

LITTLEHAMPTON TOWN COUNCIL

Member & Officer Protocol

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This policy aims to provide guidance on the complex relationships between Members and Officers of the Council.
- 1.2 An effective and harmonious working relationship between Members and Officers is crucial to the successful operation of the Council's business.
- 1.3 The protocol supplements the Codes of Conduct for Members and employees' contracts which should be read in conjunction with this document.
- 1.4 The seven principles of public life as stated by the "Nolan" Committee (the Committee on Standards of Conduct in Local Government), which are set out in the Members' Code of Conduct (selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership) should inform the relationships between Members and Officers.

2. Scope

- 2.1 This protocol seeks to reflect the principles underlying the respective Codes of Conduct which apply to Members and Officers. The shared object of these codes is to enhance and maintain the integrity (real and perceived) of local government and they therefore demand very high standards of personal conduct.
- 2.2 Both Councillors and Officers are servants of the public and they are indispensable to one another, 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 role is to give advice to Councillors and the Council, and to carry out the Council's work under the direction of the Town Clerk.

3. The Role Of Members

- 3.1 Members are responsible for:
 - i) Determining the policies, vision and values of the Town Council and ensuring staff commitment;
 - ii) Ensuring standards are properly established and monitored;
 - iii) Linking service and corporate objectives;
 - iv) Enabling local people to resolve problems and issues faced by the community;
 - v) Ensuring community needs are fed into strategy formulation and service provision;
 - vi) Developing and supporting community leadership.

- 3.2 Members can expect Officers to:
- i) Maintain confidentiality;
 - ii) Perform their duties effectively, efficiently and with political neutrality
 - iii) Behave in a professional and courteous manner;
 - iv) Be helpful to Members and respect their role;
 - v) Avoid personal close familiarity with Members and not use their relationship with Members to advance their personal interests or to influence decisions improperly;
 - vi) Report to their Line Managers or to the Town Clerk any time that a Member asks or pressurises the Officer to deal with a matter outside of Council procedure or policy;
 - vii) Demonstrate an understanding of and support for respective roles, workload and pressures;
 - viii) Comply with the relevant Codes of Conduct.

3.3 The Mayoralty

The Mayor has a representative role on behalf of the Council and the Town to local residents and those who live or work in the Town. The position is non-political and this must be reflected when invitations to functions are accepted. It is reasonable for the Mayoralty to be supportive of local business, but the Office should not be used for commercial promotions. The Mayor should not use his or her Office, nor Council Officers, to by-pass recognised systems of working.

4. The Role of Officers

4.1 Officers of the Council have, in broad terms, the following main roles:

- i) to initiate policy proposals;
- ii) to implement all Council policies;
- iii) to manage the services for which the Council has given them responsibility. They are accountable for the efficiency and effectiveness of those services and for proper professional practice in discharging their responsibilities and taking decisions, within agreed policy;
- iv) to provide professional advice to the Council, its Committees and Members and the public in respect of their service;

4.2 Officers can expect from Members:

- i) political leadership and direction;
- ii) respect, dignity and courtesy;
- iii) an understanding of and support for respective roles, workload and pressures;
- iv) not to be subject to bullying or undue pressure;
- v) not to use their position or relationship with Officers to advance their personal interests or those of others or to influence decisions improperly;
- vi) compliance with the relevant Codes of Conduct.

4.3 Members and Officers will wish to discuss policy issues and Officers will often require political guidance in framing proposals. However, when Officers write

reports for Member decision they have a duty to give the advice dictated by their professional expertise and in accordance with their own professional codes of conduct. In some situations an Officer will be under a duty to submit a report on a particular matter. Officers expect to have their professional integrity respected and not to be influenced or required to reduce options, withhold information or make recommendations to the Council or a Committee they cannot professionally support.

- 4.4 An Officer's first duty is to the Council as a whole and not to an individual Member, or to a political or other group of Members. However, Officers may be called upon to provide advice to the majority group or leading Members. This should not preclude them offering a similar service to the Opposition parties.
- 4.5 Bullying or harassment of Officers, including sexual and racial, by Members is unacceptable. Members should not use their position and knowledge of the Council to place undue pressure on Officers to take a different course of action than they would otherwise have done.

5. Meetings

- 5.1 Officers and Members will most frequently come into contact with each other at the variety of meetings held to conduct the Council's business. The respective roles of the participants may vary according to the purpose of the meeting and therefore their relationship to each other will also vary.
- 5.2 At all times Officers and Members should show respect to one another and although Members are entitled to question Officers at meetings they should avoid personal attacks on Officers and ensure that criticism is constructive and well-founded. Officers would expect to have the opportunity to explain what appears to be a performance failure or inconsistency.