

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The formal business of the Council is regulated by the Constitution and various supplementary guidance. The conventions set out in this document are for guidance of the members of the Council and **Directors** and are aimed at supplementing those rules and guidance.

2. ENTITLEMENT TO INFORMATION

2.1 Any member of the Council may ask the appropriate Director for written factual information about a Directorate (or part thereof) or service. Such requests will be met, subject to any legal requirements (including the Freedom of Information and Data Protection Acts).

2.2 Where a Director on his own initiative provides information to any Member of a political group, the information will **also** be supplied to the other **Groups** through their Group Leaders unless it is of a routine or minor nature.

2.3 Where a request for information by a Group Leader, Deputy Group Leader or Spokesperson on behalf of a political group is made to a **Director**, such information shall, so far as is reasonable, remain confidential to the Group in question. **In the event that the supply of information to one political group only may give that group an advantage, the Director concerned will discuss and agree a timescale for its release to all groups.**

2.4 All Councillors are asked to respect the close working relationships between Cabinet members and Directors. The operation of Executive arrangements inevitably results in close collaboration between Directors and the Portfolio Holder(s) with responsibility for their services. Those working arrangements should not be used to deny other members of the Council access to information which they require. Equally, such requests may create a sensitive situation for Directors. Councillors need to be aware that Directors should not be placed in a position of having supplied information to a Councillor which might be used politically with the Cabinet member.

2.5 A particular case in point is questions without notice to Cabinet members at Council meetings. Members seeking information for the purposes of such questions must bear in mind that it may be necessary to share the information so that the role of the Director is not compromised. Directors must be open with Councillors if this situation arises and agree at the outset the confidentiality which applies in supplying the information and the timing of any disclosure to the Portfolio Holder. By the same token, Portfolio Holders and Directors will need to acknowledge rights of non Cabinet members to information which set out in the local government law and this Constitution.

3. BRIEFINGS ON COUNCIL BUSINESS

3.1 Formal briefings may be arranged for meetings to discuss business to be transacted at meetings. Member representatives of the remaining political groups **may** be invited to attend briefings on Council business with the Leader (or any other Cabinet member) or the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of any other body.

Independent councillors (i.e. those not affiliated to any political group) shall be entitled to attend briefings in respect of those meetings of which they are members.

3.2 Briefings for meetings will deal with (a) procedural matters (b) up-dating of information contained in agenda items by officers and (c) any questions from political groups.

3.3 All briefings will be held at a mutually convenient time, usually on the day of the meeting in question and where possible will be published on the weekly calendar in the Council Bulletin. The actual time will depend on the starting time of meeting proper. This arrangement will not be amended without the approval of all political groups.

3.4 In the case of the Cabinet members or Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen, arrangements may be made by the Chief Executive or appropriate Director for separate briefings of a more general character where this is necessary to familiarise members with current Council policies. Discretion and judgement will however, be used by Directors and Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen so as to ensure that information is not sought or given which might give any political group an advantage.

4. BRIEFING OF POLITICAL GROUPS

4.1 Officers of the Council will not attend meetings of political groups on the Council.

4.2 Meetings of group leaders may be held. Such meetings will have no executive powers but will be authorised to meet with the Chief Executive on an informal basis to discuss business to be considered by the Council.

4.3 Group Leaders' meetings shall have formal agenda and minutes and shall be chaired by the Leader of the largest political group if present.

5. MEETING PRACTICE

5.1 Role of Chairman

The Chairman of the Council, the Leader **of the Cabinet or the Chairman** of any Committee, Sub-Committee or **Panel/Working Group** shall ensure that there is a reasonable opportunity for debate and that there is effective despatch of Council business. The Chairman shall ensure that every motion which is properly proposed and seconded is put to the vote.

5.2 Casting Vote

In circumstances where a second or casting vote may be required, the Chairman shall consider whether to make a second or casting vote by taking advice on whether the decision is necessary and whether there will be a further opportunity to debate the issue concerned within a reasonable timescale. The Chairman may decide, dependant on that advice, not to make a casting vote or if one is cast, to vote according to the status quo. However, in some cases there is no status quo (e.g. quasi judicial decisions concerning planning, licensing and appeals of various kinds) and in those circumstances the Chairman shall vote in accordance with their judgement of the public interest. Chairmen will acknowledge at all times the requirement under the Constitution to signify whether he or she intends to vote in the first vote on any matter before a meeting.

5.3 Respect for the Chair and Behaviour

Group Leaders will do everything possible to ensure that members of their groups are aware of the rules of debate and proper standards of behaviour at all meetings.

5.4 Group Representatives – District Development Control Committee/Area Plans Sub Committees

Immediately following the Annual Council meeting, all political groups will specify their nominated representatives on these Committees and Sub Committees. The role of the Group representative shall be to act as spokesman for their group in connection with those meetings.

5.5 Seating Arrangements – Council and Committee Meetings

Seating in the Council Chamber shall be agreed between the political groups.

5.6 Committee Minutes

Draft minutes will be cleared with the appropriate Chairman.

6. RELATIONS WITH THE MEDIA

6.1 Official media statements will be issued on behalf of the District Council, a Portfolio Holder, an Overview and Scrutiny or other Committee Chairman. Such statements may be prepared in consultation with appropriate Directors but must be approved by the quoted Members before issue. **Quoted members will also be consulted on statements issued within the broader context of a proactive media release and in response media enquiries.** Statements issued through the Public Relations and Marketing Officer (Including quoted comments by members) must reflect the nature of decisions or Council policy and exclude 'political' comment.

6.2 Members may speak directly to the media on any given issue (subject to legal constraints such as the Data Protection Act) **in order to express personal or political points of view.**

6.3 Political Groups may issue their own press releases either through group leaders or group representatives. These will be solely the province of the political group concerned and will not involve officer input except in so far as a group wish to check factual information. Press statements arising from Council business and issued in a party capacity by a Leader or Group Representative must be careful to differentiate between the Council's policy and the views of the group concerned.

6.4 The Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Council have a special role within the authority by virtue of their civic responsibilities. To reflect this role, they will receive special support from relevant officers in carrying out those duties.

6.5 Political groups and individual councillors shall bear in mind the special rules which apply to Council publicity during election periods and shall bear in mind the guidance set out in Appendix 2 to this report .

7. APPOINTMENT OF REPRESENTATIVES

7.1 The appointment of representatives to any outside body of a permanent nature or involving regular attendance will be determined by the Council in accordance with Council Procedure Rules.

8. FACILITIES FOR MEMBERS

8.1 Word processing facilities are available in accordance with Council policy for member correspondence, on application to **Democratic Services**. Typing for the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Council is provided by the Democratic Services .

8.2 Photocopying facilities are available in the Members' Room, free of charge.

9. REVIEW OF CONVENTIONS

9.1 The conventions set out in this document will be reviewed from time to time. The Chief Executive will also initiate a special review at any time if required by a change in the political balance on the Council or on the request of any of the political groups.