

Informal protocol – Conduct of members during meeting

Council meetings and committees are formal events, not social occasions. They have a clear purpose – to make decisions – and can be observed by members of the public and the press. Inappropriate or unprofessional behaviour by members, or perceived conflict between individuals or political parties, can damage the council’s reputation and all the good work it does.

Members are subject to the following relevant provisions of the Members' Code of Conduct whilst attending meetings and committees of the Council.

“1.1 I treat other councillors and members of the public with respect.”

“2.1 I do not bully any person”

“5.1 I do not bring my role or local authority into disrepute”

This informal protocol has been requested by and agreed between the political parties in 2023 and covers particular points they believe need addressing. It provides some practical guidance on how councillors engage with each other to help them observe the Code of Conduct.

1. General behaviour

- 1.1 Members should always conduct themselves in a business-like manner. They should not try and score points off fellow councillors and must never engage in personal attacks.
- 1.2 Members should not need to raise their voices in order to make their point. They should also refrain from interrupting others, making noises or gesticulating, as a way to show their disagreement with what is being said.
- 1.3 Where members of the public have taken the time and trouble to contribute to a meeting, members should be particularly respectful towards them.
- 1.4 In order to avoid disrupting a meeting the Chair will remind members that all electronic devices (such as mobile phones, laptops and ipads) must be switched to silent or vibrate during meetings, and if there are exempt agenda items that the use of social media is not permitted during those items.

2. Respecting the Chair (the Mayor)

- 2.1 The office of Chair is created by legislation, and the person in that role is in charge during council meetings. Chairs have a duty to ensure that council meetings run smoothly, that all business is properly understood and considered, and all councillors who wish to speak can do so. It is good practice for the Chair to refer to the Clerk for advice.

2.2 Where councillors, the clerk and Chair work together as a team they can combine knowledge and skills to deliver real benefits to the community they serve. Good working relationships, mutual respect and an understanding of their different roles are vital. Apparent conflict between these key roles, especially during meetings in front of the press or public, rarely goes unnoticed and is unprofessional.

3. Member contributions

3.1 Council meetings should be formal and dignified. Councillors wishing to speak should catch the Chair's eye or raise their hand.

3.2 The expectation of the public is that members will concentrate on the business in hand at meetings. It is therefore important that Members listen to debates and comments and are not distracted by other non-work-related activities, or by the task of accessing electronic papers. Members may be disrespecting others or considered to be bringing their office or authority into disrepute by their behaviour if they do not pay proper attention. This applies whether or not the meeting is being webcast.

3.3 During debate, members should ensure they:

- Are mindful of the number of motions on the agenda and the amount of time allocated to the meeting
- Ensure that their contributions are concise and to the point, and always make them via the Chair.
- Use closure motions when necessary.
- Only raise well thought out questions.

3.4 The expectation is that "Substantive" amendments to motions/reports are to be provided at least 48 hours in advance to each political party, and longer where advance time is needed to consider the potential impact of the proposed amendment eg in relation to an alternative budget. It is for the political parties to determine what they consider to be substantial, and they should keep this under review and raise any concerns with the Monitoring Officer. In any event the Mayor will have the discretion to allow amendments at shorter notice where the circumstances so require.

4.0 Ongoing improvement and monitoring

4.1 The Chair and Vice-Chair will undertake mandatory training in relation to rules of debate and application of the rules, to help support them in their pivotal role. Training and support to other members will also be available on request.

4.2 Arrangements for security at meetings will be kept under review.

4.3 The behaviour of members is to be a permanent agenda item for political group meetings and any ongoing issues must be reported to the Monitoring Officer.

4.4 As respect for fellow councillors extends beyond the duration of meetings, consideration will be given by the Monitoring Officer to keep cameras on after the webcast has ended, for the purpose of local recording.

- 4.5 The need for and content of this protocol will be kept under review by the Monitoring Officer.

September 2023