



# ST AUSTELL TOWN COUNCIL

## MEMBER/OFFICER RELATIONS PROTOCOL

### **1 Background**

- 1.1 This protocol is intended to assist Councillors and the Clerk, in approaching some of the sensitive circumstances which arise in a challenging working environment.
- 1.2 The reputation and integrity of the council is significantly influenced by the effectiveness of Councillors, the Clerk and other staff working together to support each other's roles.
- 1.3 The aim is effective and professional working relationships characterised by mutual trust, respect and courtesy.

### **2. Roles of Councillors and Employees**

- 2.1 The respective roles of Councillors and employees can be summarised as follows:

Councillors and Officers are servants of the public and they are indispensable to one another, but their responsibilities are distinct. Councillors are responsible to the electorate and serve only so long as their term of office lasts. Officers are responsible to the council. Their job is to give advice to Councillors and to the council, and to carry out the council's work under the direction and control of the council and relevant committees.

#### **2.2 Councillors**

- 2.2.1 Councillors have four main areas of responsibility:
  - To determine council policy and provide community leadership;
  - To monitor and review council performance in delivering services;
  - To represent the council externally; and
  - To act as advocates for their constituents.
- 2.2.2 All Councillors have the same rights and obligations in their relationship with the Clerk and other employees, regardless of their status or political party, and should be treated equally.
- 2.2.3 Councillors should not involve themselves in the day to day running of the Council. This is the Clerk's responsibility, and the Clerk will be acting on instructions from the Council or its

Committees, within an agreed job description.

- 2.2.4 Individual Councillors cannot commit the Council to expenditure or a particular course of action.

### **2.3 Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of Committees**

Committee Chairs and Vice-Chairs have additional responsibilities. These responsibilities mean that their relationships with employees may be different and more complex than those of other Councillors. However, they must still respect the impartiality of Officers and must not ask them to undertake work of a party political nature, or to do anything which would prejudice their impartiality.

### **2.4 Officers**

The role of Officers is to give advice and information to Councillors and to implement the policies determined by the Council.

In giving such advice to Councillors, and in preparing and presenting reports, it is the responsibility of the Officer to express his/her own professional views and recommendations. An Officer may report the views of individual Councillors on an issue, but the recommendation should be the Officer's own. If a Councillor wishes to express a contrary view they should not pressurise the officer to make a recommendation contrary to the officer's professional view, nor victimise an officer for discharging his/her responsibilities.

## **3. Expectations**

- 3.1 All Councillors can expect:

- a commitment from Officers to the Council as a whole, and not to any individual Councillor, group of Councillors or political group;
- a working partnership;
- Officers to understand and support respective roles, workloads and pressures;
- a timely response from Officers to enquiries and complaints;
- Officer's professional advice, not influenced by political views or personal preferences;
- regular, up to date, information on matters that can reasonably be considered appropriate and relevant to their needs, having regard to any individual responsibilities or positions that they hold;
- Officers to be aware of and sensitive to the public and

- political environment locally;
- respect, courtesy, integrity and appropriate confidentiality from Officers;
- training and development opportunities to help them carry out their role effectively;
- not to have personal issues raised with them by Officers outside the 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 will at all times comply with the relevant code of conduct as far as it applies.
- If on an outside body to be required to provide update reports in a timely manner with an appropriate level of detail.

### 3.2 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;
- 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 comply with the council's adopted Code of Conduct.

### 3.3 Some General Principles:

- Close personal relationships between Councillors and Officers can confuse their separate roles and get in the way of the proper conduct of Council business, not least by creating a perception in others that a particular Councillor or Officer is getting preferential treatment.
- Special relationships with particular individuals or party political groups should be avoided as it can create suspicion that an employee favours that Councillor or political group above others.
- It is accepted that officers may have to communicate with individual or a number of Councillors on specific items of business between meetings.

#### **4. Political Groups**

- 4.1 The Council does not operate on the basis of political groups.
- 4.2 Party political groups, if formed, will have no power to require the Clerk or any other employee to attend group meetings or to prepare written reports for them, and employees can legitimately refuse to do so. The Clerk and other Officers are responsible to the council as a whole and should not take action under instructions from any individual Councillor.
- 4.3 If the council adopts party political groupings, the Clerk should ensure that any reports or advice offered to a political group are statements of relevant facts, with an appraisal of options. It is not the Clerk's job to make recommendations to a political group but may do so if in the public interest.
- 4.4 If a report is prepared for one political group, the Clerk should advise all other political groups and non-aligned Councillors that the report has been prepared and make it available if requested.

#### **5. When things go wrong**

- 5.1 From time to time the relationship between Councillors and the Clerk (or other employees) may break down or become strained. Whilst it is always preferable to resolve matters informally or through conciliation by an appropriate third party, it is important that the council adopts a formal grievance protocol or procedure.
- 5.2 Cornwall Council's Monitoring Officer may be able to offer a mediation/conciliation role or it may be necessary to seek independent advice. Alternatively, the Cornwall Association of Local Councils or the Society of Local Council Clerks may be able to provide an independent person. The Chair of the council should not attempt to deal with grievances or work related performance or line management issues on their own. The council should delegate authority to a small group of Councillors to deal with all personnel matters.
- 5.3 The law requires all employers to have disciplinary and grievance procedures. Adopting a grievance procedure enables individual employees to raise concerns, problems or complaints about their employment in an open and fair way.
- 5.4 The Town Council will maintain and regularly review separate disciplinary and grievance procedures and ensure that they comply with good practice.

- 5.5 If a Councillor is dissatisfied with the conduct, behaviour or performance of the Clerk or another employee, the matter should be raised with the Clerk and/or the Mayor in the first instance. If the matter cannot be resolved informally, it may be necessary to invoke the council's disciplinary procedure.