

**HENHAM PARISH COUNCIL**

**Code of Conduct**

**Adopted 2 March 2023**

## PART 5 - CODES AND PROTOCOLS

### THE COUNCILLORS' CODE OF CONDUCT

#### Introduction

All councils are required to have a local Councillor Code of Conduct.

The Local Government Association (LGA) developed this Model Councillor Code of Conduct, in association with key partners and after extensive consultation with the sector, as part of its work on supporting all tiers of local government to continue to aspire to high standards of leadership and performance. Uttlesford District Council adopted this as its Councillor Code of Conduct.

The LGA will undertake an annual review of this Code to ensure it continues to be fit for purpose, incorporating advances in technology, social media and changes in legislation.

#### Definitions

For the purposes of this Code of Conduct, a "councillor" means a member or co-opted member of a local authority. A "co-opted member" is defined in the Localism Act 2011 Section 27(4) as "a person who is not a member of the authority but who a) is a member of any committee or sub-committee of the authority, or; b) is a member of, and represents the authority on, any joint committee or joint subcommittee of the authority; and who is entitled to vote on any question that falls to be decided at any meeting of that committee or sub-committee".

#### Purpose of the Code of Conduct

The purpose of this Code of Conduct is to assist you, as a councillor, in modelling the behaviour that is expected of you, to provide a personal check and balance, and to set out the type of conduct that could lead to action being taken against you. It is also to protect you, the public, fellow councillors, local authority officers and the reputation of local government. It sets out general principles of conduct expected of all councillors and your specific obligations in relation to standards of conduct. For further guidance on how the Code operates please see [Guidance on Local Government Association Model Councillor Code of Conduct](#) | [Local Government Association](#)

#### General principles of councillor conduct

Everyone in public office at all levels; all who serve the public or deliver public services, including ministers, civil servants, councillors and local authority officers; should uphold the Seven Principles of Public Life, also known as the Nolan Principles.

Building on these principles, the following general principles have been developed specifically for the role of councillor.

In accordance with the public trust placed in me, on all occasions:

- I act with integrity and honesty
- I act lawfully
- I treat all persons fairly and with respect; and
- I lead by example and act in a way that secures public confidence in the role of councillor.

In undertaking my role:

- I impartially exercise my responsibilities in the interests of the local community
- I do not improperly seek to confer an advantage, or disadvantage, on any person
- I avoid conflicts of interest
- I exercise reasonable care and diligence; and
- I ensure that public resources are used prudently in accordance with my local authority's requirements and in the public interest.

### **Application of the Code of Conduct**

This Code of Conduct applies to you as soon as you sign your declaration of acceptance of the office of councillor or attend your first meeting as a co-opted member and continues to apply to you until you cease to be a councillor. This Code of Conduct applies to you when you are acting in your capacity as a councillor which may include when:

- you misuse your position as a councillor
- Your actions would give the impression to a reasonable member of the public with knowledge of all the facts that you are acting as a councillor;

The Code applies to all forms of communication and interaction, including:

- at face-to-face meetings
- at online or telephone meetings
- in written communication
- in verbal communication
- in non-verbal communication
- in electronic and social media communication, posts, statements and comments.

You are also expected to uphold high standards of conduct and show leadership at all times when acting as a councillor. Your Monitoring Officer has statutory responsibility for the implementation of the Code of Conduct, and you are encouraged to seek advice from your Monitoring Officer on any matters that may relate to the Code of Conduct. Town and parish councillors are encouraged to seek advice from their Clerk, who may refer matters to the Monitoring Officer.

### **Standards of councillor conduct**

This section sets out your obligations, which are the minimum standards of conduct required of you as a councillor. Should your conduct fall short of these standards, a complaint may be made against you, which may result in action being taken. The obligations of the Code of Conduct are in bold and guidance is included in italics to help explain the reasons for the obligations and how they should be followed.

### **General Conduct**

#### **1. Respect**

As a councillor:

**1.1 I treat other councillors and members of the public with respect.**

**1.2 I treat local authority employees, employees and representatives of partner organisations and those volunteering for the local authority with respect and respect the role they play.**

*Respect means politeness and courtesy in behaviour, speech, and in the written word. Debate and having different views are all part of a healthy democracy. As a councillor, you can express, challenge, criticise and disagree with views, ideas, opinions and policies in a robust but civil manner. You should not, however, subject individuals, groups of people or organisations to personal attack. In your contact with the public, you should treat them politely and courteously. Rude and offensive behaviour lowers the public's expectations and confidence in councillors. In return, you have a right to expect respectful behaviour from the public. If members of the public are being abusive, intimidatory or threatening you are entitled to stop any conversation or interaction in person or online and report them to the local authority, the relevant social media provider or the police. This also applies to fellow councillors, where action could then be taken under the Councillor Code of Conduct, and local authority employees, where concerns should be raised in line with the local authority's councillor/officer protocol.*

## **2. Bullying, harassment and discrimination**

As a councillor:

**2.1 I do not bully any person.**

**2.2 I do not harass any person. 2.3 I promote equalities and do not discriminate unlawfully against any person.**

*The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) characterises bullying as offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, an abuse or misuse of power through means that undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient. Bullying might be a regular pattern of behaviour or a one-off incident, happen face-to-face, on social media, in emails or phone calls, happen in the workplace or at work social events and may not always be obvious or noticed by others. The Protection from Harassment Act 1997 defines harassment as conduct that causes alarm or distress or puts people in fear of violence and must involve such conduct on at least two occasions. It can include repeated attempts to impose unwanted communications and contact upon a person in a manner that could be expected to cause distress or fear in any reasonable person. Unlawful discrimination is where someone is treated unfairly because of a protected characteristic. Protected characteristics are specific aspects of a person's identity defined by the Equality Act 2010. They are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. The Equality Act 2010 places specific duties on local authorities. Councillors have a central role to play in ensuring that equality issues are integral to the local authority's performance and strategic aims, and that there is a strong vision and public commitment to equality across public services.*

## **3. Impartiality of officers of the council**

As a councillor:

**3.1 I do not compromise, or attempt to compromise, the impartiality of anyone who works for, or on behalf of, the local authority.**

*Officers work for the local authority as a whole and must be politically neutral (unless they are political assistants). They should not be coerced or persuaded to act in a way that would undermine their neutrality. You can question officers in order to understand, for example, their reasons for proposing to act in a particular way, or the content of a report that they have written. However, you must not try and force them to act differently, change their advice, or alter the content of that report, if doing so would*

*prejudice their professional integrity.*

#### **4. Confidentiality and access to information**

**As a councillor:**

##### **4.1 I do not disclose information:**

**a. given to me in confidence by anyone**

**b. acquired by me which I believe, or ought reasonably to be aware, is of a confidential nature, unless**

**i. I have received the consent of a person authorised to give it;**

**ii. I am required by law to do so;**

**iii. the disclosure is made to a third party for the purpose of obtaining professional legal advice provided that the third party agrees not to disclose the information to any other person; or**

**iv. the disclosure is:**

**1. reasonable and in the public interest; and**

**2. made in good faith and in compliance with the reasonable requirements of the local authority; and**

**3. I have consulted the Monitoring Officer prior to its release.**

**4.2 I do not improperly use knowledge gained solely as a result of my role as a councillor for the advancement of myself, my friends, my family members, my employer or my business interests.**

**4.3 I do not prevent anyone from getting information that they are entitled to by law.**

*Local authorities must work openly and transparently, and their proceedings and printed materials are open to the public, except in certain legally defined circumstances. You should work on this basis, but there will be times when it is required by law that discussions, documents and other information relating to or held by the local authority must be treated in a confidential manner. Examples include personal data relating to individuals or information relating to ongoing negotiations.*

#### **5. Disrepute**

**As a councillor:**

**5.1 I do not bring my role or local authority into disrepute.**

*As a Councillor, you are trusted to make decisions on behalf of your community and your actions and behaviour are subject to greater scrutiny than that of ordinary members of the public. You should be aware that your actions might have an adverse impact on you, other councillors and/or your local authority and may lower the public's confidence in your or your local authority's ability to discharge your/its functions. For example, behaviour that is considered dishonest and/or deceitful can bring your local authority into disrepute. You are able to hold the local authority and fellow councillors to account and are able to constructively challenge and express concern about decisions and processes undertaken by the council whilst continuing to adhere to other aspects of this Code of Conduct.*

## 6. Use of position

### As a councillor:

**6.1 I do not use, or attempt to use, my position improperly to the advantage or disadvantage of myself or anyone else.**

*Your position as a member of the local authority provides you with certain opportunities, responsibilities, and privileges, and you make choices all the time that will impact others. However, you should not take advantage of these opportunities to further your own or others' private interests or to disadvantage anyone unfairly.*

## 7. Use of local authority resources and facilities

### As a councillor:

**7.1 I do not misuse council resources.**

**7.2 I will, when using the resources of the local authority or authorising their use by others:**

**a. act in accordance with the local authority's requirements; and**

**b. ensure that such resources are not used for political purposes unless that use could reasonably be regarded as likely to facilitate, or be conducive to, the discharge of the functions of the local authority or of the office to which I have been elected or appointed.**

*You may be provided with resources and facilities by the local authority to assist you in carrying out your duties as a councillor.*

*Examples include:*

- office support
- stationery
- equipment such as phones, and computers
- transport
- access and use of local authority buildings and rooms.

*These are given to you to help you carry out your role as a councillor more effectively and are not to be used for business or personal gain. They should be used in accordance with the purpose for which they have been provided and the local authority's own policies regarding their use.*

## 8. Complying with the Code of Conduct

### As a Councillor:

**8.1 I undertake Code of Conduct training provided by my local authority.**

**8.2 I cooperate with any Code of Conduct investigation and/or determination.**

**8.3 I do not intimidate or attempt to intimidate any person who is likely to be involved with the administration of any investigation or proceedings.**

## **8.4 I comply with any sanction imposed on me following a finding that I have breached the Code of Conduct.**

*It is extremely important for you as a councillor to demonstrate high standards, for you to have your actions open to scrutiny and for you not to undermine public trust in the local authority or its governance. If you do not understand or are concerned about the local authority's processes in handling a complaint you should raise this with your Monitoring Officer.*

## **Protecting your reputation and the reputation of the local authority**

### **9. Interests**

#### **As a councillor:**

#### **9.1 I register and disclose my interests.**

*Section 29 of the Localism Act 2011 requires the Monitoring Officer to establish and maintain a register of interests of members of the authority. You need to register your interests so that the public, local authority employees and fellow councillors know which of your interests might give rise to a conflict of interest. The register is a public document that can be consulted when (or before) an issue arises. The register also protects you by allowing you to demonstrate openness and a willingness to be held accountable. You are personally responsible for deciding whether or not you should disclose an interest in a meeting, but it can be helpful for you to know early on if others think that a potential conflict might arise. It is also important that the public know about any interest that might have to be disclosed by you or other councillors when making or taking part in decisions, so that decision making is seen by the public as open and honest. This helps to ensure that public confidence in the integrity of local governance is maintained. You should note that failure to register or disclose a disclosable pecuniary interest as set out in Table 1, is a criminal offence under the Localism Act 2011. Appendix B sets out the detailed provisions on registering and disclosing interests. If in doubt, you should always seek advice from your Monitoring Officer.*

### **10. Gifts and hospitality**

#### **As a councillor:**

**10.1 I do not accept gifts or hospitality, irrespective of estimated value, which could give rise to real or substantive personal gain or a reasonable suspicion of influence on my part to show favour from persons seeking to acquire, develop or do business with the local authority or from persons who may apply to the local authority for any permission, licence or other significant advantage.**

**10.2 I register with the Monitoring Officer any gift or hospitality with an estimated value of at least £50 within 28 days of its receipt.**

**10.3 I register with the Monitoring Officer any significant gift or hospitality that I have been offered but have refused to accept.**

*In order to protect your position and the reputation of the local authority, you should exercise caution in accepting any gifts or hospitality which are (or which you reasonably believe to be) offered to you because you are a councillor. The presumption should always be not to accept significant gifts or hospitality. However, there may be times when such a refusal may be difficult if it is seen as rudeness in which case you could accept it but must ensure it is publicly registered. However, you do not need to register gifts and hospitality which are not related to your role as a councillor, such as Christmas gifts from your friends and family. It is also important to note that it is appropriate to accept normal expenses and hospitality associated with your duties as a councillor. If you are unsure, do contact your Monitoring Officer for guidance.*

## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A - The Seven Principles of Public Life**

The principles are:

#### **Selflessness**

Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.

#### **Integrity**

Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must disclose and resolve any interests and relationships.

#### **Objectivity**

Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.

#### **Accountability**

Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

#### **Openness**

Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.

#### **Honesty**

Holders of public office should be truthful.

#### **Leadership**

Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

## **Appendix B**

### **Registering interests**

Within 28 days of becoming a member or your re-election or re-appointment to office you must register



with the Monitoring Officer the interests which fall within the categories set out in Table 1 (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) which are as described in "The Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012". You should also register details of your other personal interests which fall within the categories set out in Table 2 (Other Registerable Interests). "Disclosable Pecuniary Interest" means an interest of yourself, or of your partner if you are aware of your partner's interest, within the descriptions set out in Table 1 below. "Partner" means a spouse or civil partner, or a person with whom you are living as husband or wife, or a person with whom you are living as if you are civil partners.

1. You must ensure that your register of interests is kept up-to-date and within 28 days of becoming aware of any new interest, or of any change to a registered interest, notify the Monitoring Officer.
2. A 'sensitive interest' is as an interest which, if disclosed, could lead to the councillor, or a person connected with the councillor, being subject to violence or intimidation.
3. Where you have a 'sensitive interest' you must notify the Monitoring Officer with the reasons why you believe it is a sensitive interest. If the Monitoring Officer agrees they will withhold the interest from the public register.

### **Non participation in case of disclosable pecuniary interest**

4. Where a matter arises at a meeting which directly relates to one of your Disclosable Pecuniary Interests as set out in Table 1, you must disclose the interest, not participate in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation. If it is a 'sensitive interest', you do not have to disclose the nature of the interest, just that you have an interest. Dispensation may be granted in limited circumstances, to enable you to participate and vote on a matter in which you have a disclosable pecuniary interest.
5. [Where you have a disclosable pecuniary interest on a matter to be considered or is being considered by you as a Cabinet member in exercise of your executive function, you must notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest and must not take any steps or further steps in the matter apart from arranging for someone else to deal with it )

### **Disclosure of Other Registerable Interests**

6. Where a matter arises at a meeting which directly relates to the financial interest or wellbeing of one of your Other Registerable Interests (as set out in Table 2), you must disclose the interest. You may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting but otherwise must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation. If it is a 'sensitive interest', you do not have to disclose the nature of the interest.

### **Disclosure of Non-Registerable Interests**

7. Where a matter arises at a meeting which directly relates to your financial interest or well-being (and is not a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest set out in Table 1) or a financial interest or well-being of a relative or close associate, you must disclose the interest. You may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting. Otherwise you must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation. If it is a 'sensitive interest', you do not have to disclose the nature of the interest.
8. Where a matter arises at a meeting which affects -
  - a. your own financial interest or well-being;
  - b. a financial interest or well-being of a relative or close associate; or

c. a financial interest or wellbeing of a body included under Other Registrable Interests as set out in Table 2 you must disclose the interest. In order to determine whether you can remain in the meeting after disclosing your interest the following test should be applied.

9. Where a matter (referred to in paragraph 8 above) affects the financial interest or well-being: a. to a greater extent than it affects the financial interests of the majority of inhabitants of the ward affected by the decision and; b. a reasonable member of the public knowing all the facts would believe that it would affect your view of the wider public interest You may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting. Otherwise you must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation. If it is a 'sensitive interest', you do not have to disclose the nature of the interest.

10.[Where you have an Other Registerable Interest or Non-Registerable Interest on a matter to be considered or is being considered by you as a Cabinet member in exercise of your executive function, you must notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest and must not take any steps or further steps in the matter apart from arranging for someone else to deal with it].

### Table 1: Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

This table sets out the explanation of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests as set out in the Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012.

Subject	Description
Employment, office, trade, profession or vocation	Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit or gain.
Sponsorship	Any payment or provision of any other financial benefit (other than from the council) made to the councillor during the previous 12-month period for expenses incurred by him/her in carrying out his/her duties as a councillor, or towards his/her election expenses. This includes any payment or financial benefit from a trade union within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992.
Contracts	Any contract made between the councillor or his/her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the councillor is living as if they were spouses/civil partners (or a firm in which such person is a partner, or an incorporated body of which such person is a director* or a body that such person has a beneficial interest in the securities of*) and the council - (a) under which goods or services are to be provided or works are to be executed; and (b) which has not been fully discharged.
Land and Property	Any beneficial interest in land which is within the area of the council. 'Land' excludes an easement, servitude, interest or right in or over land which does not give the councillor or his/her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the councillor is living as if they were spouses/ civil partners (alone or jointly with another) a right to

	occupy or to receive-income.
Licenses	Any licence (alone or jointly with others) to occupy land in the area of the council for a month or longer
Corporate tenancies	Any tenancy where (to the councillor's knowledge)- (a) the landlord is the council; and (b) the tenant is a body that the councillor, or his/her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the councillor is living as if they were spouses/ civil partners is a partner of or a director* of or has a beneficial interest in the securities* of.
Securities	Any beneficial interest in securities* of a body where- (a) that body (to the councillor's knowledge) has a place of business or land in the area of the council; and (b) either- (i) ) the total nominal value of the securities* exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body; or (ii) if the share capital of that body is of more than one class, the total nominal value of the shares of any one class in which the councillor, or his/ her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the councillor is living as if they were spouses/civil partners have a beneficial interest exceeds one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that class.

\* 'director' includes a member of the committee of management of an industrial and provident society.

\* 'securities' means shares, debentures, debenture stock, loan stock, bonds, units of a collective investment scheme within the meaning of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 and other securities of any description, other than money deposited with a building society.

## Table 2: Other Registerable Interests

<p>You must register as an Other Registerable Interest:</p> <p>a) any unpaid directorships</p> <p>b) any body of which you are a member or are in a position of general control or management and to which you are nominated or appointed by your authority</p> <p>c) any body (i) exercising functions of a public nature (ii) directed to charitable purposes or (iii) one of whose principal purposes includes the influence of public opinion or policy (including any political party or trade union of which you are a member or in a position of general control or management</p>
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## MEMBER/OFFICER PROTOCOL

### 1. Introduction

Members and officers are indispensable to one another and mutual respect is essential for good local government. Together, they bring the critical skills, experience and knowledge required to manage an effective public sector organisation. However, members and officers have different roles and different expectations.

This protocol is intended to:

Ensure that there is a clear understanding of the respective roles of members and officers;

Set out some principles governing the relationship between them;

Establish some ground rules for the relationship;

Encourage mutual respect and good communication;

Allow for the constructive and amicable resolution of any conflict.

The Council is committed to the highest possible standards of operation, integrity, openness and accountability.

Overall, the aim of the protocol is to provide a framework to enable members and officers to work together for the benefit of people who live, work, visit, provide employment or provide services in Uttlesford.

Nothing in this protocol shall prevent or hinder a Council member from fully engaging with officers of the Council, including requesting meetings with officers, attending such meetings or offering information and advice concerning any issue within their wards or wards for which they have responsibility.

### 2. Role of Members and Officers

#### 2.1 Members

Members are democratically elected and have a mandate to represent their ward and to contribute to decisions made by the Council. They are advocates, representatives and community leaders for their ward and the people who live there and will often be seen by their constituents as the local representative of the Council as a whole. If constituents are unhappy about Council services, they will expect their councillor to do something about it.

Members will have a strong knowledge of the area they represent and the issues that affect it. This local knowledge is important in ensuring that good decisions are made, and should be respected. Members are usually, but not always, members of political groups. Political groups are a legitimate aspect of local government democracy.

Members are responsible for setting the budget and policy framework within which the Council works. Beyond this, members may have different roles. Some will be members of the Cabinet and will have a wide ranging responsibility for making strategic and operational decisions on behalf of the Council. Some will be members of Committees which scrutinise and have oversight of policies and performance. Some will be members of regulatory committees; for example, deciding applications for planning permission and ensuring compliance with licensing conditions.

## 2.2 Officers

Officers are employees of the Council. Their roles and responsibilities are set out in their contract of employment and job description.

Some are mainly responsible for the delivery of services and work within the policies and standards set by the Council. Others will have a role in developing policies and strategies and in providing professional advice aimed at ensuring that the Council operates in an effective and lawful manner.

As employees, it is important that the Council complies with its legal obligations as employer and with good employment practice.

Officers are not politicians and their loyalty is to the Council as a whole. It is important that their professional integrity and impartiality is respected, especially where they are obliged to give advice that is not welcomed.

### What members can expect from officers:

- A commitment to the Council as a whole and not to an individual political group
- A working partnership
- A timely response to enquiries and complaints
- Professional advice not influenced by political views or preference
- Integrity, mutual support and appropriate confidentiality
- Respect for the role of a member as an elected representative.

### What officers can expect from members:

- Political leadership and direction
- A working partnership
- Compliance with ethical standards and probity requirements
- Non-involvement in day-to-day management
- Fairness
- Respect for their position as employees of the Council.

## 3. Working Relationships

3.1 Officers and members will be guided by these behaviours in their working relationship:

<b>To be:</b>	<b>Not to be:</b>
Positive	Unhelpful
Professional	Obstructive
Authoritative	Arrogant
Respectful	Discourteous
Constructive	Imprudent
Communicative	Evasive
Discreet	Secretive
Reliable	Disorganised
Friendly	Friends
Honest	

- 3.2 Officers will provide advice and assistance to individual members in respect of Council business, including issues raised by constituents. They must not be requested to advise upon private matters.
- 3.3 Officers are employed by, and serve, the whole Council. They are politically neutral and must avoid being identified with any political party. Members must respect this.
- 3.4 The working relationship between senior officers and the Leader and Cabinet will be particularly close. This relationship, however, must not:
- compromise officers' duties to all members of the Council;
  - be so close as to give the appearance of partiality on the part of officers;
  - undermine the confidentiality of any discussions within the Corporate Management Team or between senior officers and other members;
  - compromise officers' professional responsibility to advise members that a particular course of action should not be pursued;
  - undermine officers' responsibility for action taken under delegated powers.
- 3.5 It is important that in any dealings between members and officers neither should seek to take unfair advantage of their position.
- 3.6 Similarly, an officer must not lobby or use influence on an individual member to make a decision in his or her personal favour. They should not:
- raise personal matters to do with their job;
  - make claims or allegations about other officers;
  - make negative comments on the competency of another officer or member.
- 3.7 In their dealings with officers (especially junior employees), members need to be aware that it is easy for officers to be overawed and feel at a disadvantage. Such feelings can be intensified where members hold official and/or political office.
- 3.8 A member should not apply any pressure on an officer to do work outside of normal duties or normal working hours. A member should not, even in an emergency, contact officers directly, even if they have their mobile phone number. In an emergency or when a matter cannot wait until normal working hours, the correct course will be to call the Council's out of hours number (01799 510510), which will ensure a speedy and coordinated approach. Even in an emergency, pressure should not be put on an officer to do anything that he or she is not empowered to do.
- 3.9 Members should approach officers of appropriate seniority when raising queries. Other than for routine service queries, this is likely to be at service manager level or above. If members wish to meet officers, they should generally make an appointment first. This is partly to allow officers to plan their work and partly because of the need to ensure that personal data, which may be visible in offices, is not inadvertently disclosed - for instance information relating to housing or benefit applications.

## 4. Familiarity

- 4.1 Close personal familiarity between individual members and officers can damage the principle of mutual respect. It could also, intentionally or accidentally, lead to the passing of confidential information or information which should not properly be passed between them, such as personal details.
- 4.2 Such familiarity could also cause embarrassment to other members and/or other officers and give rise to suspicions of favouritism.
- 4.3 Therefore care should be taken by individual members and officers in their relationship with each other. Members should declare to the Chief Executive any close family, business or personal relationship with an officer. Officers should make sure that their line manager is made aware of any similar relationship.

## 5. Communication

- 5.1 Officers should reply promptly and helpfully to correspondence, including emails, received from members. As a minimum, they should meet corporate standards for responses but should also recognise that it will sometimes be appropriate to give priority to correspondence from members. If an immediate reply is not possible, correspondence should be acknowledged and the member kept informed about progress.
- 5.2 Similarly, members should reply promptly and helpfully to communications from officers, especially where a member's view is sought before action is taken.
- 5.3 Written communication between members and officers should always be professional in tone, avoiding the appearance of over-familiarity. There is a particular risk with email of making inappropriate comments. Emails are a permanent record and may be held up to public scrutiny through, for instance, disclosure under freedom of information legislation or in the course of legal proceedings. Officers and members should always be alert to how correspondence would appear if held up to public gaze.
- 5.4 Written communication may not be the appropriate first step where, for instance, the facts are uncertain or a matter is controversial. A telephone call or personal discussion should be considered instead. In all cases, the preferred communication method of individual councillors should be taken into account, if known.
- 5.5 If members raise issues on behalf of constituents, officers should reply in terms that will allow members to give explanations to constituents that are helpful and constructive. Whilst members will hold officers to account, members will, in turn, be held to account by their constituents for the actions of the Council.
- 5.6 Unless a member or officer requests confidentiality, it will be assumed that correspondence between a member and an officer is not confidential and may be shown to others. (An obvious exception is where an issue relates to an individual constituent and would normally be treated in confidence). If, in an officer's view, correspondence between an individual member and an officer is of interest to other members, to keep them fully informed, it should be made clear to the original member that copies have been sent to other members.
- 5.7 Where issues are raised by, or with, individual members relating to a matter of general interest in a ward, copies of correspondence may be sent to other members for the ward. However, a member may specifically request that correspondence is not copied to other members.



- 5.8 Official letters sent on behalf of the Council should normally be in the name of the appropriate officer, rather than in the name of a member. It may be appropriate in certain circumstances (e.g. representations to a Government Minister) for a letter to be signed by a member, but this should be the exception rather than the norm.
- 6. Involvement of ward councillors**
- 6.1 Whenever a public meeting is organised by the Council to consider a local issue, all the councillors representing the Ward or Wards affected should, as a matter of course, be invited to attend the meeting with the maximum possible notice being given. Similarly whenever the Council undertakes any form of consultative exercise on a local issue, the Ward Councillors should be consulted at the outset of the exercise.
- 6.2 Ward Councillors should be notified in advance about any issues likely to affect them. This would include press releases relating to a particular Ward or significant matters likely to affect a Ward.
- 6.3 Ward councillors should be copied into correspondence with town or parish councils within their ward unless there is a good reason not to.
- 6.4 Ward councillors should be consulted and involved in significant issues affecting their ward. They will have a strong knowledge of the area they represent and the issues that affect it. This local knowledge is important in ensuring that good decisions are made and should be respected.
- 7. Requests for factual information**
- 7.1 Officers will use the Members' Bulletin as the primary means of providing factual information to members. There are other sources of information available to members, in particular the "Keep Me Posted/ Gov Delivery e-newsletter, to which members are encouraged to subscribe.
- 7.2 All members of the Council are entitled to request factual information from officers about a Council department or service and the information will be provided unless:
- there is a legal reason why it should not be disclosed (e.g. the information is confidential, commercially sensitive or should not be disclosed under data protection principles).
  - the request for information is for private purposes, rather than in connection with the member's elected role.
  - the relevant Director or Assistant Director considers the request to be unreasonable in terms of the resources required to provide the information. In case of dispute, the request will be referred to the Chief Executive.
- 7.3 Members making requests for information should allow adequate time for officers to provide it. Requests relating to committee or Council meetings should be made well in advance. If officers are not given enough notice, they may not be able to supply information in time. Late requests can also divert officers from work of equal or greater importance or urgency. Giving timely attention to agenda papers can mitigate this risk.
- 7.4 Members do not need to rely on Freedom of Information rights to ask for information, as they have a statutory right of access to information held by the Council, subject to a "need to know" test. This is wider than the rights given to members of the public. In some cases (for instance, where it involves third party personal information) there may be a need for confidentiality. In case of doubt or dispute, the Monitoring Officer will provide advice.

## **8. Officers' reports and advice**

- 8.1 The Director/Senior Officer in whose name a report to the Council (or any part of its formal decision-making structure) is submitted will always be fully responsible for the contents of it. It is essential that any proposals from members in reports to committees are clearly identified as such.
- 8.2 A draft or final report will only be amended where the suggested amendment also reflects the professional judgement of the author of the report. Any dispute between a member and the officer responsible for the report which cannot be resolved shall be referred to responsible Director or to the Chief Executive for resolution.
- 8.3 On occasions, officers will need to express a professional view on a matter which may not support the view of members and/or senior officers. They must be allowed to do so without interference from, or victimisation by, members or other officers.
- 8.4 At some committee meetings, a resolution may be passed which authorises named officers to take action between meetings in consultation with a member. It must be recognised that it is the officer, rather than the member, who takes the action and it is the officer who is accountable for it.

## **9. Officer advice to members and party groups**

- 9.1 It must be recognised by all officers and members that in discharging their duties and responsibilities, officers serve the Council as a whole and not exclusively any political group, combination of groups or any individual member of the Council.
- 9.2 There is statutory recognition for party groups and it is common practice for such groups to give preliminary consideration to matters of Council business. Officers may properly be called upon to provide information to party groups but must at all times maintain political neutrality. All officers must, in their dealings with political groups and individual members, treat them in a fair and even-handed manner. This means that, on occasions, information requested by one group will in fact be provided to all.
- 9.3 The support provided by officers can take many forms, including a briefing meeting with the executive or an executive member or the Chair/Nice-Chair of a committee prior to a committee meeting. Whilst in practice such officer support is likely to be in most demand from whichever party group is for the time being in control of the Council, support is available to all party groups.
- 9.4 Scrutiny committees have the power to require Cabinet Members and officers to appear before them and answer questions. As a matter of convention, the Council's scrutiny committees will only require the attendance of the Chief Executive, Directors and Assistant Directors. However, to facilitate proper conduct of business, these senior officers may arrange, as necessary, for other officers to attend meetings to assist.
- 9.5 The Chief Executive, Directors and Assistant Directors may, in exceptional circumstances, be invited to attend political group meetings to explain or to advise on policies and/or issues provided that this facility is available to all political groups represented on the Council. Officer attendance at group meetings will usually be at Assistant Director, Director or Chief Executive level. More junior officers should not generally be asked to attend group meetings and, if they are, they should first obtain permission of a Director or the Chief Executive.

- 9.6 Officer support must not extend beyond providing information and advice in relation to matters of Council business. Officers must not be involved in advising on matters of party business and should not be present when matters of party business are to be discussed.
- 9.7 Special care needs to be exercised by officers when involved in providing information and advice to a party group meeting which includes persons who are not members of the Council. Such persons are not bound by the Council's Code of Conduct (in particular, the provisions concerning the declaration of interests and confidentiality) and confidential information should not be disclosed.
- 9.8 Officers must respect the confidentiality of any party group discussions at which they are present.
- 9.9 Party group meetings are not empowered to make decisions on behalf of the Council. Conclusions reached at group meetings are not Council decisions and should not be interpreted or acted upon as such.
- 9.10 Where officers provide information and advice to a party group meeting in relation to a matter of Council business, this cannot act as a substitute for providing all necessary information and advice to the executive, executive member or relevant committee when the matter in question is considered.
- 10. Constructive criticism & redress**
- 10.1 It is important that there should be mutual courtesy between Members and officers. It is important that there are reasonable standards of courtesy and no member or officer should seek to take unfair advantage of their position.
- 10.2 Members have the right to criticise reports or the actions taken by officers but they should:
- always avoid personal attacks on officers;
  - ensure that criticism is constructive and well-founded;
  - take up an individual concern with the officer privately, where possible;
  - avoid criticising officers in the media or social media.
- 10.3 Members should not raise matters relating to the conduct or capability of an officer at Cabinet and committee meetings or in any public forum. This could be damaging both to effective working relationships and to the image of the Council. An officer has no means of responding to such criticisms in public.
- 10.4 If a member considers that he or she has not been treated with proper respect or courtesy, and fails to resolve it through direct discussion with the officer, he should raise the matter with the appropriate Director or Assistant Director. The Director or Assistant Director will look into the matter and report back to the member. If the member continues to feel concern, they should then report it to the Chief Executive who will look into the matter afresh. A complaint about a Director or an Assistant Director should be raised with the Chief Executive. A complaint about the Chief Executive should be raised with the Leader. Any action taken against an officer in respect of a complaint will be in accordance with the provisions of the Council's disciplinary rules and any statutory provisions which may apply.

- 10.5 If an officer considers that he or she has not been treated with proper respect or courtesy, and a direct discussion is impractical or fails to resolve the matter, he or she should raise the matter with their line manager or Director without delay. In such circumstances, the Director will take such action as is appropriate either by approaching the individual and/or Party Group Leader. The Director will inform the Chief Executive if the Party Group Leader becomes involved, or in any other case where it is appropriate. Feedback should be given to the officer on the outcome.
- 10.6 The Council operates a confidential whistle-blowing policy. The Council is committed to the highest possible standards of operation, integrity, openness and accountability. It is expected that where an officer or member is concerned about potential unlawful conduct of an officer or member, they voice those concerns so that they can be dealt with effectively.
- 11. Officers' advice on declarations of interest**
- 11.1 The Council's Monitoring Officer will on request provide advice and information to members on declarations of interest of a personal nature and whether or not such an interest might amount to a disclosable pecuniary interest or a prejudicial interest. However, members will know the nature and extent of any interest they may have. It is the member's responsibility, therefore, to decide whether any interest should be declared.
- 12. Officer decisions taken under delegated powers**
- 12.1 When making a decision under powers delegated to an officer, it must be recognised that it is the officer, and not any member, who takes the action and it is the officer who is accountable for it.
- 13. Media Liaison**
- 13.1 Communications with the media can be an important part of a member's workload, such as responding to queries. In any media contact, members and officers should always have regard to the reputation of the Council. Generally, members provide comments and views and officers provide factual information. This factual information may well include explaining the Council's policy on a particular issue. If any member is unsure about the facts of any issue he should contact the Communications Team or appropriate officer, or ask the media representative to do so. Members should avoid being seen to anticipate decisions and should not criticise officers in the media or via social media networks which may be accessible to the public.
- 13.2 If a member contacts or is contacted by the media he should indicate in what capacity he is speaking e.g. in a personal capacity, as a member of the executive, as a ward member, as Chair of a committee, on behalf of the Council or on behalf of his political group. Members should avoid giving the impression they are speaking on behalf of the Council when expressing a personal view. If a member is contacted by the media, it may be useful to inform the Communications Team of the query or discussion; the Communications Team may offer guidance on the nature of the response where it is appropriate to do so.
- 13.3 It is the role of the Communications Team to publicise decisions and services, and to enhance and protect the reputation and profile of the Council. In this regard members should refer to the Council's Media Relations Protocol. The Media Relations Protocol provides guidance on the work undertaken by the Communications Team, and sets out the responsibilities of officers and members acting as media spokespeople in written and verbal communications. It also references the legal obligations of the Council in publishing material, and the Government's Code of Recommended Practice on Local

Authority Publicity which covers the rules around content and style of publicity, distribution, advertising, promotion of individual councillors and restrictions during the election period.

**14. Unresolved issues and amendments to this protocol**

- 14.1 If there are any issues of concern which are not dealt with by this Protocol, then the relevant member or officer may discuss the matter with the Chief Executive with a view to advice being provided.
- 14.2 Should any Member or officer wish to suggest an amendment to this protocol, he/she is asked to contact either the Chief Executive or the Monitoring Officer.
- 14.3 Any amendments require approval of Council on the recommendation of the Governance, Audit and Performance Committee. The Standards Committee and any other relevant body may be consulted on issues raised by the protocol and on proposed amendments when appropriate.