

MEETING OF THE COUNCIL – 18TH JULY 2005

PROTOCOL FOR RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MEMBERS AND OFFICERS OF DUDLEY MBC

REPORT OF THE CABINET

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To consider the proposals of the Cabinet regarding a draft Protocol for Relationships between Members and Officers of the Council.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 At its meeting on the 14th December 2004 the Standards Committee considered a report of the Director of Law and Property and draft Protocol for Relationships between Members and Officers of the Council.
- 2.2 As a result of the Committee's initial deliberations amendments were made to paragraphs 29 and 109 and these are highlighted in bold print in the draft attached at Appendix 1.
- 2.3 The draft was considered by each of the Council's Select Committees at their meetings in January 2005. Three of the Select Committees (Education and Lifelong Learning, Good Health and Community Safety) endorsed the draft without alteration but the remaining three Select Committees made the following comments.
 - 2.4 **Select Committee on the Environment.**
 - 2.4.1 Members commented that there was a general lack of communication and information that was available to members. A particular incident was referred to whereby the telephone numbers for the Directorate of Housing had changed and members had not been made aware of this. Another incident that was highlighted involved the employment of the new Town Centre Managers where ward members would have found information useful earlier rather than later. It was felt that information about particular issues only came to light when reading newspaper articles. It was suggested that various ways of communicating information should be used, such as e-mail, intranet and internet.
 - 2.5 Comment
 - 2.5.1 Communication is an age-old problem for all large organisations. Paragraph 96 of the draft recognises the importance of keeping local members informed and this will be reinforced once the Code has been approved by the full Council.

2.6 **Select Committee on Culture and Recreation**

- 2.6.1 Members commented that they have experienced difficulties of officers not understanding that members may have access to documents relating to cases in which they are involved. They express the view that there is a growing tendency to hide behind the Data Protection Act and that officers need to understand the rights of members to view documents.
- 2.6.2 One member also expressed the view that too many committee reports are still considered in private session and felt that there would be occasions when it would be impossible not to make criticism in public of an officer's actions despite paragraph 136 of the Code.
- 2.6.3 Another member quoted examples of officers being willing to give members information over the telephone but without validating to whom they were talking. The Committee was keen that a procedure of calling a member back or using a personal code should be introduced.

2.7 Comment

- 2.7.1 At its meeting in December 2004 the Standards Committee debated access to information by members, particularly when they were acting on behalf of a constituent. A similar discussion took place at the meeting of the Cabinet 15th June, 2005. Guidance from the Information Commissioner now makes it clear that it would be unreasonable to expect elected members to provide written consent for access to records relating to a constituent of their ward when acting on their behalf, apart from sensitive personal data, information provided in confidence and police information. In the light of this, fresh written advice will be issued soon to members on this issue and a Code of Practice will follow later this year.
- 2.7.2 Very few reports are taken in private session and usually the reasons for treating the item as being "exempt" are: -
- the inclusion of personal data e.g. details of an employee or housing tenant
 - commercial sensitivity e.g. the terms of a contract
 - protecting the legal interest of the Council e.g. where confidential legal advice has been given.

Under the Freedom of Information Act a number of categories of confidential information still needs to satisfy the public interest test i.e. it is not in the public interest to disclose it, but with the passage of time information will lose its confidentiality and will be disclosable at a later point.

- 2.7.3 There is a time and place for criticism of officers and as paragraph 136 of the draft makes clear, any concerns by a member should be pursued privately with the officer concerned or their senior.

- 2.7.4 Providing information over the telephone can be fraught with difficulties if the officer does not know the member concerned. It is suggested, therefore, that we add the following to paragraph 112: -

“When the information is requested over the telephone, the officer concerned will only convey the information if they know the member requesting the information and, if not, the officer will re-telephone the member in order to confirm the member’s identity.

2.8 Select Committee on Economic Regeneration

- 2.8.1 The Committee was concerned about paragraph 100 regarding public meetings arranged by a ward member. The Committee felt that minor public meetings should take place without the need to inform the Chief Executive or Director and that this was now an added burden for them.
- 2.8.2 One member of the Committee expressed the view that officers should be allowed to attend ward or constituency political party meetings (paragraph 103) but this view was not shared by other members.
- 2.8.3 The Committee also looked at paragraph 123. Some members felt that this paragraph would benefit from re-wording to make it clear that members can copy other members into correspondence.

2.9 Comment

- 2.9.1 With regard to paragraph 100 the requirement to notify the Chief Executive or relevant Director of a public meeting is simply to ensure that the meeting may take place in Council owned premises and to make it possible for an officer to attend. If the public meeting is not to be held on Council premises and is not to be attended by any Council officer, there is no requirement to notify the Chief Executive or Director.
- 2.9.2 It is a longstanding convention that officers do not attend ward or constituency political party meetings.
- 2.9.3 In order to clarify paragraph 123 it is suggested that we insert “by the officer” after “copied” in line 2. If the member wishes to circulate the correspondence to another member, they will be free to do so.

2.10 Standards Committee

- 2.10.1 The draft Protocol was further considered by the Standards Committee at its meeting on the 4th April 2005 when it was recommended to the Cabinet and the Council that the draft be approved with the amendments to paragraph 112 and 123 highlighted in bold print in Appendix 1.

2.11 On consideration of the above, the Cabinet, at its meeting held on 15th June, 2005, resolved to recommend the Council to approve the proposals in Section 3 below.

3.0 PROPOSAL

3.1 That the draft Protocol for Relationships between Members and Officers of Dudley MBC, as appended to this report, be approved.

4.0 FINANCE

4.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

5.0 LAW

5.1 Section 112 of the Local Government Act 1972 enables the Council to appoint staff to undertake its statutory functions.

5.2 Section 111 of the 1972 Act permits the Council to do any thing which is calculated to facilitate or is conducive or incidental to the discharge of its functions.

6.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

6.1. The adoption of the draft protocol is entirely consistent with the Council's policies with regard to equal opportunities and diversity.

7.0 RECOMMENDATION

7.1 That the proposals in Section 3 above be approved.

David Caunt

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LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Model draft Protocol produced by The Association of Council Secretaries and Solicitors.
2. Report to Corporate Board on the 12th October 2004.
3. Report to the Cabinet 15th June 2005.

APPENDIX 1

**A PROTOCOL FOR RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN
MEMBERS AND OFFICERS OF DUDLEY MBC**

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“Every local authority should have its own written statement or protocol governing relations between members and officers.” (Third report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life - the Nolan Committee)

Preamble

1. Mutual trust and respect between members and officers is at the heart of a council’s good governance. They are essential if the partnership necessary for the effective running of a local authority is to succeed.
2. This may seem obvious. But what happens when relationships go awry? Where can members and officers turn for guidance? What mechanisms exist for addressing concerns? How can matters be improved?
3. Such questions point to the need for a written guide to the basic elements of the relationship between members and officers – a protocol:
 - to promote trust, openness, fairness and honesty by establishing some ground rules;
 - to define roles so as:
 - to clarify responsibilities (i.e. who does what),
 - to avoid conflict, and
 - to prevent duplication or omission;
 - to secure compliance with the law, codes of conduct and a council’s own practices; and
 - to lay down procedures for dealing with concerns by members or officers.
4. A protocol should be a recognised both as a central element of a council’s corporate governance, and as a commitment to upholding standards of conduct in public life. It’s one way of demonstrating to the public at large that local government is serious about protecting and enhancing its integrity and reputation.
5. This protocol has been approved by full Council following consultation with the Cabinet and the Standards Committee.

Definitions

6. Unless the context indicates otherwise, references to the term *Council* include the Cabinet, Select and Area Committees, and **committees** includes sub-committees and working groups
7. For the purposes of this protocol, the term *Cabinet* refers to the Leader and Cabinet members.

8. Unless the context indicates otherwise, the terms *member* and *members* include non-elected (i.e. co-opted) members as well as elected councillors.
9. *Officers* means all persons employed by the Council (but excluding teachers).

Principles

10. Members and officers must at all times observe this protocol.
11. The protocol has been approved by the Council's Standards Committee who will monitor its operation.
12. The protocol seeks to maintain and enhance the integrity (real and perceived) of local government which demands the highest standards of personal conduct.
13. Members and officers must always respect the roles and duties of each other. They must show respect in all their dealings by observing reasonable standards of courtesy, and by not seeking to take unfair advantage by virtue of their position.
14. Whilst members and officers are indispensable to one another, their responsibilities are distinct. Members are accountable to the electorate and serve only as long as their term of office lasts. Officers are accountable to the Council as a whole. Their job is to give advice to members (individually and collectively) and to carry out the Council's work under the direction of the Council.
15. The Council has adopted codes of conduct for both members and officers. Both represent best practice. The members' code follows the national code which in turn is based on the general principles governing members' conduct enshrined in law, viz:
 - Selflessness – serving only the public interest.
 - Honesty and integrity – not allowing these to be questioned; not behaving improperly.
 - Objectivity – taking decisions on merit.
 - Accountability – to the public; being open to scrutiny.
 - Openness – giving reasons for decisions.
 - Personal judgement – reaching one's own conclusions and acting accordingly.
 - Respect for others – promoting equality; avoiding discrimination; respecting others (member/member, as well as member/officer).
 - Duty to uphold the law – not acting unlawfully.
 - Stewardship – ensuring the prudent use of a council's resources.
 - Leadership – acting in a way which has public confidence.

16. These principles underpin this protocol. They will also be reflected in a new national code of conduct for employees due in the near future.
17. Until such time as a new national code appears, officers are bound by the Council's existing code of conduct for employees and, in some cases, by the codes of their professional associations.
18. Breaches of this protocol by a member may result in a complaint to the Standards Board for England if it appears the members' code has also been breached. Breaches by an officer may lead to disciplinary action.

The role of members

19. Members have a number of roles and need to be alert to the potential for conflicts of interest which may arise between the roles. Where such conflicts are likely, members should seek the advice of the Monitoring Officer.
20. Collectively, they are the ultimate policy-makers determining the core values of the Council and approving the authority's strategic plans for the borough as a whole.
21. Members represent the community, act as community leaders and promote the social, economic and environmental well-being of the community often in partnership with other agencies.
22. Every elected-member represents the interests of, and is an advocate for their ward and individual constituents. They represent the Council in the ward, respond to the concerns of constituents, meet with partner agencies, and often serve on local bodies.
23. Some members have roles relating to their position as Cabinet members and as members of Select Committees and other committees of the Council.
24. Cabinet members have individual delegated powers. Their focus should be to make decisions that are in the best interests of the borough. They may determine matters within their portfolios but implementation of their decisions is the responsibility of officers.
25. Members serving on Select Committees monitor the effectiveness of the Council's policies and service delivery, and those of local health service providers and health service commissioners, and assist in policy development.
26. Members who serve on other committees collectively have delegated responsibilities, e.g. deciding quasi-judicial matters which by law are excluded from the remit of the Cabinet.
27. Some members may be appointed to represent the Council on local, regional or national bodies.

28. As politicians, members may express the values and aspirations of the party political groups to which they belong, recognising that in their role as members they have a duty always to act in the public interest.
29. Members are not authorised to instruct officers other than:
 - through the formal decision-making process;
 - to request the provision of consumable resources provided by the Council for members' use;
 - where staff have been specifically allocated to give support to a member or group of members.
 - **to request information in accordance with the Access to Information provisions summarised in paragraph 107 below.**
30. Members are not authorised to initiate or certify financial transactions, or to enter into a contract on behalf of the Council.
31. Members must avoid taking actions which officers consider to be unlawful, financially improper or likely to give rise to maladministration. Members have an obligation under their code of conduct to have regard, when reaching decisions, to any advice provided by the Monitoring Officer or the Director of Finance.
32. Members must respect the impartiality of officers and do nothing to compromise it, e.g. by insisting that an officer change his/her professional advice.
33. Members have a duty under their code of conduct:
 - to promote equality by not discriminating unlawfully against any person, and
 - to treat others with respect.
34. Under the code, a member must not when acting as a member or in any other capacity:
 - bring the Council or their position as a member into disrepute, or
 - use their position as a member improperly to gain an advantage or disadvantage for themselves or any other person.

The role of officers

35. Officers are responsible for giving advice to members to enable them to fulfil their roles. In doing so, officers will take into account all available relevant factors.

36. Under the direction and control of the Council (including, as appropriate, the Cabinet and Committees), officers manage and provide the Council's services within the framework of responsibilities delegated to them. This includes the effective management of employees and operational issues.
37. Officers have a duty to implement decisions of the Council, the Cabinet and Committees which are lawful, and which have been properly approved in accordance with the requirements of the law and the Council's constitution, and duly minuted.
38. Officers have a contractual and legal duty to be impartial. They must not allow their professional judgement and advice to be influenced by their own personal views.
39. Officers must assist and advise all parts of the Council. They must always act to the best of their abilities in the best interests of the authority as expressed in the Council's formal decisions.
40. Officers must be alert to issues which are, or are likely to be, contentious or politically sensitive, and be aware of the implications for members, the media or other sections of the public.
41. Officers have the right not to support members in any role other than that of member, and not to engage in actions incompatible with this protocol. In particular, there is a statutory limitation on officers' involvement in political activities.

The relationship between members and officers: general

42. The conduct of members and officers should be such as to instil mutual confidence and trust.
43. There are two key elements: respect, and a recognition of each other's roles and responsibilities.
44. Informal and collaborative two-way contact between members and officers is encouraged. But close personal familiarity can damage the relationship, as might a family or business connection.
45. Members and officers should inform the Monitoring Officer of any relationship which might be seen as unduly influencing their work in their respective roles.
46. It is not enough to avoid actual impropriety. Members and officers should always be open about their relationships to avoid any reason for suspicion and any appearance of improper conduct. Where a close personal relationship has been disclosed, those concerned should avoid a situation where conflict could be perceived. Specifically, a member should not sit on a body or participate in

any decision which directly affects the officer on a personal basis, for example a disciplinary appeal.

47. Officers serve the Council as a whole. They have a duty to implement the properly authorised decisions of the Council.
48. Officers work to the instructions of the Chief Executive and Directors, not individual members. It follows that, whilst such officers will always seek to assist a member, they must not be asked to exceed the bounds of authority they have been given by their managers. Except when the purpose of an enquiry is purely to seek factual information, members should normally direct their requests and concerns to the Chief Executive or relevant Director, at least in the first instance.
49. Officers will do their best to give timely responses to members' enquiries. However, officers should not have unreasonable requests placed on them. Their work priorities are set and managed by senior managers. Members should avoid disrupting officers' work by imposing their own priorities.
50. Members will endeavour to give timely responses to enquiries from officers.
51. An officer shall not discuss with a member personal matters concerning themselves or another individual employee. This does not prevent an officer raising on a personal basis, and in their own time, a matter with their ward member.
52. Members and officers should respect each other's free (i.e. non-Council) time.

The Council as employer

53. Officers are employed by the Council as a whole.
54. Individual members' roles are limited to:
 - the appointment of specified senior posts,
 - determining human resources policies and conditions of employment, and
 - hearing and determining appeals.
55. Members shall not act outside these roles.
56. If participating in the appointment of officers, members should:
 - remember that the sole criterion is merit,
 - never canvass support for a particular candidate,
 - not take part where one of the candidates is a close friend or relative,
 - not be influenced by personal preferences, and

- not favour a candidate by giving them information not available to the other candidates.
57. A member should not sit on an appeal hearing if the appellant is a friend, a relative, or an officer with whom the member has had a close working relationship.

Mayor and officers

58. Officers will respect the position of Mayor and provide appropriate support. In particular, when the Mayor is invited to attend a function arranged by or through the Council, the appropriate officer will ensure that the Mayor's Secretary receives a briefing note and timetable at least one week beforehand.

Cabinet members and officers

59. Cabinet Members will take decisions in accordance with the constitution and will not otherwise direct staff. The Chief Executive and Directors will be responsible for instructing staff to implement the Cabinet's decisions.
60. The Chief Executive and Directors have the right to submit papers to the Cabinet as a whole or to individual Cabinet members for consideration.
61. The Chief Executive and Directors and Cabinet members, shall agree mutually convenient methods of regular contact. The Cabinet will seek appropriate professional advice before taking any formal decisions and will not direct officers in the framing of recommendations. Without exception, the Monitoring Officer and Director of Finance must always be consulted.
62. Before any formal decisions with a financial implication are taken by the Cabinet, the Director of Finance and the appropriate Director must be consulted. This is to ensure that the relevant Directors:
- are aware of the proposed decision,
 - have the opportunity to offer advice, and
 - are subsequently able properly to authorise the financial transactions needed to implement decisions.
63. An individual Cabinet member who is minded to make a decision through a decision sheet about a matter within their portfolio must ensure that those other members and officers who need to know of the matter are so informed. There is a particular requirement to involve other Cabinet members on cross-cutting issues.

64. Cabinet members when making decisions (whether collectively or individually) must state the reasons for those decisions. The written record of the decisions must include the reasons.
65. Officers taking decisions under their delegated powers must consider the advisability of informing the relevant Cabinet member(s) of their intentions in advance when the matter to which the decisions relates is likely to be sensitive or contentious.

Select Committee members and officers

66. Chairmen of Select Committees should maintain regular contact with the officer providing the principal support to their Select Committee. In consultation with Chairmen, it shall be the responsibility of that officer to ensure that those who need to know of matters being considered or for possible future consideration are so informed.
67. A Select Committee or its Chairman acting on its behalf may require officers to attend meetings of the Committee or any of its working groups. Members should not expect junior officers to give evidence. All requests should be made to the Chief Executive or appropriate Director in the first instance.
68. When making requests for officer attendance, members should have regard to the workload of officers.
69. It is recognised that officers required to appear before a Select Committee may often be those who have advised the Cabinet or another part of the Council on the matter under investigation. In these circumstances, an officer may have a conflict of interest. Both members and officers need to consider the severity of the conflict. If deemed appropriate, research and advice may be sought from the Chief Executive or another directorate of the Council.
70. Subject to 69 above, officers should be prepared to justify advice given to the Council, the Cabinet, or other committees even when the advice was not accepted.
71. Officers must also be prepared to justify decisions they have taken under delegated powers.
72. In giving evidence, officers should respect members in the way they respond to members' questions, but officers must not be asked to give political views.
73. Members should respect officers and should not question officers in a way which could be interpreted as harassment. Neither should they ask about matters of a disciplinary nature.
74. Scrutiny proceedings must not be used to question the capability or competence of officers. Chairmen and members need to make a distinction

between reviewing the policies and performance of the Council and its services, and appraising the personal performance of an officer. The latter is not a scrutiny function.

75. In exercising the right to call-in a decision of the Cabinet, Select Committee members must seek officer advice if they suspect the decision is contrary to the Council's approved plans, policies or policy framework, or is unlawful.
76. When undertaking scrutiny Select Committees will comply with the Scrutiny Protocol set out in the Constitution.

Members of other committees and officers

77. The appropriate Director or lead officer will offer to arrange regular informal meetings with Chairmen and Vice-chairmen..
78. The Chief Executive and Directors have the right to present reports and give advice to committees.
79. Members of a committee shall take decisions within the remit of that committee and will not otherwise instruct officers to act.
80. At some committee meetings, a resolution may be passed which authorises a named officer to take action between meetings in consultation with the Chairman. In these circumstances it is the officer, not the Chairman, who takes the action and is responsible for it. A Chairman has no legal power to take decisions on behalf of a committee and should not apply inappropriate pressure on the officer.

Party groups and officers

81. The Chief Executive and Directors may properly be asked to contribute to deliberations of matters concerning Council business by party groups.
82. Officer support will not extend beyond providing factual information or professional advice in relation to matters of Council business. Officers must not be involved in advising on matters of party business, and therefore should not be expected to be present at meetings or parts of meetings when such matters are to be discussed.
83. Party group meetings are not empowered to make decisions on behalf of the Council, and conclusions reached at such meetings do not rank as formal decisions. The presence of an officer confers no formal status on such meetings in terms of Council business and must not be interpreted as doing so.

84. Where officers provide factual information and advice to a party group in relation to a matter of Council business, this is not a substitute for providing all the necessary information and advice when the matter in question is formally considered by the relevant part of the Council.
85. It must not be assumed that an officer is supportive of a particular policy or view considered at a party group meeting simply because they have attended or provided information to the meeting.
86. Officers will respect the confidentiality of any party group discussions at which they are present and, unless requested to do so, will not relay the content of such discussions to another party group or to any other members. This shall not prevent an officer providing feedback to the Chief Executive and Directors on a need-to-know basis.
87. In their dealings with party groups, officers must treat each group in a fair and even-handed manner.
88. Members must not do anything which compromises or is likely to compromise officers' impartiality.
89. The duration of an officer's attendance at a party group meeting will be at the discretion of the group, but an officer may leave at any time if they feel it is no longer appropriate to be there.
90. An officer who is not the Chief Executive or Director shall not be invited to attend a party group meeting, but the Chief Executive or Director may nominate another officer to attend on their behalf.
91. If the Chief Executive or Director accepts an invitation to the meeting of one party group, they shall not decline an invitation to advise another group about the same matter. They must give substantially the same advice to each.
92. An officer should be given the opportunity of verifying comments and advice attributed to them in any written record of a party group meeting.
93. No member will refer in public or at meetings of the Council to advice or information given by officers to a party group meeting.
94. At party group meetings where some of those present are not members of the Council, care must be taken not to divulge confidential information relating to Council business. Persons who are not members are not bound by the Members' Code of Conduct. They do not have the same rights to Council information as members.
95. Any particular cases of difficulty or uncertainty in relation to this part of the protocol should be raised with the Chief Executive and the relevant party group leader.

Ward members and officers

96. To enable them to carry out their ward role effectively, members need to be fully informed about matters affecting their ward. The Chief Executive and Directors must ensure that all relevant staff are aware of the requirement to keep local members informed, thus allowing members to contribute to the decision-making process.
97. This requirement is particularly important:
 - during the formative stages of policy development, where practicable
 - in relation to significant or sensitive operational matters,
 - whenever any form of public consultation exercise is undertaken, and
 - during a scrutiny investigation.
98. Issues may affect a single ward. Where they have a wider impact, a number of ward members will need to be kept informed.
99. Whenever a public meeting is organised by the Council to consider a local issue, all the members representing the wards affected should be invited to attend the meeting as a matter of course.
100. If a ward member intends to arrange a public meeting, they should inform the Chief Executive or Director. Provided the meeting has not been arranged on a party political basis, and the subject matter concerns some aspect of the Council's work:
 - an officer may attend but is not obliged to do so, and
 - the meeting may be held in Council-owned premises.
101. No such meetings should be arranged or held in the immediate run-up to Council elections, i.e. when notice of the election has been given.
102. Whilst support for members' ward work is legitimate, care should be taken if staff are asked to accompany members to ward surgeries. In such circumstances:
 - the surgeries must be open to the general public, and
 - officers should not be requested to accompany members to surgeries held in the offices or premises of political parties.
103. Officers must never be asked to attend ward or constituency political party meetings.
104. It is acknowledged that some Council staff (e.g. those providing secretarial support to Cabinet members) may receive and handle messages for members on topics unrelated to the Council. Whilst these will often concern diary management, care should be taken to avoid Council resources being used for private or party political purposes.

105. In seeking to deal with constituents' queries or concerns, members should not seek to jump the queue but should respect the Council's procedures. Officers have many pressures on their time. They may not be able to carry out the work required by members in the requested timescale, and may need to seek instructions from their managers.

Members' access to documents and information

106. This part of the protocol should be read in conjunction with the Access to Information Rules in the Council's Constitution.
107. Members may request the Chief Executive or appropriate Director to provide them with such information, explanation and advice as they may reasonably need to assist them to discharge their roles as members. This may range from general information about some aspect of the Council's services to specific information on behalf of a constituent. Where information is requested on behalf of a third party, it will only be provided if:
- it is in the public domain, and
 - it is not barred by the Data Protection Act from being given.
108. Every Cabinet member, member of a Select Committee, and/or any other committee has a right to inspect documents about the business of that Select Committee or other committee or the Cabinet.
109. A member who is not a member of a specific Select Committee, other committee, or the Cabinet may have access to any document of that specific part of the Council provided:
- they can demonstrate a reasonable need to see the documents in order to carry out their role as a member (the "need to know" principle), and
 - the documents do not contain "confidential" or "exempt" information as defined by the law, **i.e.:-**

"confidential information" means information provided to the Council by a Government Department upon terms which forbid its disclosure to the public, and information which cannot be disclosed by law or by Court order.

"exempt information" means information in a report, background paper or decision sheet which the Council may choose to withhold for a number of reasons, e.g. the information may be commercially sensitive or refer to the personal circumstances of an individual.

110. Disputes as to the validity of a member's request to see a document on a need to know basis will be determined by the Monitoring Officer. Officers should

seek advice from the Monitoring Officer if in any doubt about the reasonableness of a member's request.

111. A member should obtain advice from the Monitoring Officer in circumstances where they wish to have access to documents or information:
 - where to do so is likely to be in breach of the Data Protection Act, or
 - where the subject matter is one in which they have a personal or prejudicial interest as defined in the Members' Code of Conduct.
112. Information given to a member must only be used for the purpose for which it was requested.
113. It is an accepted convention that a member of one party group will not have a need to know and therefore a right to inspect a document which forms part of the internal workings of another party group.
114. Members and officers must not disclose information given to them in confidence without the consent of a person authorised to give it, or unless required by law to do so.
115. When requested to do so, officers will keep confidential from other members advice requested by a member.
116. Members and officers must not prevent another person from gaining access to information to which that person is entitled by law.

Media relations

117. All formal relations with the media must be conducted in accordance with the Council's agreed procedures and the law on local authority publicity.
118. News releases or statements made by officers must promote or give information on Council policy or services. They will be factual and consistent with Council policy. They cannot be used to promote a party group, party politics or individual politicians.
119. Officers will keep relevant members informed of media interest in the Council's activities, especially regarding strategic or contentious matters.
120. Before responding to enquiries from the media, officers shall ensure they are authorised to do so.
121. Likewise, officers will inform the Council's Marketing and Communications Section of issues likely to be of media interest, since that section is often the media's first point of contact, and is responsible for the strategic management of media relations.

122. If a member is contacted by, or contacts, the media on an issue, they should:
- indicate in what capacity they are speaking (e.g. as ward member, in a personal capacity, as a Cabinet member, on behalf of the Council, or on behalf of a party group);
 - be sure of the facts;
 - if necessary, and always when they would like a news release to be issued, seek assistance from the Council’s Marketing and Communications Section and/or the Chief Executive or relevant Director, except in relation to a statement which is party political in nature;
 - consider the likely consequences for the Council of their statement (e.g. commitment to a particular course of action, reputation, image, allegations of jumping to conclusions);
 - never give a commitment in relation to matters which may be subject to claims from third parties and/or are likely to be an insurance matter;
 - consider whether to consult other relevant members; and
 - take particular care in what they say in the run-up to local or national elections to avoid giving the impression of electioneering, unless they have been contacted as an election candidate or political party activist.

Correspondence

123. Correspondence between an individual member and an officer should not be copied to another member (apart from the appropriate Cabinet member) unless the author expressly intends and states that this is the case or consents. Where correspondence is copied, this should always be made explicit, i.e. there should be no “blind” copies.
124. Official letters written on behalf of the Council should normally be in the name of the relevant officer. It may be appropriate in some circumstances (e.g. representations to a Government Minister) for letters to appear in the name of a Cabinet Member or the Chairman of a Select Committee.
125. The Mayor may initiate correspondence in their own name.
126. Letters which create legally enforceable obligations or which give instructions on behalf of the Council should never be sent in the name of a member.
127. When writing in an individual capacity as a ward member, a member must make clear that fact.

Access to premises

128. Officers have the right to enter Council land and premises to carry out their work. Some officers have the legal power to enter property in the ownership of others.
129. Members have a right of access to Council land and premises to fulfil their duties. This right does not extend to schools, and if members wish to visit a school they should do so by prior arrangement with the Headteacher or Chairman of Governors.
130. When making visits as individual members, members should:
 - whenever practicable, notify and make advance arrangements with the appropriate manager or officer in charge;
 - comply with health and safety, security and other workplace rules;
 - not interfere with the services or activities being provided at the time of the visit;
 - if outside their own ward, notify the ward member(s) beforehand; and
 - take special care at schools and establishments serving vulnerable sections of society to avoid giving any impression of improper or inappropriate behaviour.
 - remember that they will not be allowed access to any Social Services establishment until they have been through a Criminal Records Bureau check.

Use of Council resources

131. The Council provides all members with services such as typing and photocopying, and goods such as stationery and computer equipment, to assist them in discharging their roles as members of the Council. These goods and services are paid for from the public purse. They should not be used for private purposes or in connection with party political or campaigning activities.
132. Members should ensure they understand and comply with the Council's own rules about the use of such resources, particularly:
 - where facilities are provided in members' homes at the Council's expense; and
 - regarding ICT security.
133. Members should not put pressure on staff to provide resources or support which officers are not permitted to give. Examples are:
 - business which is solely to do with a political party;
 - work in connection with a ward or constituency party political meeting;

- electioneering;
- work associated with an event attended by a member in a capacity other than as a member of the Council;
- private personal correspondence;
- work in connection with another body or organisation where a member's involvement is other than as a member of the Council; and
- support to a member in their capacity as a councillor of another local authority.

Interpretation, complaints and allegations of breaches

134. This part of the Protocol should be read in conjunction with the Council's Confidential Reporting (i.e. Whistleblowing) Policy.
135. Members or officers with questions about the implementation or interpretation of any part of this protocol should seek the guidance of the Monitoring Officer.
136. A member who is unhappy about the actions taken by, or conduct of, an officer should:
 - avoid personal attacks on, or abuse of, the officer at all times,
 - ensure that any criticism is well founded and constructive,
 - never make a criticism in public, and
 - take up the concern with the officer privately.
137. If direct discussion with the officer is inappropriate (e.g. because of the seriousness of the concern) or fails to resolve the matter, the member should raise the issue with the officer's manager or the relevant Director or Chief Executive.
138. A serious breach of this protocol by an officer may lead to an investigation under the Council's disciplinary procedure.
139. An officer who believes a member may have acted other than in accordance with this protocol should raise their concern with the Monitoring Officer, who will consider how the complaint or allegation should be dealt with. At a minor level, this may be no more than informally referring the matter to the leader of the relevant party group. More serious complaints may involve alleged breaches of the Members' Code of Conduct, and may be referred to the Standards Board for England.