

Restrictions on hiring North Tyneside Council meeting rooms and facilities for political purposes

The Council is prohibited by law from allowing its resources, including its buildings and other premises, facilities and equipment, to be used for party political purposes. This includes party political publicity.

This does not prevent the use of Council resources for council or electoral ward business. Elected councillors can use committee rooms and other rooms to help them carry out their duties (for example, to hold meetings with constituents) when they are available

There is an exception to this principle during election periods where candidates may use publicly-funded meeting rooms (as well as school premises) for the purpose of holding public meetings to promote their candidacy.

The Council has a number of rooms and facilities available to hire. The Council, as a public authority, is aware of the need to enable and support the principle of freedom of expression and aims to allow the widest possible use of its premises.

All booking forms should require information on the activity to be carried out and specify clearly that the premises cannot be used for party political purposes. Full details of the nature and purpose of a booking, and whether the meeting or event in question is private or open to the public, will be sought in the booking form

Council staff who receive requests for room or venue bookings will determine whether or not a booking request is acceptable. To assist in this determination staff will have reference to the following key principles:

- Council premises may not be used for public meetings associated with any political party, or for electioneering or political campaign purposes (other than by a candidate in the pre-election period to promote their candidacy).
- Council premises which are available for paid hire may be hired by members of the public, elected councillors, groups and others, for any reasonable purpose, subject to compliance with the Authority's current conditions of hire. This could include use for private political group or constituency meetings.
- Elected councillors are entitled to use the Council's premises at Quadrant (including the Group Rooms) or other Council premises (subject to availability) free of charge for the purpose of carrying out Council business. Council business includes holding ward surgeries and other ward-related business, including public meetings on specific ward matters.
- Elected councillors may also meet with their party political groups to deal with Council business; this is accepted as part of the democratic process. Meeting rooms in Quadrant and other Council premises may therefore (subject to availability) be used by the political groups free of charge for that purpose.
- The Authority will in all cases reserve the right to refuse use of its premises, whether for paid hire or otherwise, to any group or individual where it is to be used for a purpose which could be unlawful, or which in the Authority's opinion might result in it

contravening its duties in relation to civil liberties, equality, human rights, or might lead to a breach of the peace or public disorder.

- The principles above are subject to any restriction on use imposed by any condition of grant funding applicable to such venues.

If in doubt regarding the application of these principles, Council staff should seek guidance from their managers, who may in turn seek legal advice from the Council's Head of Law.