

MEMBER/OFFICER RELATIONS Factsheet

The [Member] Code of Conduct states 'You must promote and support high standards of conduct when serving in your public post, in particular as characterised by ... leadership and example. You should have regard to the Council's guidance in Protocols on the conduct between officers and members and the conduct when serving on outside bodies.'

A. How should I conduct my relations with officers? This should at all times, be conducted in a professional and business-like manner. Be cautious in developing close personal relationships with officers. Informal and collaborative two-way contact between you and officers is encouraged, but personal familiarity can damage the relationship, as might a family or business connection.

B. What should my relationship with officers be based on? Mutual respect and trust at all times. You must always respect the roles and duties of an officer and vice versa. Respect is shown by observing reasonable standards of courtesy and by not seeking to take unfair advantage of another person's position.

C. Are officers responsible to me as a Councillor? No. Officers are employed by the Council and are accountable to it and the Head of paid Service (the Managing Director). Ultimately, officers serve the Council as a whole and not any particular political group, combination of groups or any individual Member.

D. Do officers have a contractual and legal duty to be impartial? Yes. Officers must at all times, maintain impartiality.

E. Can I ask an officer to assist my political group? Yes. Officers may properly be asked to contribute to deliberations of matters concerning Council business by political groups. You must respect the impartiality of officers and do nothing to compromise this. The presence of an officer confers no formal status on a political group meeting in terms of Council business and must not be interpreted as doing so.

F. Can I ask an officer to attend ward or constituency political party meetings? No.

G. What is the difference between criticism of an officer and 'bullying'? You may question officers in order to understand, for example, their reasons for proposing a certain course of action, or on the content of the report they have written, but you must not try and force officers to act differently, change their advice, or alter the content of reports, if doing so, would prejudice their professional integrity. You may question poor officer performance, so long as it is done in an appropriate and private way. A personal attack, or criticism that is offensive, intimidating, malicious, insulting or humiliating will cross the line of what is acceptable behaviour and be characterised as 'bullying'.

H. How should I conduct my relations with outside bodies? Whatever your appointed role, you must at all times, act in the public interest, provide leadership for your community and conduct yourself appropriately. The key point to note is that where you are carrying out your duties as a director, trustee, or management committee member on an outside body, you may take account of the wishes of the Council, but your primary duty is to act in the best interests of the organisation to which you have been appointed.

I. Find out more - The Member/Officer Relations' Protocol and Guidance for Members on Outside Bodies offer further guidance. Advice or clarification can be sought from the Monitoring Officer or the Head of Legal Services.