

**CONVENTIONS RELATING TO THE MANAGEMENT OF THE
DISTRICT COUNCIL AND ON THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN
POLITICAL GROUPS AND OFFICERS**

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 Heads of Service and are aimed at supplementing the rules set out in Standing Orders consequent to the electoral balance between the political groups arising from the elections in May 1994.

2. ENTITLEMENT TO INFORMATION

- 2.1 Any member of the Council may ask the appropriate Head of Service for written factual information about a department or service. Such requests will be met, subject to any legal requirements and to the amount of work involved in preparing that information not being unreasonably time consuming.
- 2.2 Where a Head of Service on his own initiative provides information to any representative of a political group, that information will be supplied to the other parties through their spokesman 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 Head of Service, such information shall, so far as is reasonable, remain confidential to the Group in question.

3. BRIEFING ON COUNCIL BUSINESS

- 3.1 Formal briefings may be arranged for meetings where the business is to be transacted. Member representatives of the remaining political groups will be invited to attend briefings with the Leader or any other Cabinet member or 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 (a) deal with procedural matters (b) up-date information contained in agenda items and (c) answer factual questions from political groups.
- 3.3 All briefings will be held at 6.30 p.m. on the day of the meeting in question. This arrangement will not be amended without the approval of all political groups.
- 3.4 In the case of the Cabinet members or Chairman and Vice-Chairman, arrangements may be made by the Chief Executive or appropriate Head of Service 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 Heads of Service 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 and relevant Heads of Service 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 each political group on an alphabetical rota by surname. Deputy group leaders shall also be entitled to attend these meetings.

5. MEETING PRACTICE

5.1 Role of Chairman

The Chairman of the Council, the Cabinet and of any Committee, Sub-Committee or 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 the second or casting vote is required to be given the Chairman of any meeting shall, if at all possible, cast that vote in accordance with the status quo. Chairmen will acknowledge at all times the requirement under the Constitution to signify that he or she intends to vote in the first round of such voting.

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

Immediately following the Annual Council meeting, all political groups will specify their nominated representatives on the committees and sub-committees of the Council. 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 Chairmen.

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 by the Public Relations and Marketing Officer. Statements may be prepared in consultation with appropriate Heads of Service but must be approved by quoted Members before issue. 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. Members may speak directly to the media on any given issue (subject to legal constraints such as the Data Protection Act) to express personal or political points of view.
- 6.2 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.
- 6.3 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.

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 through from Legal and Administration Services, on application to the Secretarial Bureau. Typing for the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Council is provided by the Democratic Services Section.
- 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.

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