



## PROTOCOL ON OFFICER AND MEMBER RELATIONSHIPS

Reviewed and updated February 2016

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this protocol is to guide members and officers of the Council in their relationships with one another. It is not intended to be prescriptive or comprehensive and seeks simply to offer guidance on some of the issues which most commonly arise.
- 1.2 The protocol seeks to reflect the principles underlying the respective Codes of Conduct, which apply to members and officers and should be read in association with those Codes. The shared objective of the Codes is to enhance and maintain the integrity of local government.

### 2. Personal Relationships

- 2.1 Guidance on personal relationships is contained within the Codes of Conduct.
- 2.2 Provided these guidelines are observed there is no reason why there should not be an informal atmosphere between members and officers outside formal meetings and events.
- 2.3 It is clearly important that there should be a close working relationship between Committee Chairmen and officers. However, such relationships should never be allowed to become so close, or appear to be so close, as to bring into question the individual's ability to deal impartially with others.

### 3. Members' Constituency Role and Individual Employees

- 3.1 A member may be asked for advice and support by an employee who is one of their Parishioners. Employees are entitled to seek such assistance in the same way as any other member of the public. However, members should be careful not to prejudice the

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Council's position in relation to disciplinary procedures or employment matters in respect of an employee. A member approached for help in such circumstances should first seek advice from the Town Clerk.

#### 4. Support Services to Members and Party Groups

- 4.1 Members are provided with ICT (information and communication technology) equipment and support services (e.g. stationary provision, typing, printing, photocopying etc.) to enable them to better perform their policy and constituency role as Councillors.
- 4.2 Members should not use - and officers should not provide - such equipment and support services in connection with party political or campaigning activity or for purposes not related to Council business except that:
- a. limited private photocopying may be undertaken provided it is at no cost to the Council.
  - b. IT equipment may be used for non-commercial purposes provided it does not cause a conflict with, or risk to, Council systems, nor increase the support required from officers.

#### 5. Officers and Whole Council

- 5.1 Whilst the Council has a Scheme of Delegation allowing the Town Clerk to make decisions and use resources without recourse to the Council, no member is to pressure the Town Clerk to use this delegated authority for their own purposes or particular areas of interest.
- 5.2 Officers are required at all times to serve the whole Council and will need to exercise judgement in fulfilling this obligation, whilst maintaining the distinction between executive and scrutiny. Members must recognise this obligation on officers.

#### 6. Officers and Committees

Reports to Committees will normally be produced by officers but there may be occasions when a member prepares a report. In either situation, the appropriate officer shall place on record his/her professional advice to the Committee and ensure that advice is considered when a decision is taken.

#### 7. Officers and Individual Members

- 7.1 Committee Chairman may request a private and confidential briefing from the Town

Clerk on matters of policy which have already been or may be discussed by the Council or within its decision-making or advisory process. All requests should be made to the Town Clerk. Briefings shall remain strictly confidential and are not to be shared with other members of the Council unless so permitted by the relevant member.

- 7.2 Individual members may request the Town Clerk to provide them with factual information. Such requests must be reasonable, and must recognise the need for officers to maintain the distinction between the executive and scrutiny processes. Members and Committee Chairman will, unless it is of a minor nature, be advised that the information has been given and, on request, will be supplied with a copy.
- 7.3 Any Council information provided to a member must only be used by the member for the purpose for which it was provided (i.e. in connection with the proper performance of the member's duties as a member of the Council). The point is emphasised in the Code of Conduct.

## 8. Officers and Non-Council Elected Representatives

Officers may be requested to meet with Councillors or Elected Representatives from other Councils or organisations to provide briefings and/or policy advice. A report of these meetings will be provided to the Council as soon as is practicable.

## 9. Media Relations

- 9.2 The Town Clerk and other officers will assist members in their media relations (on a confidential basis if requested).
- 9.3 Any officer assisting a member with media relations must act at all times in the interests of the whole council and in an impartial manner. Other than factual statements, members should not seek assistance from an officer with the preparation or issue of any media statement that will adversely affect the reputation of the Council.

## 10. Local Members

- 10.1 It is essential for the proper running of the Council that members should be fully informed about matters on which they may be required to make decisions or which affect their electoral divisions.
- 10.2 It is the duty of the Town Clerk to ensure that all relevant staff are aware of the requirement to keep local members informed and that the timing of such information allows members to contribute to those decisions. Members shall also be kept informed about matters affecting their Wards during the formative stages of policy development.

- 10.3 Issues may affect a single Ward but others may have a wider - even district wide impact, in which case numerous members will need to be kept informed.
- 10.4 Local members have an important role to play in representing the Council in their Wards; responding to the concerns of their Parishioners both in meetings with partners and serving on outside organisations.
- 10.5 Whenever a public meeting is organised by the Council to consider a local issue, all the members representing the Ward(s) affected should as a matter of course be invited to attend the meeting.
- 10.6 Similarly, whenever the Council undertakes any form of consultative exercise, the local member(s) should be notified at the outset of the exercise.

## 11. Member Training

- 11.1 Members are expected to embrace the principles of personal development and skill training and ensure they allocate time to participate in all the necessary training and personal development activities. This includes the necessary skills to take advantage of the ICT facilities made available to them.

## 12. Arbitration

- 12.1 When necessary, the Town Clerk will arbitrate on the interpretation of this Protocol following consultation with the monitoring officer.