

Civic Protocol and Order of Precedence Guidance for Event Organisers

When arranging any Durham County Council event the Civic Office should be contacted as early as possible regarding the involvement of the Chairman of Durham County Council at the event. (Telephone: 03000 267 202).

This guidance note on civic protocol is offered to organisers of events to which the Chairman of Durham County Council, possibly as one of a number of civic dignitaries, has been invited to attend. It is difficult for a single brief document to cover all eventualities and so, if in doubt, do please contact the Civic Office for advice.

The Committee, Member and Civic Services Manager (Telephone: 03000 269 708) and Direct Member Support Manager (Telephone: 03000 268 822) are also available to offer advice.

Events in County Durham including Royal Visits and events of a Regional, National and International significance.

The Chairman of Durham County Council shall have precedence in the County of Durham, but not so as to prejudicially affect Her Majesty's royal prerogative.

This means that, subject to the exception only of Her Majesty The Queen, any members of the Royal Family or HM Lord-Lieutenant of the County and the High Sheriff, when they are representing Her Majesty, at public, as opposed to private events, the Chairman of Durham County Council has absolute precedence over any other person in the County of Durham.

It is sometimes wrongly assumed that, for example, Mayors of Town Councils and Mayor of the Charter Trust take precedence over the Chairman. This is not the case.

Accordingly, at any function or event to which he/she is invited within the County of Durham, the Chairman of Durham County Council must be accorded absolute precedence.

The involvement of other Civic Dignitaries

When organising an event it will be appropriate to consider inviting the Leader of the County Council and a local County Councillor(s). Although there are no formal rules of precedence in these cases it should be remembered that the Leader of the County Council is the senior executive member of the County Council. This significant role should be borne in mind when considering roles, seating, speeches, table places and similar.

Events may also include the local Member of Parliament. In such cases organisers will want to recognise the importance of the office of MP. The office of the local MP should be contacted direct.

For events organised by parish/town councils and the Mayor of the City of Durham (or Charter Trust for the City of Durham), if the Chairman of the County Council is invited it is assumed that the Mayor will host the event and the Chairman will take precedence over other Civic Heads.

Processions

Advice is sometimes sought about the order for processions, when all or a number of Civic Heads are present. For all events, either organised by Durham County Council or County-Wide, the Chairman of the County Council will take precedence (see Appendix A as an example).

As far as other Civic Heads are concerned there is no precedence enshrined in any protocol, but it is recommended that a structured approach should be adopted. It is the case that once out of their area Civic Heads have no specific status, although those of Principal Councils are taken as being senior to those of Town and Parish Councils.

It is recommended that Chairmen and Mayors of Principal Councils be treated as equals and assembled in a logical order. An approach which is frequently used is to place Principal Councils in alphabetical order which can avoid many problems. The order can be alphabetically reversed when appropriate.

As previously stated the Lord-Lieutenant, if present, will take precedence over civic dignities and special consideration should be given to the position of the High Sheriff, Leader of the County Council and Member of Parliament.

It is established practice to adopt the last-in-first-out approach to ordering processions, with the Lord-Lieutenant entering last, at the rear of the procession.

When events are organised by a parish/town council or Charter Trust (i.e. where the Mayor or Chairman of the organising Body is host) the Chairman of Durham County Council will be treated as principal guest subject to the exception only of Her Majesty The Queen or her representatives. Further guidance can be sought from the Civic Office.

Advance Notice

In advance of the event the Civic Office should be provided with all the arrangements including whether the Chairman should wear the Chain of Office; the name of the person waiting to receive the Chairman; if he or she is required to make a speech; or required to make any presentations; if refreshments are provided. Further the likely duration of the event and at what time before the start of the event should the Chairman arrive? This information provides an indication of how much time the Chairman needs to allocate in his/her diary. The Civic Office will provide a short proforma in this respect to ensure the capture of the necessary information.

The Chairman receives many requests and, so as not to disappoint, will attempt to attend as many as possible.

Speeches

If you are arranging an event involving speeches you will need to consider who should say what, when. It is usual for the host to speak first and this is followed by the principal guest (e.g. the Chairman). It is always helpful to the Chairman to have background briefing notes and suggested points for the Chairman's speech, and this is arranged through the Civic Office when the invitation is received.

Announcements

An announcement is often made on formal occasions as a way of acknowledging the principal guests. The announcement would typically take account of the Lord-Lieutenant, Chairman and other civic dignities, the High Sheriff, the Bishop of Durham, and Members of Parliament, Lords and Ladies. The order taken for announcements will vary dependent upon where the event is being held and who is attending. The preamble should be short as possible but not so short that offence could be caused to an office holder who feels they should be acknowledged. Please seek advice from the Civic Office if you are in any doubt.

An example could be:

“My Lord-Lieutenant, Mrs Sue Snowden, Chairman of Durham County Council, The Right Worshipful the Mayor of the City of Durham, Members of Parliament, Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen, please.....”

Arrival arrangements

On arrival the Chairman (and the same applies to the Leader of the County Council and other principal guests) should be greeted by the host or if this is not possible, by his or her representative. It is good practice to allocate someone to accompany the Chairman throughout the visit if the event host is otherwise engaged. Where there are a number of principal guests the hosting arrangements need to be carefully considered. Particular provision for car parking will also be addressed.

Seating

The notes relating to processional arrangements apply equally to seating, where care needs to be taken to ensure that guests are seated in accordance with established protocol and a logical structure.

If the event is a dinner, then the Chairman (or Lord-Lieutenant if present), would sit on the right of the host.

For further advice or information please contact:

Civic Office
Durham County Council
County Hall
Durham
Tel: 03000 267 202
Email: memberssupportoffice@durham.gov.uk

Appendix A

Durham Cathedral Services

When others Civic Guests are seated the order of procession to be seated will be as follows:

The Bodyguard will escort the Mayor of the City of Durham and or Charter Trust to their seats

Followed by the Chairman of Durham County Council

Lastly the Lord Lieutenant

After the Service

The Lord Lieutenant will be escorted first

Followed by the Chairman of Durham County Council

Followed by the Mayor and Charter Trustees for the City of Durham

Exceptions previously agreed – For the Mayor’s evensong and Founders and Benefactors Services the Mayor acts as a host and will invite the Chairman of the Council to join him/her to process from the Cathedral.

Mayoral Processions through the Town

The Body Guard will lead the Mayor and Mayoral procession through the streets. It is suggested that the Mayor invite the Lord Lieutenant and Chairman of Durham County Council to walk with him/her in the procession.

Church Services

When others Civic Guests are seated the order of procession to be seated will be as follows:

Mayor or Chairman of the Host Council to their seats

Followed by the Chairman of Durham County Council

Lastly the Lord Lieutenant

After the Service

The Lord Lieutenant will be escorted first

Followed by the Chairman of Durham County Council

Followed by the Mayor or Chairman of the Host Council

Mayoral Processions through the Town

The Body Guard will lead the Mayor and Mayoral procession through the streets. It is suggested that the Mayor invite the Lord Lieutenant and Chairman of Durham County Council to walk with him/her in the procession.