



BRIDGWATER TOWN COUNCIL
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Adopted by the Council at its Meeting held on

Protocol on Councillors/ Officer / Employee Relations

Introduction

This protocol is intended as a guide for Councillors, Officers and Employees in their dealings with one another and as a supplement to the Members' Code of Conduct. To a large extent the protocol is a statement of practice and convention which is intended to provide clarity.

The reputation and integrity of the Council is significantly influenced by the effectiveness of the Councillor, the Clerk and other staff working together to support each other's roles. The aim is effective and professional working relationships characterised by mutual trust, respect and courtesy.

In this document Council refers to Bridgwater Town Council and Councillor refers to Councillors of Bridgwater Town Council.

1. General Principles

1.1 A good working relationships is best defined as a partnership of Councillors, Officers and Employees working together to achieve the overall aims of the Council.

1.2 Members and Officers and Employees should avoid any close personal familiarity that could give rise to the suspicion of bias or undue influence.

1.3 Every person must be treated fairly with dignity and respect. Harassment and bullying is not acceptable.

1.4 In general, Councillors make policy and Officers and Employees implement the Council's policy. In most cases Councillors should avoid becoming involved in the operational and administrative aspects of service delivery.

1.5 Members and Officers and Employees share a responsibility to work together to achieve and implement decisions in the interests of the Council and the area it serves.

1.6 All dealings between Members and Officers and Employees should be conducted courteously and neither party should seek to take advantage of their position.

1.7 To ensure high standards of conduct Councillors are required to abide by the Members' Code of Conduct and Officers and Employees the Staff Handbook.

1.8 If an Officer or Employee is concerned about the behaviour of a Councillor, or if a Councillor is concerned about the behaviour of an Officer or Employee the nature of the concern should be brought to the attention of the Town Clerk.

2. Councillors

2.1 Councillors have 4 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
- To act as advocates for their constituents

2.2 Councillors make decisions in Committee and Council meetings (when the topics discussed will be in accordance with the Committee Terms of Reference).

2.3 A Councillor acting as an individual cannot give instructions to a Council employee.

2.4 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. Progress on actions will be reported to the relevant committee.

2.5 Any Councillor may inspect and make a copy of any document in the possession or under the control of the Council and which the Councillor may require in the course of their duties as a Member of the Council – subject to 2.6 below.

2.6 A Councillor may not knowingly inspect or call for a copy of any document relating to a matter in which they have a professional, personal or pecuniary interest.

2.7 Any document provided for a Councillor and marked as "Confidential" or "Not for Publication" shall be exclusively for the use of that Councillor and shall not be disclosed to any other person.

2.8 Council equipment or supplies e.g. stationery provided to Councillors must only be used to assist them in their role as members of the Council.

2.9 Members must not seek to influence the appointment of Council staff other than where they are properly appointed to a selection panel.

3. Officers and Employees

3.1 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 their own professional views and recommendations. An Officer may report the views of individual Councillors on an issue, but any recommendation should be the Officers own. If a Councillor wishes to express a contrary view they should not pressurise the Officer to make a recommendation contrary to the Officers professional view, nor victimise an Officer for discharging their responsibility.

3.2 Officers and Employees are required to discharge their responsibilities in a professional manner and without political bias or favour.

3.3 Officers and Employees are expected to declare any prejudicial interests relating to their work to the Town Clerk.

3.4 Officers and Employees must not normally lobby Councillors e.g. about personal employment matters or budgetary matters; such issues should be taken through agreed procedures.

3.5 Council equipment or supplies e.g. stationery provided to Officers and Employees must only be used to assist them in their role as employees of the Council.

3.6 Certain Officers such as the Head of Paid Service (Town Clerk) and the Responsible Financial Officer have responsibilities in law over and above their obligations to the Council and individual members, which they must be allowed to discharge. These duties are set out in various documents, such as but not restricted to, Contract of Employment, Standing Orders and Financial Regulations.

4. Expectations

What members can expect from employees:

- A commitment from Officers and Employees to the Council as a whole, and not to any individual Councillor, group of Councillors, political group or pressure group
- An effective and co-operative working partnership with Officers and Employees
- Officers and Employees to understand and support respective roles, workloads and pressures
- Respect, courtesy, integrity and appropriate confidentiality from Officers and Employees
- Training and development opportunities to help them carry out their role effectively (records of any such training will be kept by the Town Council)
- Not to have personal issues raised with them by Councillors outside the Council's agreed procedures
- That Officers and Employees will not use their contact with Councillors to advance their personal interests or to influence decisions improperly
- Using their knowledge, skills and expertise to deliver the best services possible
- Listening to views and trying their best to understand and solve problems
- Taking responsibility for problems and getting back to people when they say they will
- Being honest about what they can and can't do
- Being courteous, respectful and helpful
- Recognition of councillors' areas of expertise

What Councillors should not expect from employees:

- Giving excuses not reasons
- Not responding in a polite and timely way to queries and complaints
- Making assumptions and not checking them out
- Being secretive and withholding information
- Being patronising or condescending
- Discrimination of any sort

What Officers can expect from Members:

- An effective and co-operative working partnership
- An understanding of, and support for, respective roles, workloads and pressures
- Leadership and direction
- Respect, courtesy, integrity, supportive and appropriate confidentiality
- Not to be bullied or put under undue pressure
- That Councillors will not use their position or relationship with Officers and Employees 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 Members Code of Conduct.
- Being challenged in a constructive way at the right time and place

What officers should not expect from members

- Inappropriate level of challenge in public meetings without prior discussion
- Bullying
- Blaming
- Criticising in public
- Discrimination of any sort

Background Papers:

Bridgwater Town Council Code of Conduct for Members

Governance Toolkit for Parish & Town Councils (version 3 - April 2009)

The Good Councillors Guide 2018