

1. Background

- 1.1. This protocol is intended to assist Councillors and the Parish Manager, 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 Parish Manager and other officers 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 Officers

- 2.1. The respective roles of Councillors and Officers can be summarised as follows:
 - 2.1.1. Councillors and Officers are servants of the public and they are indispensable to one and other, but their responsibilities are distinct.
 - 2.1.2. Councillors are responsible to the electorate and serve only so long as their term of office lasts.
 - 2.1.3. 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/working groups.

3. Councillors

- 3.1. Councillors have four main areas of responsibility:
 - 3.1.1. To determine council policy and provide community leadership;
 - 3.1.2. To monitor and review council performance in delivering services;
 - 3.1.3. To represent the council externally; and
 - 3.1.4. To act as advocates for their constituents.
- 3.2. All Councillors have the same rights and obligations in their relationship with the Parish Manager and other Officers, regardless of their status or political party, and should be treated equally.
- 3.3. Councillors should not involve themselves in the day to day running of the Council. This is the Parish Manager's responsibility, and he/she will be acting on instructions from the Council or its Committees/Working Groups, within an agreed Job Description.

4. Group Leader and Deputy Group Leader of working groups

- 4.1. Group Leaders and Deputy Group Lead Cllrs have additional responsibilities. These responsibilities mean that their relationships with Officers 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.

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5. Officers

- 5.1. The role of Officers is to give advice and information to Councillors and to implement the policies determined by the Council.
- 5.2. 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.

6. Expectations

6.1. All Councillors can expect:

- 6.1.1. A commitment from Officers to the Council as a whole, and not to any individual Councillor, group of Councillor's or political group;
- 6.1.2. A working partnership;
- 6.1.3. Officers to understand and support respective roles, workloads and pressures;
- 6.1.4. A timely response from Officers to enquiries and complaints;
- 6.1.5. Officer's professional advice, not influenced by political views or personal preferences;
- 6.1.6. 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;
- 6.1.7. Officers to be aware of and sensitive to the public and political environment locally;
- 6.1.8. Respect, courtesy, integrity and appropriate confidentiality from Officers;
- 6.1.9. Training and development opportunities to help them carry out their role effectively;
- 6.1.10. Not to have personal issues raised with them by Officers outside the council's agreed procedures;
- 6.1.11. That Officers will not use their contact with Councillors to advance their personal interests or to influence decisions improperly;

6.2. Officers can expect from Councillors:

- 6.2.1. A working partnership;
- 6.2.2. An understanding of, and support for, respective roles, workloads and pressures;
- 6.2.3. leadership and direction;
- 6.2.4. Respect, courtesy, integrity and appropriate confidentiality;
- 6.2.5. Not to be bullied or to be put under undue pressure;
- 6.2.6. 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;
- 6.2.7. That Councillors will always comply with the council's adopted Code of Conduct.
- 6.2.8. That Councillors will respect the position of the officer and the training or knowledge they have obtained in relation to the council sector as compared to the "business" or other sectors.

6.3. Some General Principles:

- 6.3.1. 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 Councillor or Officer is getting preferential treatment.

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- 6.3.2. Special relationships with individuals or party-political groups should be avoided as it can create suspicion that an Officer favours that Councillor or political group above others.

7. Political Groups

- 7.1. The operation of political groups is becoming more of a feature within parish councils, but it is worth repeating that it is NALC's policy that party politics should have no place in parish councils.
- 7.2. Parish Councillors are there to serve their community as councillors of the community, and should not be side tracked by party political issues. Party politics within a parish council can pose difficulties in terms of the impartiality of the Parish Manager and other Officers, and the relationship between Councillors and the Officer generally.
- 7.3. Party political groups have no power to require the Parish Manager or any other Officer to attend group meetings or to prepare written reports for them, and Officers can legitimately refuse to do so. The Parish Manager and other Officers are responsible to the council and should not act under instructions from any individual Councillor, even if he/she has been styled as 'Leader' of the council.
- 7.4. If a council has adopted party political groupings, the Parish Manager should ensure that any reports or advice offered to a political group are statements of relevant facts, with an appraisal of options and do not deal with the political implications of the matter or options or make any recommendations. It is not the Parish Manager's job to make recommendations to a political group.
- 7.5. If a report is prepared for one political group, the Town Clerk should advise all other political groups that the report has been prepared, or that advice was given.
- 7.6. Any officer needing advice or guidance on matters relating to party groups or how to operate within a political environment, should seek advice from their County Association of NALC, or from the Society of Local Council Town Clerks.