

Councillor – Officer Relations Support and Facilities Provided for Councillors

Principles

The support to be provided to councillors must be subject to the following caveats:

- Officers are employed by the council and are responsible to the council as a whole
- Officers cannot be required and must not undertake work of a political nature
- Officers must respect the confidentiality of some information that they may be exposed to

Supporting councillors centrally

The Democratic Services team can offer/facilitate support in the following areas:

A. ICT

ICT training will be given as part of the induction programme and following on from that equipment will be issued. This equipment will include a lap top and docking station, the option of a printer and other essentials. A broadband connection, or a monthly allowance to provide the same, will be provided together with the means to gain secure remote access to the Council's Network.

B. Councillor development

Following the councillor induction programme a detailed councillor development programme will be implemented. Councillors will be offered a personal development discussion which will enable them to discuss their training needs and find out about what training and development is available.

C. Allowances

All councillors are entitled to a basic allowance to cover the costs of being a councillor. Expenses can also be claimed for travel and subsistence. Details of allowances and expenses are set out in the Members Allowances scheme within Part 14 of the Constitution.

D. Secretariat and information

- Keeping councillors up-to-date with diary changes
- Booking onto any sessions from the Councillor Development Programme
- All councillors' conference arrangements including booking of places, hotel reservations, train tickets and arrangements for other transport.
- Providing 'Councillor Websites'
- Monitoring and maintaining individual Councillors' registered interests on the council's web-site.
- Councillors' briefings with key information and details of delegated decisions, links to minutes and agenda for forthcoming meetings
- A councillor's intranet page with links to committee dates, planning applications, highways works or training opportunities.

Councillors will also be provided with:

- an identity badge
- a pass card to gain entry to the main offices
- a general retiring lounge known as 'the members' room' (~~arrangements to be finalised~~
~~— as part of the transformation programme~~)
- reasonable stationery requirements, including letterheads, business cards, envelopes, and pre-paid reply envelopes for correspondence with council departments
- car parking whilst attending official meetings. ~~— arrangements under review.~~

E. Accommodation

Each political group will have a group room and access to a docking station for a laptop, printer, telephone and photocopying facilities for use in connection with council business.

There will also be specific accommodation provided for the leader, the cabinet, ~~scrutiny members~~ and the chairman of the council.

F. Political group support

No dedicated support is provided to group leaders but photocopying can be provided in connection with group business at an agreed cost and correspondence/communications can be sent with official council communications.

G. Briefings/seminars

A detailed list of forthcoming seminars will be maintained.

H. Response to Councillor

enquiries e-mails and telephone calls

- will be acknowledged within two working days of receipt, giving details of an alternative contact if the officer concerned is absent from the office
- a substantive response will be provided within ~~seven~~ ten working days of receipt. If that is not possible an explanation will be given as to the reason for the delay, what action is being taken, and when a response will be sent.

Supporting Councillors locally

The democratic services staff based in ~~the office hubs~~ Trowbridge will, subject to resources being available, support councillors in their community leadership roles. This could include:-

- Assisting councillors in providing a two-way link between the council and the community
- Supporting the representational role of councillors
- Arranging for office facilities to be made available

Councillors will arrange any surgeries they wish to hold for their constituents, using libraries and area hub offices where appropriate

APPENDIX 2 TO PROTOCOL 1

Guide to Information Provision for Councillors

All councillors fulfil many roles:

- championing their area by representing their constituents;
- enabling public involvement and providing community leadership;
- contributing to decision making processes;
- creating effective partnerships and working with them to build strong and cohesive communities;
- fulfilling responsibilities as a “corporate parent” for children and young people in the care of the local authority; and
- representing the council externally.

It is widely recognised that when councillors are kept informed on local issues, they are far better equipped to be proactive in handling local issues and in responding to individuals or interest groups on a particular matter.

Information available to all councillors

A wide range of information is readily available to all councillors through the following sources, including:

- Members Elected wire – regular email
- Councillor briefing notes sent out on specific issues
- Email notification of agenda and delegated decisions
- Electronic subscription services for all council papers
- Electronic subscription services for all council press releases
- Parish council newsletter
- Community Area Joint Strategic Assessments providing facts and figures on the local area

The Access to Information Protocol covers other information provision that can be made available on request so that councillors have the information they need to know to fulfil their roles. Where councillors seek additional statistics on their local area they should have a discussion with the council's research team.

Matters relating to electoral division(s)

Officers should ensure councillors are informed as appropriate on matters relating to their local division. This includes representations on local issues, where it appears the councillor has not already been informed, such as speed restrictions; school admissions; petitions and Local Government Ombudsman cases.

Officers should refer to the area boards and delegated decisions checklist to ensure local councillors and area boards are involved in decisions on local services. Consultation of local councillors when relevant also forms part of the checklist for cabinet papers.

Where planning initiatives or informed of changes to service provision by partners, which relate to one or a small number of electoral divisions, officers should inform the local division councillor. This includes circumstances such as:

- Forthcoming local consultations to be carried out by the council;
- Localised issues that may be identified to be subject to scrutiny or review;
- Sale of land and/or property owned by the council;
- Planned demolition of property, extension or renovation;
- Enforcement action: such as action taken by trading standards;
- Schools being put into special measures;
- Awards gained by services or facilities that are specific to a local area;
- Research or statistics on the electoral division.

In most cases an email is an appropriate form of communication, however in other circumstances officers should give consideration to other forms of briefing - such as face to face, online or over the phone.

Officers should rapidly alert local councillors to urgent issues affecting local services or facilities, such as unplanned work to public buildings or roads that has not been previously programmed and notified (in such cases a phone call may be more appropriate than other forms of communication such as email). Similarly, the council may be notified at short notice by partner agencies on changes to services (such as a temporary reduction in police staffing) or on the work of statutory undertakers. It is important to inform local councillors of any changes affecting their electoral division in particular as soon as realistically possible.

Heads of service should ensure that all their members of staff are aware of the requirements within this guidance. Any particular cases of difficulty or uncertainty arising under this guidance should be raised with the Monitoring Officer who will advise how to proceed.

Extract of Part 2 of the Constitution

3. Article 3 – Members of the public and the council

3.1 Rights of members of the public

Members of the public have the following rights. They have further rights relating to access to information details of which appear in the access to information rules in Part 5 of this constitution.

Voting and petitions

Residents on the electoral roll for the area have the right to vote and sign a petition to request a referendum for a mayoral form of governance for Wiltshire Council.

Citizens can petition the council to take specified action(s). Such petitions will be dealt with under the council's Petitions Scheme, which is set out in Part 4 of the constitution.

Information

Members of the public have the right to:

- contact the council by telephone, post, email, fax or in person. An acknowledgement will be sent within 2 working days, and a full response to all written correspondence within 15 working days from the day your correspondence is received. Where legislation dictates otherwise, e.g. Freedom of Information, different timescales may apply.
- contact their local councillor about any matters of concern to them
- view the register of councillors' interests
- obtain a copy of the constitution on payment of a fee or access it on-line or at local libraries
- attend meetings of the council and its committees except where confidential or exempt information is likely to be disclosed
- attend meetings of the cabinet when key decisions are being considered except where confidential or exempt information is likely to be disclosed
- find out from the forward plan what key decisions will be taken by the cabinet and when
- see reports and background papers, and any records of decisions made by the council and the cabinet, except where a document contains confidential and/or exempt information
- inspect the council's accounts and make their views known to the external auditor