabling councillors to respond rapidly to community concerns and to deal with service improvement. The level of officer support provided to members will reflect the importance the Council gives to this issue.
18. The support provided will include administrative back-up, including - access to paperwork for meetings, diary management; arrangements and publicity for surgeries; support with casework, including nominated officers to assist with complaints and petitions (community calls for action); and engagement with communities (both geographical, and communities of interest, including young people); research support for ward work; and support/training to use ICT. Members undertaking specific roles (i.e. executive and non-executive) will also require specific officer support.
19. **Remuneration and Support to enhance Participation:** In recognition of the key roles that councillors undertake and to support members who work either full-time or part-time, or who have dependents, the Council will implement a scheme of remuneration and associated support for councillors to ensure that as many people as possible can participate in local representative democracy. This will extend to the offer of assessments by trained officers about the specific needs of members who consider themselves as having a disability and the provision of facilities within council premises and for members individually to ensure that councillors with disabilities are not prevented from undertaking their role because of access or mobility related barriers. Likewise, appropriate support will be given to members who may be affected by barriers

arising from their ethnicity, age, faith, gender or sexual orientation. Support will also extend to arrangements for child and dependent care cover.

20. The Council will actively liaise with local employers to ensure that awareness of the councillor role is raised and that employers duties in relation to time-off for councillors to undertake their work is recognised (including the development of a financial compensation scheme to be administered by the Council to allow small businesses to claim a flat rate for absences arising from councillor duties).
21. The council will adopt modern business and meeting processes which seek to remove potential barriers to participation including meeting times which are accessible to both councillors and the public; are welcoming and inclusive; are chaired efficiently (it will be expected that existing, as well as new members, undertake relevant training in this area) and have agreed maximum lengths; make use of modern technology to enable involvement in meetings without the need to attend in person (i.e. video-conferencing); and have paperwork (or e-documents) that are concise, focused and provided in sufficient time for reading.
22. **Making a difference in local communities:** For councillors to be able to make a difference in their local communities and act as place-shapers, it is important that they have access to resources. The Council will provide a specific sum of funding per councillor, per year which may be spent, at the discretion of the councillor (subject to any guidance, criteria, or protocols which will govern its use) on specific projects within each councillor's area.

Councillor/Staff Relations

23. The relationship between councillors and staff employed by the Council is vitally important in delivering high quality services to the people of County Durham. A detailed protocol setting out how that relationship will work in practice forms a separate part of the Council's Constitution. However, some of key principles are set out below to inform councillors and for the avoidance of doubt:
 - both councillors and officers serve local people but each have distinct roles

- the best service will be provided to local people by councillors and staff working as one team
 - the service given to local people must be efficient, open and accountable
 - both councillors and staff have a duty to act in accordance with the Council's ethical standards
 - staff serve the Council as a whole but this service is expressed through the staff management structure
 - the political impartiality of staff must be maintained
 - effective working relationships between councillors and staff must be based on trust and mutual respect
24. Councillors are elected by local people and are democratically accountable to those people. They set the policy framework and budget in full Council and the Executive (Cabinet) take key decisions within the policy framework and budget. Councillors hold decision takers to account through the work of overview and scrutiny committees. Most councillors also belong to political groups which may meet together to consider issues before the council takes a decisions.
25. Councillors do not have responsibility for day to day management of staff or delivery of services or are able to give orders to staff. Nor should councillors use their influence to secure for themselves or any other person improper advantage or disadvantage from the council or its partners. Councillors should not lobby on behalf of any individual seeking employment with the council.
26. Staff serve the council as a whole and support councillors in their roles. They use their professional expertise and best judgement to advise councillors on how to achieve their objectives and should be free to do so without pressure from councillors, either individually or collectively. Staff implement lawful decisions of the council; ensure members are kept up to date with legislation or other external influences on the council. They manage the resources of the council and may propose new policies or changes to existing policies where they consider these may improve the council's performance and/or delivery of services to local people. Staff take day to day managerial and operational decisions within the council and may liaise with staff in other authorities or agencies to share best practice and co-operate where necessary to achieve the council's objectives. Some staff have particular responsibilities as defined in the constitution and must be permitted to perform these roles in accordance with their own judgement and without fear or favour.
27. Staff must not allow their personal or political opinions to interfere with the exercise of their responsibilities to the council. They will not treat any individual councillor or groups of councillors less favourably than any other, but provide the same level of service to all councillors, consistent with the demands of the councillor's roles within the council and their workloads.

Member Role Descriptions

Frontline Councillor

Community leadership roles

As the democratically mandated local community leader, Frontline Councillors will engage different communities and bring local interests together to help resolve issues and shape future provision. In particular they will:

- be recognised as a local community champion and leader for the area, helping to provide direction, resolve local concerns and reconcile competing views and interests;
- encourage the involvement of local people in policy development, service planning and decision-making;
- be key members of any future action partnership;
- be responsible for the spending of budgets devolved for dealing with local matters and targeting resources effectively;
- promote effective relationships with public, private, voluntary and community organisations in their area;
- be the Council's link with existing town and parish councils and play a key role in supporting local campaigns or groups looking to establish new town and parish councils in their area;
- assist in brokering local agreements such as the local area charter or mini-Council Plan in which 'added value' service provision could be negotiated and agreed with service providers;
- monitor the performance of local public services in their area, hold poor performers to account and help plan improvements to local services;
- promote both the principles and practices of community cohesion, social inclusion and equality and diversity;
- keep in touch with constituents, through regular surgeries, meetings, phone, letter, e-mail and personal contact so as to know and understand their views and concerns;
- speak freely in support of their area in order to influence Council decision-making, including the consideration of issues such as planning and licensing;
- promote and contribute to the Council's vision for sustainable communities.

Corporate roles

As a member of the Full Council, the Frontline Councillor has a significant role to play, for example:

- agreeing the Council's overall mission, strategic aims, objectives and priorities;
- deciding on revenue and capital budgets and council tax levels;
- agreeing and reviewing the Council's Constitution;
- appointing committees and sub-committees;
- being involved in appointing the Council's Head of Paid Service (Chief Executive);
- promoting and preserving the integrity of the Council;
- representing the Council on other bodies;
- making, amending and revoking bylaws;
- making sure the Council meets its obligations as a corporate parent.
- Frontline Councillors, will together be a key component in delivering the Council's regulatory responsibilities for such matters as highways, licensing and planning. In so doing they will:
 - act fairly and judiciously;
 - act in accordance with all relevant legislation;
 - make reasonable decisions based on relevant matters, excluding irrelevant matters;
 - ensure that local views and perspectives from area action partnerships and local town and parish councils were brought to the table;
 - ensure proceedings were carried out in an open and transparent way.

As a member of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees, the Frontline Councillor will:

- play a major role in policy development and review;
- question the Executive's actions, decisions and assess the performance of the Council. Scrutiny members should use performance information to hold the Executive to account, allowing performance to be assessed from the perspective of customers and citizens;
- scrutinise the effectiveness and performance of partnerships e.g. CDRP, and partner organisations e.g. NHS in delivering measurable outcomes within the context of the County Durham Strategic Partnership and Council Plan;
- scrutinise the performance as appropriate of the third sector (voluntary and community) as a service provider;
- respond to community calls for action where required;
- contribute to regional scrutiny arrangements as appropriate, such as NHS, regional agencies

Executive Member

As a member of the decision-making Executive, an Executive Councillor will be responsible for making key decisions on a wide range of issues which affect and shape quality of life in the County. In particular they will:

- be a publicly recognisable and accountable 'key decision-maker' with whom the 'buck stops' for Council performance;
- collectively provide strong and fair executive leadership and clear political guidance to other Councillors and Officers;
- develop with partners a clear vision for what County Durham needs and develop policies and take decisions which respond to local peoples' needs and aspirations;
- take tough and strategically driven decisions on competing priorities;
- champion the vision and interests of the council and the County on the regional and national stage;
- be instrumental in building and nurturing local and thematic partnerships, leading and integrating the County Durham Strategic Partnership and Council Plan Executive Board and related thematic partnerships;
- provide leadership and direction within the Council for designated portfolio areas;
- hold senior officers within the Council to account for the performance of services, allowing performance to be assessed from the perspective of customers and citizens;
- develop the financial and investment strategies to fulfil the Council's commitments to the sustainable community strategy for the County, working with partners in the public, business, voluntary and community sectors;
- ensure that there is proper support for Frontline Councillors in their various roles, responding to them when they raise issues and ensuring that their local knowledge is brought to bear when developing policy

Executive Support Member

General

The role of Executive Support Member is specifically recognised in the statutory guidance issued by the Government under the Local Government Act 2000 (as amended) for local authority executive arrangements. That guidance suggests that such a role might help provide an effective link between the Executive and other Members and also an effective developmental role for the Members involved.

Specific Responsibilities

- To support the Executive as a whole or an individual Executive Member with his or her portfolio workload, including attending/chairing relevant internal meetings, reading and commenting on papers, research, liaison with relevant service officers, drafting press releases/comment, carrying out interviews and representing the Council on appropriate external groups/meetings.
- To provide a point of liaison between the Executive Member and other Members of the Council
- To lead on specific tasks/projects/reviews
- To attend and speak at Executive meetings (but not to vote or be a substitute or representative of the Executive Member) when their area of responsibility is under consideration
- To contribute to the content of an Executive Member report/response to Scrutiny or the Council
- To attend and speak at Scrutiny meetings with Executive Member or in his or her absence

Chairman of Council

The Chairman of the Council will:

- provide strong, fair and visible civic and ceremonial leadership to the Council and in relation to citizens, stakeholders and partners.
- attend or be represented at such civic and ceremonial functions as the Council or he/she determines appropriate.
- be an ambassador for the Council and the County, both at home and abroad
- promote public involvement in the Council's activities.
- uphold and promote the Council's Constitution and interpret the Constitution when necessary.
- preside over meetings of the Council so that its business can be carried out efficiently and with regard to the rights of Councillors and the interests of the community.
- request such additional meetings of the Council as may be considered necessary or appropriate.
- ensure the Council meeting is a forum for the debate of matters of concern to the local community and a place at which Members who are not on the Executive can hold the Executive to account.
- be consulted on any matter in relation to which consultation with the Chairman of the Council is required under the Constitution.
- determine any matter referred to him/her under the urgency provisions of the Access to Information Procedure Rules or the Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules in the Council's Constitution.

Vice-Chairman of Council

The Vice-Chairman of the Council will:

- undertake a full deputising role in the absence of the Chairman
- undertake specific tasks and responsibilities as requested by the Chairman
- share and support in general the full workload range of the Chairman
- (The Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Council will carry out their role in accordance with the Protocol)

Leader of the Council

The Leader of the Council will:

- provide strong, fair and visible political leadership and direction to the Council and in relation to citizens, stakeholders and partners in the co-ordination of Council policies, strategies and service delivery.
- lead the Council's efforts to achieve its Mission for County Durham.
- lead in promoting the aims and core values of the Council.
- lead the development of local, regional, national and European policy and strategic partnerships.
- assume overall responsibility for guiding the development and formulation of corporate priorities and strategic policy direction and for presenting those policies to the Council and the wider community, acting as the principal political spokesperson on corporate and strategic issues.
- provide political guidance to the Chief Executive and the Corporate Management Team on the implementation of the Council's priorities and objectives and revenue and capital budgets.
- appoint the Deputy Leader of the Council and other Executive Councillors to form a Cabinet.
- chair and manage the business/work programme of the Cabinet, ensure a coordinated and coherent approach is taken to policy development and the delivery of services and also where relevant, and taking into account any advice from the Chief Executive, the Council's Monitoring Officer or Chief Finance Officer, ensure that proposals are made to the County Council for decision within appropriate timescales, and in accordance with the Budget and Policy Framework of the Council and all legislative and procedural requirements.
- determine the frequency and timing of meetings of the Cabinet and placing items on its agenda as he/she thinks appropriate.
- ensure the development of effective corporate policies reflecting the Council's commitment to continuous improvement and co-ordinate the work of the Cabinet in:
 - developing corporate policies and programmes;
 - delivering high quality services to the people of County Durham;
 - monitoring performance;

- preparing and monitoring revenue and capital budgets;
- reviewing the effectiveness of the Council's organisation and management process;
- developing policies to promote the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of the County.
- delegate executive functions to any individual member of the Cabinet and establish protocols for consultation between Cabinet Members and Officers in such circumstances.
- ensure that decisions are taken properly, openly and, where appropriate, publicly and that key decisions are properly programmed and subject to effective public consultation.
- involve local people and communities in the business and activities of the Council as fully as possible.
- encourage scrutiny of the Council's policies and service delivery and the input to policy by all Councillors.
- ensure that Members are treated responsibly and responsively in representing their constituents.
- maintain and promote the highest standards of conduct in the Council's affairs and in the appointment of its staff.
- chair the Chief Officer Appointments Committee
- be consulted on any matter in relation to which consultation with the Leader is required under the Constitution.
- represent the Council at all levels, liaise with government and other relevant agencies where appropriate and act as the principal ambassador for the County Council in advocating and explaining its roles and functions and promoting it as a listening and accessible organisation.
- consider learning and development needs of all Members and arrange suitable briefing and learning opportunities to take place through appropriate mechanisms.

Deputy Leader of the Council

The Deputy Leader of the Council will:

- undertake a full deputising role in the absence of the Leader.
- undertake portfolio responsibilities of an Executive Councillor as determined by the Leader.
- undertake specific tasks and responsibilities as requested by the Leader.
- work actively with the Leader to co-ordinate the work of the Executive.
- share and support in general the full workload range of the Leader.

Chairman of a Committee

Committee Chairmen will:

- provide leadership and direction for the Committee.
- chair and manage the business of the Committee, ensuring effective engagement by all Committee Members.
- request such additional meetings of the Committee as may be considered necessary or appropriate.
- promote the role of the Committee both within and outside the Council.
- represent the Council and the Committee on relevant external bodies as required.
- guide Members through those functions delegated by the Council to the Committee.
- be consulted on matters of business between meetings.
- ensure that the Committee takes balanced decisions based on all relevant evidence, always with impartiality and fairness.
- ensure, where appropriate, that there is full consultation with and participation by all interested parties on issues to be considered by the Committee.
- ensure that Committee decisions are properly recorded with full justifications.
- liaise and consult with relevant officers wherever appropriate.
- consider learning and development needs of Members and arrange suitable briefing and learning opportunities to take place through appropriate mechanisms.

Vice-Chairman of a Committee

Committee Vice-Chairmen will:

- provide a full deputising role in the absence of the Chairman.
- undertake specific tasks and responsibilities as requested by the Chairman.
- share and support in general the full workload range of the Chairman.
- work actively with the Chairman to co-ordinate the work of the Committee.

Opposition Group Leader

The Leader of an Opposition Group will:

- provide strong, fair and visible leadership and direction to the Group within the Council;
- act as a spokesperson for the Group and as a representative of the Council to external bodies and organisations as appropriate;
- represent the interests of the Group in any discussions with the Leader of the Council, other Group Leaders, other Senior Members of the Council or Senior Officers;
- be responsible for the appointment of Group Members to seats on Council Bodies in accordance with the Council's political balance apportionments;
- comment on, challenge and review the Majority Group's performance in the coordination and implementation of its policies and procedures;
- be the Group's principal consultee on Council business in general and establish and represent the views of the Group on issues of policy and probity;
- with other Group Leaders, work with the Chief Executive and Corporate Directors on relevant corporate matters; and
- support the learning and development needs of all Members of the Group.

Corporate Parenting Panel Members

- to understand, accept and carry out the function of the Corporate Parent as outlined in the DfES guidance “if this were my child”. Specifically:-
- Accept responsibility for children in the care of Durham County Council.
- Make their needs a priority.
- Seek for them same outcomes any good parent would want for their own children.
- to ask appropriate questions to seek reassurance about the safety and wellbeing of such children.
- to ask questions about how well the County looks after these children through membership of formal systems such as Fostering and Adoption Panels.
- to work with officers in assessing the quality of care provided through processes such as Regulation 44 visits alongside independent officers.
- to assess the effectiveness of service delivery through receiving regular reports about a range of provisions as set out in the Corporate Parenting Panel’s Annual Business Plan.
- to promote the role of Corporate Parent amongst other Councillors.
- to raise any concerns about the safety and wellbeing of young people for whom there is a Corporate Parenting responsibility with appropriate officers and/or Chair of Corporate Parenting Panel.
- to work with relevant officers and members in ensuring the effective delivery of the Corporate Parenting Panel business.

Non-Elected Members

A number of Council Bodies have various Non-Elected Members, both with and without voting rights. A brief description of their roles is set out below:

Audit Committee

To help the Audit Committee meet its responsibilities to advise the Council and the Executive on audit, governance and final accounts issues and provide independent assurance over the adequacy of the Council's risk management framework and the associated control environment, the Council appoints Non-Voting Co-opted Members.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Voting Co-opted Members of Overview and Scrutiny (Education Issues) are appointed to represent Church and Parent Governor interests.

Non-Voting Co-opted Members of Overview and Scrutiny are appointed from a variety of backgrounds to bring an external view to work and represent the views of residents of the County.

Pension Fund Committee

Voting Non-Elected Members are appointed to the Committee to represent the interests of other Statutory and Admitted Bodies who contribute to the Pension Fund as well as the interests of both current and retired employees.

Standards Committee

Co-optees from the Parish Councils are appointed to the Committee, to represent the interest of Parish Councils.