



GILLINGHAM TOWN COUNCIL

The Town Hall, School Road, Gillingham, Dorset SP8 4QR

MAYOR'S HANDBOOK

1. INTRODUCTION

Congratulations on being elected Mayor of Gillingham Town Council. You are looking at a busy year ahead and will be expected to represent the Council at various events and locations. Your calendar will be filled with civic engagements and council meetings, and you will meet many people and build strong relationships which will benefit the Council as a whole.

This handbook has been produced as a guide for you, explaining civic life and the various engagements which are likely to be attended. It will also assist you in understanding your new role and responsibilities.

2. THE HISTORY OF THE MAYOR OF GILLINGHAM

There has been a Mayor of Gillingham since 1973, when the Parish Council was reorganised to become a Town Council (before this time the parish council had a Chairman not a Mayor).

The first ever Mayor of Gillingham was Cllr Stewart Hiscock in 1973. A list of past Mayors can be found on the mayoral boards hanging in the Civic Hall, and on the links of the Mayoral chain.

3. THE ROLE OF THE MAYOR

3.1 The Importance and Role of The Mayor Today

The power of the Mayor has undoubtedly reduced throughout the centuries, but the Office continues to have a central part to play in modern Local Councils and modern society, and part of this role is as a result of the traditions it inherits.

The Mayor serves as a representative of the town and its residents, holding a position of respect. They preside over Full Council Meetings and are expected to remain impartial in fulfilling their duties. In conducting formal council meetings, the Mayor must ensure fairness and uphold the integrity of the proceedings.

The Mayor can use their role to inspire community pride, support local businesses, promote the voluntary sector, and strengthen social cohesion. They should uphold the dignity of the office while ensuring it remains accessible to the public, enhancing the Council's reputation. Additionally, the Mayor should actively engage in the Council's initiatives, advocating for its values, objectives, and vision.

The Mayor can clearly be a symbol of the Authority, identifiable by Robes and Chains of Office. The Mayor connects the present day with the history, customs and traditions of the area and acts as a symbol of continuity.

The modern role of the Mayor symbolises an inclusive and open society. Unlike in previous centuries, when the selection of a Mayor was limited to a privileged few, today the position is accessible to individuals of all backgrounds, regardless of class, gender, or ethnicity. This reflects the democratic values and diversity of contemporary society.

The many social engagements that are undertaken by a Mayor are an expression of giving cohesion to the life of the town. They can act as a link between the various organisations they visit and can feed back the views and concerns of the people.

3.2 Ceremonial Role of The Mayor

- To be the representative for the Town Council, the community and local democracy and to work to ensure that the dignity and impartiality of the Office of Mayor is upheld.
- To promote the Council's policies and good name at home and elsewhere.
- To host all the Council's civic events.
- To act as the Council's ambassador in promoting the town.
- To attend other events within the Town Council's area, often associated with charitable and voluntary organisations, affording them due recognition for their valuable contributions to the wellbeing of the local community.

3.3 Civic Role of The Mayor as Chairman of The Council

- To uphold and promote the Council's standing orders and governance documents when chairing Full Council meetings.
- To preside over meetings of the Full Council so that its business can be carried out efficiently and observing the rights of councillors and in the interest of the community.
- To promote public involvement in the Council's activities.
- To uphold the integrity and ethical standards of the Council.
- To call extra meetings of Council, if necessary, subject to proper procedures being followed as defined in the Council's Standing Orders.

3.4 Mayor's Role in the Chairing of Meetings

Before assuming office, it is recommended that individuals undertake training in chairing skills, although any prior experience and abilities will be taken into account.

As Chairman, the Mayor is responsible for ensuring the proper conduct of meetings and may exercise a second or casting vote in the event of a tie. Beyond this, they have the same rights as other Councillors in decision-making.

The Chairman's authority extends to ensuring that the business conducted is lawful and that meetings are run in an orderly and professional manner. Their powers regarding meeting conduct and procedures are set out in the Council's Standing Orders.

Both Councillors and members of the public in attendance must respect and comply with the Chairman's rulings.

A Chairman is required to:

- Ensure that all motions on the agenda are lawful and within the scope of the meeting.
- Oversee the approval of the minutes from the previous meeting.
- Regulate and maintain order during the meeting.
- Introduce agenda motions and ensure they are properly moved and debated.
- Put motions to a vote and, if necessary, use their casting vote.
- Announce the outcome of votes Manage discussions and debates to ensure fair participation.
- Adjourn the meeting when required.
- Formally close the meeting once all business is concluded.

This framework ensures that meetings are conducted efficiently, lawfully, and with due respect for the democratic process.

3.5 The Mayor's responsibility to the Town Council

The Mayor represents the town of Gillingham at all times, not just during civic engagements or council meetings. As a public figure, they may be recognised and approached by members of the community at any time.

The Mayor's attire and behaviour are key in shaping public perception. Your actions, dress, and conduct should always reflect the dignity of the office and uphold the reputation of the Town Council.

3.6 Mayor's Consort

If the Mayor chooses to appoint a consort, the role may be undertaken by a spouse, partner, friend or relative and is accorded precedence alongside the Mayor.

The Consort is generally expected to:

- Provide personal support to the Mayor.
- Accompany the Mayor on official engagements.
- Observe civic protocol and etiquette (including dress code).
- Assist with the Mayor's charitable activities.

In carrying out their roles, the Mayor, Deputy Mayor, and Consort should consider the public nature of their office and not bring the Council into disrepute. They should follow the advice and guidance issued by the Mayor's Office.

If the Consort is unable to attend an engagement, the Mayor may choose to attend alone or be accompanied by another person. This person should be informed of their responsibilities and etiquette before the event.

4. THE ROLE OF THE DEPUTY MAYOR

There are two elements to the role of Deputy Mayor:

- To deputise for the Mayor at their request when the Mayor is unable to fulfil an engagement.
- To support the Mayor at major civic events organised by the Council.

The Deputy Mayor and their Consort will be invited to attend all annual civic functions in Gillingham. Robes and the badge of office should be worn as appropriate.

The Deputy Mayor will deputise for the Mayor at functions they are unable to attend. Invitations to events that the Mayor is unable to attend will be passed to the Deputy Mayor at the discretion of the Mayor, via the Mayor's Secretary.

The Deputy Mayor will also deputise at Full Council if the Mayor is unable to attend. The Deputy Mayor sits on the top table with the Mayor at Full Council.

5. THE FORM OF ADDRESS OF THE MAYOR

The Mayor of Gillingham, Councillor (**Name**)

6. PHOTOGRAPHY

The Mayor, Mayor's Consort, Deputy Mayor and Deputy Mayor's Consort accept that it is highly likely photographs will be taken at public and civic events throughout the year and used for publicity with or without consent.

7. INVITATIONS

All who seek the Mayor's presence at their events must be referred to the Mayor's Secretary, including those that arise internally from officers or councillors.

Occasionally the Mayor will be approached in person, by letter/email, over the phone, by representatives of a charity or an organisation asking them to attend a function. In this instance it is recommended to refer the person to the Mayor's Secretary who can advise on the availability of the Mayor, inform the charity/organisation of the proper procedures and send out the function questionnaire form for completion. The questionnaire helps the Mayor to prepare a speech and to know what is expected in advance of their visit. In the absence of the Mayor's Secretary, another member of staff will be allocated to assist the Mayor and deal with correspondence.

Invitations for Gillingham events and engagements always take precedence over engagements outside Gillingham's boundary. An engagement, once accepted, should not be cancelled except for most important reasons and under no circumstances swapped for a later invitation that is received and is more appealing. The organiser of each event sees theirs as being the most important and this must be remembered. The Mayor should attend punctually (but not too early) and be ready to take their place at the appointed time, complete with chains and robes if requested.

If the invitation includes an escort, the Mayor or Deputy Mayor must only take **one** person to the event unless the invitation is for Mayor / Deputy and family.

8. MAYOR'S CIVIC STAFF

8.1 Role of Mayor's Secretary

- Maintaining the Mayor's diary and responding to invitations.
- Organising Civic Functions.
- General administrative support to the Mayor.

It is advised that the Mayor and Mayor's Secretary meet once a week to discuss mayoral matters. The Mayor's Secretary is available for Civic Support between 9am and 1pm Monday to Friday and at Annual Civic Events - please do not contact the Mayor's Secretary outside of these hours.

9. CLOTHING AND ROBES

The Mayor is expected to be well dressed and presentable at all events, engagements and Council meetings. They may choose to wear their robe during Full Council meetings. The Mayor should not wear their robes to civic occasions or other events unless formally requested to do so. The Mayor and Deputy Mayor's robes are stored at Gillingham Town Hall.

10. CHAINS AND BADGES

10.1 Wearing the Chains of Office

The mayoral chains are a visual representation of the authority and responsibilities of the sitting mayor.

The Mayor should not wear the Chain of Office outside the Gillingham parish boundary without the express permission of the civic body for that parish being visited.

The mayoral chain should be worn during Full Council meetings and to civic occasions in Gillingham. It may be worn at other events if requested and an official invitation has been received. Civic invitations usually include details of what should be worn to the event.

The mayoral chain or badge of office **must not** be worn to events if the Mayor has not received an official invitation.

The Badge of Office is normally worn when attending less formal social occasions or when invited as a guest outside of Gillingham, unless permission to wear the chain of office has been granted.

The mayoral chain has been in use since 1974. During a Mayor's year in office their name will be engraved on one of the shields on the chain. These shields run in date order.

The Chain of Office can be quite heavy, so it is advisable to attach Velcro or fabric loops to jackets that are frequently worn. This will help distribute the weight more evenly and prevent potential damage to clothing.

10.2 Safe Custody Guidelines

The Council has agreed a set of guidelines for the custody and safekeeping of the Civic Regalia.

Responsibilities

The Council will:

- Maintain insurance cover for all civic regalia.
- Be responsible for the maintenance of the regalia, including any damage or wear and tear.

The Mayor and Deputy Mayor will:

- Ensure the regalia is not left in an unattended vehicle unless all the doors, windows and other means of access have been secured and locked, all keys of the vehicle removed to a place of safety and the regalia is placed in the boot or out of sight.
- Ensure the regalia, unless being worn, is kept in the case provided by the Council. A jewellery roll should only be used when storing the regalia in a home safe or on the way to/from a function.
- Ensure that, if the regalia is not required over a period of two weeks, it is returned to the Town Hall for safekeeping.
- Return the regalia to the Town Hall during any holiday periods or when it is likely that the member will be away from home.
- Not attempt to clean the regalia other than with a soft cloth. Any damage or wear and tear should be reported to the Mayor's Secretary as soon as possible.
- Not loan the regalia or place in the custody of any other person other than the Town Clerk or Mayor's Secretary.
- Inform the Town Clerk immediately if their Chains of Office are lost, mislaid, stolen or otherwise missing, in order that the Council's insurers can be informed.

10.3 Avoiding Misrepresentation

To avoid misrepresentation and to protect the integrity of the Town Council, it is **not** permissible for councillors to use photos of themselves in robes or chains of office as their social media profile pictures.

The robes and chains of office represent the council, not the individual wearing them or their personal achievement. Such imagery might give the impression that the councillor is speaking or acting in an active and official capacity on social media, even when expressing personal views.

If Mayors or past Mayors wish to share moments from their ceremonial duties, they can do so in posts or updates with appropriate context, rather than as a profile image.

11. FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS

11.1 Civic Responsibilities Budget

The Civic Responsibilities budget should be used by the Mayor and Deputy Mayor for the following expenditure:

- travel expenses to events outside the Gillingham parish.
- ticket purchase to events where an invitation has been received and they are required to pay for their own meal.
- flower bouquets e.g. Golden Wedding Anniversary, 100th birthday.
- gifts presented on behalf of The Town Council.
- the Mayor's Christmas cards.
- engraving and maintenance of the chain of office.
- purchase of Past Mayor's and Freeman Badges, and
- any events that the Mayor holds on behalf of the council, e.g. the Mayor Making ceremony, Civic Day, Civic Carol Service or Freedom events.

Expenditure should be in accordance with the Council's Financial Regulations and Mayor's Allowance Policy.

11.2 Mayor's Christmas Card

The Mayor may send out a formal Christmas Card. It is recommended that, where possible, this should be an e-card and sent in line with the Council's Climate Change and Carbon Management Policy. Any cost of providing the cards will be met by the Civic Responsibilities budget. The Mayor will discuss the design of the card with the Mayor's Secretary.

11.3 Gifts

The Mayor is sometimes required to present gifts, such as flowers for Golden Wedding Anniversaries. The Mayor will be informed of these occasions in advance. A gift will be purchased with funds from the Civic Responsibilities budget.

Minor tokens of goodwill or flowers can be accepted as personal gifts. The Code of Conduct states: "Councillors must register with the Monitoring Officer any gift or hospitality with an estimated value of at least £50 within 28 days of its receipt."

12. ELECTION OF MAYOR AND DEPUTY MAYOR

The procedure for the election of Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Gillingham for Years 2, 3, 4 and 5 are as follows:

- Nominations for the forthcoming year will be submitted to the Town Clerk by the 3rd Monday in March. Approved nominations will then be presented to the Full Council meeting in March when a ballot and resolution will take place. If a nominated councillor is unable to attend this meeting, a signed declaration form must be submitted confirming that they are willing to stand.

- The new Mayor officially takes office at Annual Council in May where they must sign the Declaration of Acceptance of Office.

Please note: In year one there is a different procedure due to council elections. Please contact the Town Clerk for more details.

13. ANNUAL CIVIC FUNCTIONS

There are several principal annual civic functions which the Mayor is expected to take part in as listed below in proceeding order.

13.1 Mayor Making Ceremony

The Mayor Making ceremony takes place in the Civic Hall on the first Wednesday evening following the Annual Council Meeting in May. However, in an election year, it will be held on the second Wednesday after the Annual Council Meeting.

Following the ceremony, a reception may be held in the Council Chamber. The Mayor-elect should provide the Mayor's Secretary with a list of guests they wish to invite once elected. As space is limited, the guest list should be discussed and agreed upon with the Mayor's Secretary. Food and drink of the Mayor's choice will be provided at the reception.

13.2 Carnival

The Mayor may be invited to lead the Children's Afternoon Carnival procession and may be driven in the evening procession. The carnival is organised by the Carnival Committee not the Town Council.

13.3 Remembrance Sunday

The Mayor leads the procession through the town and lays a wreath at the War Memorial. The Deputy Mayor and the Town Clerk accompany the Mayor. All councillors are also asked to take part in the parade. The Mayor and Deputy Mayor's consorts do not join the parade but may join them at the church. The Royal British Legion, in partnership with the Council, is responsible for organising this event.

13.4 Town Christmas Carol Service

The Town's Christmas Carol Service takes place at The Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin on the last Sunday before Christmas and is jointly organised by the Town Council and the Parish Church. The Mayor and other dignitaries are usually invited to do a reading.

Invitations are extended to surrounding Town and Parish Mayors/Chairs, Councillors, Freeman of the Town, and the local MP. The Mayor may also wish to formally invite other key members of the Town.

The Mayor welcomes invited dignitaries and residents upon arrival at the Church. After the service, a reception is held in the Vicarage Schoolroom, where wine and soft drinks are provided by the Town Council, and mince pies are supplied by the Church.

13.5 Line Ups

The following are the recommended positions for civic processions:

- Lord-Lieutenant – should accompany the Mayor.
- The Mayor and Consort.
- High Sheriff.
- Deputy Mayor and Deputy Consort.
- Chairman of Dorset Council.
- Member of Parliament.
- Town Councillors.
- Any other Mayors / Chairmen.
- Honorary Freeman.

For civic ceremonial parades, it is recommended that spouses of Council members do not participate in the procession. Instead, they should proceed directly to the Church to await the arrival of the procession.

13.6 Annual Civic Day

The Annual Civic Day can take place at any time during the Mayoral year and serves as an opportunity to showcase the highlights of Gillingham, promote civic pride, and strengthen inter-town relationships. It is at the Mayor's discretion whether to host a Civic Day.

The event can be held during the day or evening and may include activities such as visits to local businesses and points of interest, a lunch, a local talk, a walkabout, or a church service - the itinerary is entirely up to the Mayor.

As the biggest event in the Mayor's diary, a significant portion of the budget is usually allocated to it, though this is not always the case. Advance planning is essential to secure bookings and ensure a well-organised event.

A 'save the date' notice is typically sent out months in advance, followed by a formal invitation closer to the date. This invitation includes full details of the day's itinerary, a menu, a map, and RSVP instructions.

On the day, the Mayor leads the event, with the Mayor's Secretary on hand to assist with coordination and ensure everything runs smoothly.

14. OTHER CIVIC ENGAGEMENTS

Visits from Schools and local organisations

The Mayor may be happy to receive groups of young people from schools or groups, e.g. Scouts, at the Town Hall. This provides an excellent opportunity to inform them of the role of the Mayor, the Town Council and democracy as well as listening to their concerns and ideas.

15. SPEECHES

The Mayor should write their own speeches. If they feel they are lacking in background information for an engagement, they should ask the Mayor's Secretary to contact the organisation for further details.

15.1 Being Prepared to Speak

The Mayor should read all the information provided prior to attending an appointment and make sure they are fully prepared. Sometimes the Mayor is asked to speak without notice.

15.2 Making a Speech

Be prepared to speak with little notice - prepare a standard short speech that can be used at any function that could include:

- I thank you for this kind invitation.
- There has always been a high rapport between your organisation and the Council, and long may it continue.

15.3 When Speaking

- Look pleased about having to speak and remember the points made earlier about representing the Town Council.
- Do not partake in a large quantity of alcohol (keep a clear head).
- Speak clearly and slowly.
- Smile when speaking.
- Be enthusiastic.
- Look at your audience.

16. FUNDRAISING

The Mayor may wish to adopt a charity for the Mayoral Year.

It must be stressed that such an undertaking is secondary to the function of the Mayor and therefore the setting of fundraising targets is to be avoided. This is because the use of a monetary target can lead to the Mayor's charity becoming almost an overriding preoccupation of the Mayoral Year, which can detract from the role as well as requiring significant administrative support.

It is expected that any funds raised shall benefit local people. Therefore, if a national charity is chosen, there must be a local branch that will directly benefit. At the end of each Mayoral year, all the funds are paid to the chosen charity/charities.

It is the Mayor's responsibility to lead in any fundraising initiative. Proper arrangements need to be made for issuing acknowledgements, recording and banking the receipts - preferably with the help of the Responsible Financial Officer. The Town Clerk should be consulted at an early stage and before the Mayor becomes committed to a charity appeal.

When choosing a charity, the Mayor should bear in mind that practical help is needed for running events of any description as well as promoting and selling tickets. Find out if the charity is willing to provide practical help. Donations to the Mayor's adopted charities should be paid into a Charity Fund account. The Mayor reports the success of any charity appeal to the Annual Council Meeting and makes a presentation to the charity just prior to the end of the term of office.

The primary role of the Mayor's Secretary is to ensure the smooth running of the civic events and office of the Mayor - they are unable to assist at charity events. Staff will attempt to support the Mayor, but thought must be given as to how the Mayor can organise these events without assuming that the office will be able to staff and organise it. The Mayor's Secretary can only assist if it does not impede their other duties.

It is expected that costs for fundraising events will be set against the funds raised. Council staff should not be approached to make financial contributions towards any mayoral charity fundraising event, neither should they be expected to volunteer their time outside of working hours.

It is advised that dates for charity events are discussed and set well in advance of the event.

17. PRE-ELECTION PERIOD

Special conditions apply to the issue of publicity in the period leading up to elections.

During the period leading up to an election, the Council must take special care not to issue any publicity that might conceivably be perceived as having the potential to influence the outcome of the poll. This period is a minimum of six weeks before the election date.

The Mayor must ensure the dates of major civic events are arranged to ensure there is no conflict with the pre-election period.

Details can be found in the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity (2011) and the Local Government Act 1986 Section 2 and Section 4.

18. REVIEW

The Mayor's Handbook was reviewed by the Finance and Policy meeting held on 17 February 2025 minute no. 112b and ratified by Full Council on 24th February 2025,

Future reviews will be carried out annually.

Signed:

Date:

(Mayor of Gillingham)