

Member – Officer Conduct Protocol

Introduction

This protocol sets out the practical measures for ensuring effective and professional working relationships between Members and Officers of the Council. It is based on the Model Councillor Code of Conduct, the guidance for officers in the Staff Handbook, and the Seven Nolan Principles of Public Life—selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, and leadership. These principles emphasise mutual respect, impartiality, and professionalism.

Scope & Purpose

Positive relationships between Members and Officers are essential for good governance and the effective running of the Council. Trust, openness, respect, and constructive communication underpin these relationships. The purpose of this protocol is to clarify expectations and support a shared understanding of roles, responsibilities, and behaviours. The reputation of the Council depends significantly on how well Members and Officers work together. Members set policy, make decisions, and provide community leadership. They must not involve themselves in day-to-day administration, which is the responsibility of the Clerk and Officers.

Focus on Issues

Members may robustly challenge ideas, proposals, and policies, but must not direct personal criticism, attacks, or offensive behaviour toward individuals. Officers are similarly expected to focus on issues rather than personalities.

Roles and Responsibilities

Councillors

Councillors are responsible to the electorate and serve only so long as their term of office lasts.

Councillors are responsible for:

- Setting the Council's policy direction and providing community leadership
- Monitoring performance and delivery of services
- Representing the Council externally
- Acting as advocates on behalf of residents.

Councillors should focus on strategic matters and must not micromanage staff. Individual Members, including the Chair, cannot direct staff; instructions must come from the Council as a whole or through the Clerk.

Chairs and Vice-Chairs

Chairs and Vice-Chairs have additional responsibilities, including:

- Leading and managing meetings
- Working with the Clerk to agree draft agendas
- Exercising a casting vote at meetings where required
- Acting as the public face of the Council or committee
- Supporting good governance, conduct, and meeting discipline

They must continue to respect the impartiality of Officers, must not request politically partisan work, and must not put Officers in a position that conflicts with Standing Orders or Council policies.

Officers

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.

Officers, managed by the Clerk, are responsible for:

- Providing professional advice
- Implementing Council decisions
- Managing daily operations.

Certain officers (e.g., the Clerk and RFO) have statutory duties that may override instructions from Members. Members must respect these obligations and not obstruct Officers in fulfilling them.

Officers must be able to offer professional recommendations freely, even when these may not align with Member preferences. Where Members disagree, they should do so respectfully and ensure that reasons are clearly recorded in the minutes.

Mutual Respect and Trust

Members and Officers must work together with mutual trust, courtesy, and respect. Uncivil or discourteous behaviour is unacceptable.

Each should support the other's role

- Members should value professional expertise
- Officers should respect the democratic mandate of members

Expectations

Members can expect Officers to:

- Demonstrate commitment to the Council as a whole
- Work in partnership with members
- Understand and respect respective roles, pressures, and workloads
- Provide timely responses to enquiries and complaints
- Offer impartial, politically neutral professional advice
- Provide relevant and up-to-date information
- Be aware of the political environment while remaining politically neutral
- Demonstrate respect, dignity, courtesy, and appropriate confidentiality
- Maintain integrity and adhere to policies and procedures
- Avoid using relationships with Members for personal gain.

Officers can expect Members to

- Work in partnership with officers
- Understand and support respective roles, pressures, and workloads
- Provide leadership while maintaining appropriate boundaries
- Demonstrate respect, dignity, courtesy, and confidentiality
- Avoid bullying or applying undue pressure
- Consider the seniority and authority of Officers when making requests
- Avoid using their position for personal benefit or inappropriate influence
- Comply with the Council's Code of Conduct.

Impartiality and No Political Pressure

Shinfield Parish Council supports the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) policy that party politics should not influence parish councils. Councillors serve their community, not political groups.

Officers:

- Must not attend party group meetings or prepare partisan material
- Are responsible to the Council as a whole, not to individual Members or groups;
- Must not be asked to act in a politically biased way or undertake tasks that further party interests
 - Reports and advice must be factual and impartial.
- Must treat all Councillors fairly and provide the same information to all Members unless a legitimate reason prevents this

Confidentiality

Information acquired through Council roles must remain confidential unless disclosure is authorised, required by law, or deemed to be in the public interest following consultation with the WBC Monitoring Officer.

Communications

Members should direct operational requests through the Clerk or Deputy Clerk rather than approaching junior staff. Where communication with a specific officer is appropriate, the Clerk or Deputy Clerk should be copied in.

Officers should ensure the whole Council or relevant committees are informed of responses where appropriate.

A professional tone is required in all communications—no shouting, rude emails, or hostile exchanges.

Problem Resolution

Minor issues should be resolved informally wherever possible. Where informal approaches are insufficient, formal processes apply.

A councillor's misconduct (e.g. bullying the Clerk/other staff) may trigger a Code of Conduct complaint to WBC's Monitoring Officer. The Monitoring Officer may seek local mediation first, but if that fails, the matter can be investigated and potentially lead to sanctions on the councillor (though limited, since parish councillors cannot be suspended or removed by the parish). Nevertheless, even a finding of a breach with a formal censure is reputationally significant and can lead to pressure to resign if severe.

An employee's misconduct (e.g. an officer showing disrespect to an elected member or failing to follow council instructions) is handled via the council's disciplinary procedure. The Staffing Committee will oversee any investigation, with the employee having rights to representation, etc. If a councillor is dissatisfied with an officer, they should not themselves attempt discipline but refer it to the Clerk or Staffing committee.

The Council (via the Staffing Committee) has the authority to handle personnel matters, and the Chair of the Council should not individually attempt to deal with complaints about staff outside the proper process.

Review Date

This document should be reviewed every four years (January 2030) or sooner if Full Council deems it necessary.