

CONVENTIONS ON THE WORKING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN POLITICAL GROUPS & COUNCILLORS WITH 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 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 A Councillor may require the Director to treat the request for information as confidential and this confidentiality will be respected unless it is agreed with the Councillor concerned that request no longer needs to be treated in that way.

2.3 All such requests shall be made to a Director or Assistant Director.

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

3. BRIEFING MEETINGS

3.1 Formal briefings may be arranged for meetings to discuss business to be transacted at meetings. Briefings will be attended by the Chairman and Vice Chairman concerned except in the case of the District Development Control Committee and Area Plans Sub Committees where appointed group representatives and independent members serving on the Committee or sub Committee concerned will also attend.

3.2 Briefing meetings will deal with (a) procedural matters; and (b) up-dating of information contained in agenda items by officers.

3.3 All political groups will notify their group representatives on the District Development Control Committee and the Area Plans Sub Committees at the beginning of each Council year. The role of the Group representative shall be to act as spokesman for their group in connection with those meetings.

3.4 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.

3.5 Group Leaders and independent members may attend the briefing for the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Council meetings.

4. BRIEFING OF POLITICAL GROUPS

4.1 The Chief Executive, Directors and Assistant Directors of the Council shall only attend meetings of political groups if this is for the purpose of assisting Council business. Where a political group invites an officer to attend a meeting, such invitations should be accepted only if the same opportunity is afforded to all political groups. Where officers have doubts about the appropriateness of accepting such an invitation, the Chief Executive will make a final decision.

4.2 Where an officer considers that it would assist Council business to attend a political group meeting for the purpose of briefing and makes a proposal that he or she should attend, the officer concerned shall be careful to extend that offer to all political groups.

4.3 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. **Group Leaders' meetings shall have formal agenda and minutes and shall be chaired by the Leader of the largest political group 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 Seating Arrangements – Council and Committee Meetings

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

5.5 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 releases 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 should 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 and photocopying facilities are available in accordance with Council policy, on application to Democratic Services. Typing for the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Council is provided through Democratic Services.**

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.