

# Protocol for Member Officer Relations

RESPONSIBLE COMMITTEE: PERSONNEL

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This is a policy/procedure document of Saltash  
Town Council to be followed by both  
Councillors and Employees.

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<b>Document Retention Period</b>
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Until superseded
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# Protocol for Councillor /Officer Relations

## 1. Introduction

The purpose of this protocol is to guide Councillors and Officers of the Town Council in their relations with one another. A strong, constructive and trusting relationship between Councillors and Officers is essential to ensure the effective and efficient working of the Town Council.

The individual roles of Councillors and Officers can be summarised as follows:

Both Councillors and Officers serve the public and are essential to one another but their responsibilities and roles are distinct. Councillors are responsible to the electorate and serve only so long as their term of office lasts. Officers are responsible to the Town Council. They give advice to the Councillors and the Town Council and carry out the Town Council's work under the direction of the Town Council and the relevant committees.

Following this protocol should ensure that Councillors receive objective and impartial advice and that Officers are protected from accusations of bias and any undue influence from Councillors.

## 2. Principles underlying the protocol

The provisions of this protocol seeks to reflect the principles underlying the Councillors' Code of Conduct, the Employee Handbook and the Town Council's adopted policies, procedures and processes.<sup>1</sup> The shared object of the Code of Conduct and other documents, policies and procedures is to enhance and maintain the integrity (real and perceived) of Local Government and they therefore demand very high standards of personal conduct.

We base our protocol on the Nolan Principles (The Seven Principles of Public Life - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk))) of holding public office which include:

- Selflessness

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<sup>1</sup> Employees are also directed to their contract of employment, job description, the Green Book and policies relevant to their employment. They may also wish to consult their Line Manager or take advice from their union or professional association.

- Integrity
- Objectivity
- Accountability
- Openness
- Honesty
- Leadership

In addition to the Nolan Principles:

- Personal judgement – reaching one’s own conclusions and acting accordingly.
- Respecting the work of Councillors and Officers within their individual remits of serving the town with the reputation of the Town Council at heart.
- Duty to uphold the law – not acting unlawfully.
- Stewardship – ensuring the prudent use of the Town Council’s resources.
- Leadership – acting in a way that has public confidence.

### 3. Roles

#### 3.1. Councillors

3.1.1. Councillors have four main areas of responsibility:

- To determine Town Council policy and provide community leadership;
- To monitor and review Town Council performance in delivering services;
- To represent the Town Council externally; and
- To act as advocates for their constituents.
- **In addition, all Councillors should be aware of and adhere to their responsibilities as Corporate Employers.** When Councillors join, the Town Council guidance is provided and Members of the

Personnel Committee are required to undertake additional training.<sup>2</sup>  
All Councillors are advised to undertake HR employment law training  
as the Corporate Employer<sup>3</sup>

3.1.2. All Councillors have the same rights and obligations in their relationship  
with the Town Clerk and other employees, regardless of their status  
and should be treated equally.

### 3.2. Chairman and Vice Chairman of Committees

It is clearly important that there should be a close working relationship between  
Chairman and Vice-Chairman of Committees and the Officers who support  
and/or interact with them. However, such relationships should never be  
allowed to become so close, or appear to be so close, as to bring into question  
the officer's ability to deal impartially with other Councillors. Officers should  
never be asked to do anything which may prejudice their impartiality.

### 3.3. Officers

The following key principles reflect the way in which Officers generally relate to  
Councillors:

- Officers are employed by, and accountable to, the Town Council as a whole;
- Officers are impartial;
- Officers are responsible for operational delivery of all of the Town Council's functions including support to all Town Council Committees;
- Day to day managerial and operational decisions remain the responsibility of the Town Clerk and Line Managers working within set budgets and Town Council policies and procedures.

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<sup>2</sup> NALC Being a Good Employer, six monthly HRSC Employment Law Training

<sup>3</sup> 12 monthly HRSC Employment Law Training.

Council set budgets, policies, procedures and Statutory and legal obligations.

#### **4. Expectations**

##### 4.1. Councillors can expect:

- A commitment from Officers to the Town Council as a whole, not to any individual Councillor or group of Councillors;
- A working partnership<sup>4</sup>;
- That Officers understand and support respective roles, workloads and pressures;
- Respond to enquiries and complaints in accordance with the Town Council's standards;
- Professional, impartial advice and information, not influenced by political views or personal preferences;
- Regular, up to date information on appropriate and relevant matters, having regard to individual responsibilities or positions held;
- Respect, courtesy, integrity and appropriate confidentiality from Officers;
- Not to have personal issues raised with them by Officers outside the Town Council's agreed procedures;
- That Officers will not use their contact with Councillors to advance their personal interests or to influence decisions improperly;
- That Officers at all times will comply with relevant policies and procedures;

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<sup>4</sup> Members may find the following publication helpful: LGA Effective Member Officer Relations

- If representing the Town Council on an outside body, to be required to provide update reports in a timely manner with an appropriate level of detail.

#### 4.2. Officers can expect from Councillors:

- A working partnership and to be treated in a professional manner;
- An understanding of, and support for, respective roles, workloads and pressures;
- Timely responses to emails and/or telephone calls;
- Leadership and direction;
- Respect, courtesy, integrity and appropriate confidentiality;
- Not to be bullied or to be put under undue pressure;
- That Councillors will not use their position or relationship with Officers to advance their personal interests or those of others or to influence decisions improperly;
- That Councillors will at all times abide by the Nolan Principles and with the Town Council's adopted Code of Conduct, policies and procedures.

### **5. Meetings**

The interaction between Councillors and Officers at meetings of the Town Council and Committees should reflect the formality of the situation.

Any Officer carrying out a statutory role has specific responsibilities placed on them by law. These responsibilities go beyond their obligations as employees of the Town Council. Where an Officer is discharging their responsibilities under any statutory office a Councillor/Councillors shall not:

- Improperly interfere with or obstruct the Officer in exercising those responsibilities;
- Victimise any Officer who is discharging or has discharged their responsibilities of the Statutory Office.



Councillors and Officers may attend all formal meetings for the consideration of Part I (i.e. non-confidential) items, as may any member of the public. When a body is considering Part II information (i.e. exempt from publication under Access to Information legislation), Councillors and Officers do not have an automatic right of attendance.

## **6. Councillors' Access to information and Town Council documents**

- 6.1. Councillors are free to approach the Town Clerk to provide them with such information, explanation and advice, as they may reasonably need in order to assist them in discharging their role as Councillors. This can range from a request for general information about some aspect of the Town Council's activities to a request for specific information on behalf of a constituent.
- 6.2. As regards the legal rights of Councillors to inspect Town Council documents, these are covered partly by statute and partly by the common law.
- 6.3. Councillors have a statutory right to inspect any Town Council document that contains material relating to any business which is to be transacted at a Town Council, Committee or Sub-Committee meeting. This right applies irrespective of whether the member is a member of the Committee or Sub-Committee concerned and extends not only to reports which are to be submitted to the meeting, but also to any relevant background papers. This right does not however apply to documents relating to certain items which may appear in Part II (exempt) of the Agenda for meetings. Examples are documents that contain exempt information relating to employees, occupiers of Town Council property, applicants for grants and other services, contract and industrial relations negotiations, advice from Counsel and criminal investigations.
- 6.4. The common law right of Councillors is much broader and is based on the principle that any Councillors has a prima facie right to inspect Town Council documents so far as his/her access to the documents is reasonably necessary to enable the member properly to perform his/her duties as a

member of the Town Council. This principle is commonly referred to as the “need to know” principle.

- 6.5. The exercise of this common law right depends therefore upon the Councillor’s ability to demonstrate that they have the necessary ‘need to know’. In this respect a Member has no right to-‘a roving commission’ to go and examine documents of the Town Council. Mere curiosity is not sufficient.
- 6.6. In some circumstances (e.g. a
- 6.7. Councillor wishing to inspect documents relating to the functions of that Committee) a Councillors ‘need to know’ will normally be presumed. In other circumstances (e.g. a Councillor wishing to inspect documents which contain personal information about third parties) a Councillor will normally be expected to justify the request in specific terms.
- 6.8. Finally, any Town Council information provided to a Councillor must only be used by the Councillor for the purpose for which it was provided i.e. in connection with the proper performance of the Councillor’s duties as a member of the Town Council.
- 6.9. The Code of Conduct states that a Councillor must not disclose confidential information or information which they believe to be of a confidential nature, except in some specific circumstances as detailed in the Code.
- 6.10. For completeness, Councillors do, of course, have the same right as any other member of the public to make requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

## **7. Correspondence**

- 7.1. Correspondence between an individual Councillor and an Officer should not normally be copied by the Officer (or the Councillor) to any other Councillor. Where it is necessary to copy the correspondence to another Councillor, this should be done in a transparent manner with the original Councillor clearly informed. The system of silent copies (bcc) should not be used. Councillors and Officers should note that all correspondence may be subject to disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 or UK GDPR.

7.2. Official correspondence, by email or any other means, on behalf of the Town Council should normally be sent in the name of the appropriate Officer, rather than in the name of a Councillor. It shall, be appropriate in certain circumstances for correspondence to appear in the name of the Chairman of the Town Council or a Committee Chairman. Correspondence which, for example, creates legal obligations or gives instruction on behalf of the Town Council should never be sent out in the name of a Councillor.

## **8. Press and Social Media Comments, Press Releases and Local Publicity**

- 8.1. Councillors and Officers are reminded to follow the procedure for communicating with the press in the Communications Policy.
- 8.2. Any press or media release that may be necessary to clarify the Town Council's position should be cleared by the Town Clerk or their nominated deputy in consultation with the Mayor or Chairman of the relevant committee.
- 8.3. On no account must an Officer expressly or implicitly make any political opinion, comment or statement.
- 8.4. Particular care should be taken with publicity/media comments/press releases around the time of an election and more so during the heightened period of sensitivity during the pre-election period known as Purdah. Advice will be available from CALC and the Monitoring Officer where appropriate.

## **9. Use of Town Council resources**

The Code of Conduct states that a Councillor must, when using or authorising the use of the resources of the Town Council, act in accordance with the Town Council's requirements. Support from Officers can only lawfully be provided where this is to assist the Councillor in discharging their role on Town Council business and should never be used in connection with political or other campaigning activity or for private purposes. The use of computers (or other IT devices) provided to Councillors is governed by the policies and procedures adopted by the Town Council, including the IT Acceptable Use Policy.

### **General guidelines**

- 9.1. It is accepted that Councillors may wish to call on Officers to discuss various issues. However, it should be noted that Officers may have significant

workloads and deadlines to meet. Any discussions likely to take more than five minutes should be by appointment except where urgent and unforeseen. It is unlawful for Councillors to instruct members of staff. All requests for tasks to be undertaken must be submitted through the Line Managers.

- 9.2. Equally, Officers should only contact Councillors by telephone or email where necessary and should avoid circulating superfluous information.
- 9.3. All matters relating to particular committees should be copied to the Chairman of the Committee. Requests for agenda items should be submitted to both the Chairman and the Town Clerk.
- 9.4. Close personal relationships between Councillors and Officers can confuse their separate roles and get in the way of the proper conduct of Town Council business, not least by creating a perception that a particular Councillor or Officer is getting preferential treatment.

## **10. If things go wrong**

From time to time the relationship between Councillors and Officers may break down or become strained. Whilst it is always preferable to resolve matters informally, if appropriate through conciliation by an appropriate third party, the law requires all employers to have disciplinary and grievance procedures. The Town Council will maintain and regularly review separate disciplinary and grievance procedures and ensure they comply with good practice.

The Chairman of the Town Council should not attempt to deal with grievances or work related performance or line management issues. The Town Council has delegated authority on employment/human resources matters to the Personnel Committee.

Councillors and Officers should never personally criticise or undermine respect for the other in any public, external or internal forum such as 'round robin' email exchange. This damages working relationships and has an adverse impact on the public perception and reputation of the Town Council. Whilst Councillors have the right to criticise reports, advice or recommendations put before them at meetings, they should not address their criticism to the conduct or capabilities of individual Officers in the meeting or after. Officers have no means of responding to such

criticism either in a public meeting or via email – we must be vigilant to safeguard the welfare of our Officers.

Procedure for Councillors:

A Councillor who is dissatisfied with the conduct, behaviour or performance of an officer including the Town Clerk should refer to the Town Council Complaints Procedure.

Councillors should at all times:

- Ensure a professional working relationship-avoiding personal attacks on, or abuse of any Officer.
- Ensure that any criticism is well founded and constructive.
- Ensure that any criticism is made in private.

Procedure for Officers:

The Town Council's adopted grievance procedure enables individual employees to raise concerns, problems or complaints about their employment in an open and fair way. Where possible informal resolution should be sought via the procedure outlined in the Employee Handbook.

Where there is a potential breach of the Councillors' Code of Conduct:

Officers are advised to contact the Cornwall Council Monitoring Officer and request that an investigation is carried out in line with the Code of Conduct adopted under the Localism Act 2011. They may also wish to seek advice from their union or professional organisation.

Any questions about this protocol should be addressed in the first instance to the Town Clerk.

**Recommended reading for Councillors:**

NALC Being a Good Employer

Local Government Association Town Councillor Workbook: Effective Member and Officer Relations