

Appendix 13 - Member and Officer Relationships Protocol

1. Underlying Principles

The principles underlying this Protocol are as follows:

- There shall be mutual courtesy and respect between Members and Employees with regard to their respective roles as set out below.
- Members and Employees shall each carry out their respective duties in the best interests of the Council set out in this Constitution.

This Protocol applies to all dealings between Members and Employees and not just in formal meetings. In addition to this Protocol, Members and Employees are obliged to follow their respective Codes of Conduct.

2. The Role of Members

These include the following:

- Setting the strategic direction and priorities of the Council via the Council Plan and the policy framework.
- Develop and set policies to promote these priorities which will then be implemented by the Employees.
- Monitor how those policies are being implemented.
- Represent the views of their communities and ward constituents, and deal with individual casework.
- Respect the statutory roles of Executive Directors including the Head of Paid Service, the Director of Finance and ICT as Section 151 Officer, the Director of Legal & Democratic Services as the Monitoring Officer, and the significance to be attached to their advice.
- Consult with the communities they represent on the development of policy, national and other local initiatives.
- Consult with the Monitoring Officer and the Director of Finance and ICT about vires, maladministration, financial impropriety and probity. Also where they have any doubt as to whether the particular decisions were, or are likely to be, contrary to the policy framework, or contrary to, or not wholly in accordance with the budget and/or the law.
- Respect Employees' political impartiality.
- Promote, and themselves demonstrate, the highest standards of conduct and ethics.

Members must not insist that any Employee:

Protocol for Member/Employee Relations

- Change his or her professional advice.
- Take any action, or not take action that the Employee considers unlawful or illegal, or which would be likely to amount to maladministration.
- Act in a manner that could be perceived as party political

3. The Role of Employees

Employees:

- Should conscientiously implement the policies set by Members.
- Will ask for guidance on implementation of the policies set by Members if they are unclear about any aspect of those policies.
- Give such professional advice to Members as may be required of them from time to time.
- Carry out their delegated functions to the best of their ability and in the interests of the Council.
- Must remember that he or she is employed by the Council as a whole and not by any particular part of the Council and act accordingly.
- Are under a duty to help all Members and all parts of the Council equally.
- Should take all relevant matters into account when formulating advice to Members.
- Will provide, or arrange for, training and development to Members as may be required of them from time to time.
- Will respond to queries raised by Members in a timely manner.

Employees must not:

- Set policy other than for the smooth running of office procedures and processes and as may have been delegated under the Council's Constitution and Scheme of Delegations.
- Take any action, or not take action, which would be unlawful or illegal or which would be likely to amount to maladministration.

4. Relationship between Members and Employees

The relationship between Employees and Members should be characterised by mutual respect, which is essential to good local government. Members and officers should therefore have regard to the following:

- Close personal familiarity between individual Members and Employees can damage professional relationships and prove embarrassing to other Members and Employees. Situations should be avoided that could give rise to suspicion and any appearance of improper conduct. This includes excessive socialising between Members and Employees.
- Any close personal or family relationships (e.g. parent/child, spouse/partner) between Employees and Members should be disclosed to your Executive Director who will then decide how far this needs to be disclosed to others.
- Members should not raise matters relating to the conduct or capability of Employees either individually or collectively at meetings held in public/or in the Press. Employees have no means of responding to criticism like this in public. If Members feel they have not been treated with proper respect, courtesy or have any concern about the conduct or capability of an Employee they should raise the matter with the Strategic Director of the department concerned.

5. Relationship between the Leader, Chairman of the County Council, Members and Employees

The Leader, Chairman of the County Council and Committee Chairman shall be bound by the same provisions set out in paragraph 2 when acting as Leader/Chairman of the County Council or Committee Chairman, as they would be when acting as an ordinary Council Member.

6. Relationship between the Chairman of Improvement and Scrutiny Committees, Members of Improvement and Scrutiny Committees and Employees

The Chairmen and Members of the Council's Improvement and Scrutiny Committees and related bodies shall:

- Seek the advice of the Monitoring Officer where they consider there is doubt about the vires for a decision; or the Monitoring Officer and other appropriate Employees where they consider a decision of a Committee might be contrary to the policy framework.
- When considering calling Employees to give evidence the Improvement and Scrutiny Committees shall not normally, without the consent of the relevant Executive Director, request the attendance of a junior Employee, to ensure that more junior Employees are not put under undue pressure.
- When asking Employees to give evidence confine questions, so far as possible, to questions of fact and explanation relating to policies

and decisions. Employees may be asked to give a professional opinion, but Employees may not be expected to give a political view.

- Where they consider it appropriate, ask Employees to explain and justify advice given to Members prior to decisions being taken and justify decisions they themselves have taken under the Council's Constitution and their responses to consultations under the Scheme of Delegations.
- Not to question Employees in such a way as to either be in breach of the Council's Whistleblowing policy in relation to harassment, or deal with matters which are of a disciplinary nature.
- At all times, respect the political impartiality of the Employees.

7. Relationship between the Chairman and Members of Other Committees and Employees

This shall apply to all the Council's Committees and Joint Committees. The Chairman and Members of those Committees shall:

- Be bound by the same provisions set out in section 2 above when sitting as a Committee; and
- Give Employees the opportunity to present any report and give any advice they wish to present or give.

8. Employee Relationships with Party Groups

When dealing with the various party groups:

- Any request for advice to a political group or Member will be treated with strict confidence by the Employees concerned and will not be accessible by any other political group.
- Employees shall exercise care when giving briefings or commenting on the policies and actions of any of the Council's Committees or panels and maintain political impartiality at all times.

When acting in party groups, and dealing with Employees, Members shall:

- Recognise that attendance at Party Group meetings by Employees is not compulsory, but Party Groups may properly call upon Employees to support and contribute to such deliberations either by attendance or by preparing documentation for discussion by a group, subject to the availability of resources. **for Member/Employee Relations**
- Recognise that Party Groups are not empowered to make decisions on behalf of the Council and that any conclusions reached by such groups should not be actioned by Employees.
- Ensure they do not do anything that may compromise Employee impartiality.

- Ensure that confidential matters are not divulged to non-councillors.

9. Members in their Ward Role

When acting in their ward role, Members:

- Need to be mindful of their competing roles, i.e. acting for the Council and acting for constituents, and the possible conflicts of interest that can arise and the pressure this can bring on Employee time.
- Recognise the Employees' right to suggest that senior Employees, the Council or a Committee/Improvement and Scrutiny Committee should authorise additional work requested by individual Members.

10. Member Access to Documents and Information

Save as provided below every Member of a Committee, Improvement and Scrutiny Committee and/or Regulatory Committee of the Council has a right to inspect documents about the business of that Committee including Improvement and Scrutiny Committees as set out in the Access to Information Procedure Rules included within the Council's Constitution at Appendix 6.

A Member who is not a member of a specific Improvement and Scrutiny Committee/Committee or Regulatory Committee may have access to any documents of that part of the Council if:

- He or she satisfies the Council's Monitoring Officer, that he or she reasonably needs to see the documents to perform his or her duties; and
- The document or papers or information do not contain 'confidential' or 'exempt information'.

A Member should seek advice from the Monitoring Officer in circumstances where he or she wishes to inspect any document or have access to any information about a matter:

- In which he or she has a personal or prejudicial interest; or
- Where to do so would be in breach of the Data Protection Act 1998.

11. Non-Council Members on Council Bodies Protocol for Member/Employee Relations

This applies to all those people who are not elected Members of the Council, but who are Members (including Independent Members) of, or attend any of the Council's Committees or any other bodies.

This Protocol applies equally to such non-Council members on Council bodies, as it does to Council Members.

12. Press Releases

All Council press releases:

- Should be issued through the Council's Communications Team.
- Should be concerned with matters of policy.
- Should not contain anything of a political nature. In this respect special regard must be given to the relevant legislation concerning publicity issued by the Council, especially around election time.

13. Correspondence

All correspondence written on behalf of the Council must be written on the relevant headed paper.

When Members are writing in their capacity as a Member they must make it clear whether they are writing on behalf of the Council or as the ward Member.

Correspondence between individual Members and Employees should be treated as confidential unless the Member or Employee indicates otherwise.

All correspondence should normally be open to the inspection of the public. This does not apply to correspondence written in connection with legal proceedings, contractual matters or any other matter where papers can remain 'exempt' within the meaning of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, or if this would be in conflict with the Data Protection Act 2018.

14. Breach of the Protocol

Complaints of a breach of this Protocol by a Member may be referred to the relevant Leader and/or Chief Whip of the relevant Political Group or the Monitoring Officer, who shall consult with the Chairman of Governance and Ethics Committee and, if appropriate, refer the complainant to the Governance and Ethics Committee to be considered further.

Protocol for Member/Employee Relations

Complaints of a breach of this Protocol by an Employee may be referred to the relevant Executive Director, the Monitoring Officer or the Chief Financial Officer.

15. Further Advice

Any particular cases of difficulty or uncertainty under this Protocol should be raised with the Monitoring Officer who will advise how to proceed.