



Working Relationships between Fernwood Parish Councillors and Council Employees Policy

Reviewed 15th June 2020

This Protocol sets out guidance on relations between councillors and employees (sometimes termed “staff” or “officers”); it is primarily based on the Parish Council Governance Toolkit.

1. Background

1.1 This protocol is intended to assist Fernwood Parish Councillors and the Parish Clerk, in approaching some of the sensitive circumstances which may arise in a challenging 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 other’s 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

The respective roles of councillors and employees can be summarised as follows: councillors and officers are servants of the public and are indispensable to one and other, 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.

2.1 Councillors

2.1.1 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.



2.1.2 All councillors have the same rights and obligations in their relationships with the Clerk and other employees, regardless of their status or political party, and should be treated equally.

2.1.3 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.

2.2 Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen 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.

2.3 Officers

The role of officers is to give advice and information to councillors and to implement the policies determined by the Council. 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;
- that officers understand and support the respective roles, workloads and pressures;
- a timely response from officers to enquiries and complaints;

- the 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;
- that officers 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 at all times comply with any relevant code of conduct.

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 at all times comply with Fernwood Parish Council's Code of Conduct.

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

Although there are currently no political groups within Fernwood Parish Council, the operation of political groups is becoming more of a feature within parish councils generally; NALC policy is that party politics should have no place in parish councils. Parish Councillors are there to serve their community as members of the community, and should not be side-tracked by party political issues. Party politics within a parish council can pose particular difficulties in terms of the impartiality of the Clerk and other employees, and the relationship between councillors and the staff generally. Should such groups be formed at Fernwood, this guidance will be modified in accordance with the Parish Council Governance Toolkit.

5. When things go wrong

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, it is important that the Council adopts a formal grievance protocol or procedure.

5.2 The District Council's Monitoring Officer 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. Neither the Chair of Fernwood Parish Council nor any individual councillor should attempt to deal with grievances, or with work-related performance or line management issues, on his/her own. The Council delegates authority to the Personnel Committee to deal with all personnel matters, including discipline and grievances.

5.3 If a councillor is dissatisfied with the conduct, behaviour or performance of the Clerk or another employee, the matter should be raised with the Clerk in the first instance. If the matter cannot be resolved informally, it may be necessary to invoke the Council's disciplinary procedure.