

Protocol on Member/Officer Relations

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The relationship between members and employees is an essential ingredient that goes into the successful working of the organisation. This relationship within the Council is characterised by mutual respect, informality and trust. Members and employees feel free to speak to one another openly and honestly. Nothing in this Protocol is intended to change this relationship, it is rather to help members and employees to perform effectively by giving guidance on their respective roles and expectations and on their relationship with each other. The Protocol also gives guidance on what to do on the rare occasions when things go wrong. Responsibility for the operation of this Protocol lies with the Head of Human Resources
- 1.2 The Protocol must be read and operated in the context of any relevant legislation and national and local Codes of Conduct and any procedure for speaking up (whistle blowing).

2. ROLES OF MEMBERS AND EMPLOYEES

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

Members and employees are servants of the public and they are indispensable to one another. But their responsibilities are distinct. Members are responsible to the electorate and serve only so long as their term of office lasts. Employees are responsible to the Council. Their job is to give advice to members and the Council, and to carry out the Council's work under the direction and control of the Council, the Cabinet, and relevant committees, boards, panels etc.

Mutual respect between Councillors and employees is essential to good local government

- 2.2 Members

Members have three main areas of responsibility: determining the policy of the Council and giving it political leadership, representing the Council externally, and acting as advocates on behalf of their constituents. It is not the role of members to involve themselves in the day to day management of Council services.

- 2.3 Members of the Cabinet, Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen

Members of the Cabinet and Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of Committees, Boards, Panels etc have additional responsibilities. Because of those responsibilities, their relationships with employees may be different from, and more complex than those of members without those responsibilities, and this is recognised in the expectations they are entitled to have.

- 2.4 Opposition Members

As individual members of the Council, all members have the same rights and obligations in their relationship with employees and should be treated equally. This principle is particularly important in the context of scrutiny and overview.

However, where a political group forms an administration, either alone or in partnership with another group or groups, it is recognised that the relationship between employees, particularly those at a senior level in the organisation, and the administration will differ from that with opposition groups.

2.5 Employees

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

Certain employees e.g. Head of Paid Service, Monitoring Officer, Chief Financial Officer (Section 151 Officer) and the Statutory Chief Officers have responsibilities in law over and above their obligations to the Council and its Members that they must be allowed to discharge.

3 EXPECTATIONS

Members can expect from employees:

- A commitment to the Council as a whole, and not to any political group
- A working partnership
- An understanding of and support for respective roles, workloads and pressures
- Timely response to enquiries and complaints
- Professional advice, not influenced by political views or preference, which does not compromise the political neutrality of employees.
- Regular, up to date information on matters that can reasonably be considered appropriate and relevant to their needs, having regard to any individual responsibilities that they have and positions that they hold
- Awareness of and sensitivity to the political environment
- Respect, dignity and courtesy
- Training and development in order to carry out their role effectively
- Integrity, mutual support and appropriate confidentiality
- Not to have personal issues raised with them by employees outside the agreed procedures
- That employees will not use their relationship with members to advance their personal interests or to influence decisions improperly
- That employees will at all times comply with the relevant Code of Conduct

Employees can expect from members:

- A working partnership

- An understanding of and support for respective roles, workloads and pressures
- Political leadership and direction
- Respect, dignity and courtesy
- Integrity, mutual support and appropriate confidentiality
- Not to be subject to bullying or to be put under undue pressure. Members should have regard to the seniority of employees in determining what are reasonable requests, having regard to the power relationship between members and employees, and the potential vulnerability of employees, particularly at junior levels
- That members will not use their position or relationship with employees to advance their personal interests or those of others or to influence decisions improperly
- That members will at all times comply with the relevant Code of Conduct

4 WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

Procedure for employees

- 4.1 From time to time the relationship between members and employees may break down or become strained. Whilst it will always be preferable to resolve matters informally, through conciliation by an appropriate senior manager or member, employees will have recourse to the Grievance Procedure or to the Council's Monitoring Officer, as appropriate to the circumstances. Within each portfolio, one male and one female manager will be identified to whom an initial approach may be made by a concerned employee. In the event of a grievance or complaint being upheld, the matter will be referred to the Chief Executive, who, having advised the Leader of the Council and the appropriate Group Leader will decide on the course of action to be taken, following consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Standards Committee.

Procedure for members

- 4.2 In the event that a member is dissatisfied with the conduct, behaviour or performance of an employee, the matter should be raised with the appropriate Head of Service. A member may choose to express their concern specifically to a male or female manager. Where the employee concerned is a Head of Service or Corporate Director, the matter should be raised with the appropriate Corporate Director or with the Chief Executive. Where the employee concerned is the Chief Executive, the matter should be raised with the Head of Human Resources. If the matter cannot be resolved informally, it may be necessary to invoke the Council's Disciplinary Procedure.