

LOCAL WARD MEMBER PROTOCOL – DRAFT

PROTOCOL FOR INFORMING MEMBERS OF ISSUES RELATING TO THEIR ELECTORAL WARD

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Ward members play a key role in communicating with local residents about what the Council is doing in wards or of matters of concern. It is important that ward members have been appropriately briefed. This protocol sets out the type and nature of issues on which officers will ensure that members are properly briefed and informed. This protocol cannot be comprehensive, and its provisions must be interpreted flexibly with regard to any special circumstances.

1.2 The basic building blocks of democratic representation are at ward level. Therefore, members need to be aware of significant developments within their wards if they are to be effective in their roles as spokespersons on behalf of their local communities.

1.3 It will be the responsibility of each service area to inform the relevant members in each ward. Where an issue impacts on more than one ward all relevant members will be informed.

1.4 This protocol relates to officers informing members. Ward members will continue to raise issues and concerns directly with services for a response.

1.5 It is the duty of each Director, Assistant Director, Head of Service and Business Manager, to ensure that all relevant employees are aware of the requirement to keep local ward members informed and that the timing of such information allows members to contribute to those discussions.

1.6 Local ward members should also be kept informed about matters affecting their wards during the formative stages of policy development. It is important in an effective democratic process that they know early on if they are to deal with their constituents' concerns or exert influence on their behalf.

2.0 Type and Nature of Issues (not exhaustive)

HOUSING

- Any significant issue that arises which displaces people and creates a homelessness need which the Council needs to meet i.e. flooding or residential fire.
- Proposals for new housing development schemes over 10 units reaching pre-application planning stage.
- Property disposals or redevelopment proposals

- Long term, complex cases of rough sleeping.

COMMUNITIES

- Proposals to close community facilities
- Major accidents, injuries or violent incidents affecting Community employees, users or council owned property such as leisure centres or council offices. (including fire, flood, vandalism, burglary which affect operational efficiency).
- Significant issues creating community tension
- Temporary Road Closures for parades and processions.

ASSETS OF COMMUNITY VALUE

- Notify ward member upon verification of a nomination.

ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING

- Presence of or issues relating to the presence of unauthorised encampments:
- Any local concerns/media interest.

PUBLIC PROTECTION

- Within confidentiality parameters, high profile enforcement activities, including public enforcement interventions (e.g. prosecution, injunction orders).

EMERGENCY PLANNING

- Emergencies/Incidents requiring a significant emergency response by the Council (communication with Ward Members in line with Emergency Response Guide)

CUSTOMER SERVICES

- Proposals or changes relating to ward or major customer access arrangements.

PROPERTY

- Any issues preventing access to, or leading to closure of, facilities or services i.e. carpark or leisure centre closure.

COMMUNICATIONS

- Informing local members of news or media/social media enquiries relating to specific wards or areas
- Advising members of potential emerging issues on social media

- Ensuring all political groups receive all council news releases, including when consultations are launched

OTHER

Officer attendance at formal Town & Parish Council meetings.

All services should notify local Members if they become aware of any proposals for the closure or opening of community facilities, including post offices, bank branches, health facilities.

3.0 Business Conducted in Formal Meetings – Council, Cabinet and Committees

3.1 The Chief Executive, Directors, Assistant Directors, Head of Service and Business Managers should ensure that local matters being reported through the formal process are identified and marked accordingly on the front page of the report.

3.2 Subject to the Council's Code of Conduct for Members, the usual rules regarding bias and predetermination and any special rules regarding regulatory committees (including the protocols on public speaking at meetings of the Planning & Licensing Committee).

4.0 Consultation

4.1 Whenever the Council undertakes any form of local consultation exercise, the local ward member(s) will be notified at the outset of the exercise.

4.2 In accordance with the existing Protocol, local ward member(s) will be advised of all planning applications relating to their wards.

5.0 Local Meetings

5.1 Where any public meetings are held in a member's ward, and are arranged by the Council, the local ward member(s) for the ward in which the public meeting takes place will be informed of the event and invited to attend.

5.2 Local ward members will be invited to the opening of any Council buildings/projects or launches of services in their wards though if present the Chair/Vice Chair, Leader/Deputy Leader, relevant Cabinet Member shall take precedence unless otherwise agreed.

5.3 Where a local liaison or consultation group is established by the Council consideration should be given to whether the local ward member(s) should be invited to attend to observe if not appointed as a member of the group.

6.0 Publicity

6.1 Any publicity activity organised by officers in a member's ward whether of a local nature or district wide nature will seek to involve the relevant local ward member(s) where possible.

7.0 Commitments

7.1 Local ward members are reminded that they do not have the right to commit the Council or its officers to any particular course of action and should ensure that they do not convey to the public any false impression of commitment or give any undertaking that they are not in a position to personally fulfil.

8.0 Confidentiality

8.1 The local ward member(s) under this protocol must not make public nor make personal use of any information or material supplied to them where the supplier of the information has indicated that it is of a confidential. They must also comply with any relevant provisions of the General Data Protection Act and the Freedom of Information Act.

9.0 Review of this Protocol

9.1 The Council's Constitution Working Group may review and make recommendations to Full Council from time to time.