MEMBER OFFICER PROTOCOL

Adopted at the **22nd October 2025** meeting of Eastleigh Town Council.

Subsequent amendments agreed as follows:

Version	Owner	Date Approved	Minute Ref	Action?	Website updated	Next Review
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INTRODUCTION

Mutual trust and respect between Councillors and Officers is essential to ensure good governance and the effective running of a council. To ensure that relationships remain respectful and constructive, it is advisable to have a written protocol to cover:

- The respective roles and responsibilities of the Councillors, the Clerk, Council employees and contractors
- The relationships between Councillors and Officers.
- Where or who the Clerk should go to if they have concerns.
- Who is responsible for making decisions.

The same fundamental principles apply regardless of the size or nature of the council. While this protocol is relevant to all councils, it is particularly important for Eastleigh Town Council, where personal relationships and personnel matters can significantly impact operations, especially as the Clerk and Officers play a central role in day-to-day management. Having an agreed protocol ensures clarity and consistency in all interactions.

MEMBER/OFFICER RELATIONS

1 Background

1.1 This protocol is intended to assist Councillors, Officers, and the Clerk in approaching some of the sensitive circumstances that may arise in the 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 others' roles.

1.3 The aim is effective and professional working relationships characterised by mutual trust, respect and courtesy. Close personal familiarity should be avoided.

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.

2.3 Chair and Vice-Chair 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

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

2.4.2 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 always comply with the relevant Code of Conduct and uphold the civility and respect pledge adopted.

3.2 Officers can expect from Councillors:

- A working partnership;
- 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 always comply with the council's adopted Code of Conduct and uphold the civility and respect pledge adopted.

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.

4. Political Groups

4.1 The operation of political groups is increasingly common within parish and town councils. While Eastleigh Town Council may have political groupings, party politics should not influence the proper conduct of council business. Councillors are elected to serve the community as a whole, and political considerations should not compromise decision-making.

4.2 Party political groups 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, even if they have been styled as 'Chair' of the council.

4.3 If Eastleigh Town Council has adopted 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 and do not deal with the political implications of the matter or options or make any recommendations. It is not the Clerk's job to make recommendations to a political group.

4.4 If a report or advice is prepared for one political group, the Clerk should inform all other political groups that the same report or advice has been provided. This ensures transparency and fairness, provided that sharing the information is consistent with confidentiality requirements and Eastleigh Town Council's governance arrangements.

4.5 A Clerk needing advice or guidance on matters relating to party groups or how to operate within a political environment should seek advice from their County Association of NALC, or from the Society of Local Council Clerks.

5. When things go wrong

Procedure for officers

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, through conciliation by an appropriate third party, the Council has adopted a formal grievance procedure which should be followed by all staff.

5.2 The Executive Head (Monitoring Officer for the purposes of section 5(1) of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989) of the Principal Authority may be able to offer a mediation/conciliation role or it may be necessary to seek independent advice. For example, 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 has delegated authority to the Personnel Committee/Full Council to deal with all personnel matters.

5.3 The law requires all employers to have disciplinary and grievance procedures. The council's grievance procedure enables individual employees to raise concerns, problems or complaints about their employment in an open and fair way.

5.4 If a Councillor has concerns about the Clerk, these should be raised with the Chair of the Personnel Committee or Chair of the Council, in accordance with the council's procedures.