



RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN COUNCILLORS AND COUNCIL EMPLOYEES

Introduction

Mutual trust and respect between Councillors and Officers, is essential to ensure good governance and the effective running of a Council. To help ensure that relationships do not go awry, it is advisable to have a written protocol, which can cover:

- The respective roles and responsibilities of the Councillors and the Clerk, and any other staff employees
- Relationships between Councillors and Officers

The same fundamental principles apply regardless of the nature and size of the Council. This protocol has been written in a way that will be particularly relevant to larger Council's but personal relationships and personnel matters can be particularly problematic in smaller Councils where the Clerk may be the sole employee and means having an agreed protocol is very important.

MODEL PROTOCOL ON MEMBER/OFFICER RELATIONS

1. Background

- 1.1 This protocol is intended to assist Councillors and the Clerk, in approaching some of the sensitive circumstances which arise in a challenging working environment.
- 1.2 The reputation and integrity of the Council is significantly influenced by the effectiveness of Councillors, the Clerk and other staff working together to support each other's roles.
- 1.3 The aim is effective and professional working relationships characterised by mutual trust, respect and courtesy. Close personal familiarity should be avoided.

2. Roles of Councillors and Employees

- 2.1 The respective roles of Councillors and employees can be summarised as follows:

Councillors and Officers are servants of the public and they are indispensable to one and other, but their responsibilities are distinct. Councillors are responsible to the electorate and serve only so long as their term of office lasts. Officers are responsible to the council. Their job is to give advice to Councillors and to the Council, and to carry out the Council's work under the direction and control of the Council and relevant Committees.

2.2 Councillors

2.2.2 Councillors have four main areas of responsibility:

- To determine Council policy and provide community leadership;
- To monitor and review Council performance in delivering services;
- To represent the Council externally; and
- To act as advocates for their constituents.

2.2.3 All Councillors have the same rights and obligations in their relationship with the Clerk and other employees, regardless of their status or political party, and should be treated equally.

2.2.4 Councillors should not involve themselves in the day to day running of the Council. This is the Clerk's responsibility, and the Clerk will be acting on instructions from the Council or its Committees, within an agreed job description.

2.3 Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of Committees

Committee Chairs and Vice-Chairs have additional responsibilities. These responsibilities mean that their relationships with employees may be different and more complex than those of other Councillors. However, they must still respect the impartiality of Officers and must not ask them to undertake work of a party-political nature, or to do anything which would prejudice their impartiality.

2.4 Officers

The role of Officers is to give advice and information to Councillors and to implement the policies determined by the Council.

In giving such advice to Councillors, and in preparing and presenting reports, it is the responsibility of the Officer to express his/her own professional views and recommendations. An Officer may report the views of individual Councillors on an issue, but the recommendation should be the Officer's own. If a Councillor wishes to express a contrary view, they should not pressurise the officer to make a recommendation contrary to the officer's professional view, nor victimise an officer for discharging his/her responsibilities.

3. Expectations

3.1 All Councillors can expect:

- a commitment from Officers to the Council as a whole, and not to any individual Councillor, group of Councillors or political group;
- a working partnership;
- Officers to understand and support respective roles, workloads and pressures;
- A timely response from Officers to enquiries and complaints;
- Officer's professional advice, not influenced by political views or personal preferences;
- regular, up to date, information on matters that can reasonably be considered appropriate and relevant to their needs, having regard to any individual responsibilities or positions that they hold.
- Officers to be aware of and sensitive to the public and political environment locally.
- Respect, courtesy, integrity, and appropriate confidentiality from Officers
- training and development opportunities to help them carry out their role effectively.
- not to have personal issues raised with them by Officers outside the council's agreed procedures.
- that Officers will not use their contact with Councillors to advance their personal interests or to influence decisions improperly.
- that Officers will at all times comply with the relevant code of conduct.

3.2 Officers can expect from Councillors:

- a working partnership.
- an understanding of, and support for, respective roles, workloads, and pressures.
- leadership and direction.
- respect, courtesy, integrity, and appropriate confidentiality
- not to be bullied or to be put under undue pressure.
- that Councillors will not use their position or relationship with officers to advance their personal interests or those of others or to influence decisions improperly.
- that Councillors will at all times comply with the Council's adopted Code of Conduct.

3.3 Some General Principles:

- Close personal relationships between Councillors and Officers can confuse their separate roles and get in the way of the proper conduct of Council business, not least by creating a perception in others that a particular Councillor or Officer is getting preferential treatment.
- Special relationships with particular individuals or party-political groups should be avoided as it can create suspicion that an employee favours that Councillor or political group above others.