

## **Protocol: Chief Executive/Chief Operating Officer and Political Groups**

### **1. General**

The Chief Executive and Chief Operating Officer are employees of the Council as a whole and their overriding responsibility is to the Council and not to any party political group or other grouping of Members ( i.e. "Group"). Their political neutrality should be respected.

All Members of the Council have an equal right of access to the Chief Executive and the Chief Operating Officer .

The Chief Executive and Chief Operating Officer are expected to work closely with the political administration to give them information, assistance and advice. It is inevitable there will be more contact and more dialogue between the officers and the Leader, Deputy Leader, other Members of the Executive and Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Committees than with other Members but the officers will maintain political neutrality.

The Chief Executive and Chief Operating Officer need to develop good working relationships with minority groups. The Chief Executive and Chief Operating Officer will not reveal to other Members the content of the discussion with any Group, unless consent has been specifically given by the Leader of the Group concerned.

### **2. Briefings**

2.1 It is a basic requirement of Officers that information, other than of a routine or trivial nature, given to one Group is offered to all Groups. It is also important for the effective conduct of Council business if the Chief Executive and Chief Operating Officer keep in regular contact with all Groups to provide information, give advice and answer questions on items of corporate importance. Accordingly, regular liaison meetings can be very valuable, offering a regular and confidential forum for dialogue and discussion.

2.2 The Chief Executive has a weekly meeting with the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council , at his invitation, the notes of which are confidential.

2.3 All Group Leaders may be invited to a liaison meeting, at least once a cycle, which may be chaired by the Mayor. The Chief Executive and Chief Operating Officer attend. The liaison meetings cover items of briefings suggested by the Management Team, together with any other items requested by Group Leaders or the Mayor.

2.4 The Chief Executive will also offer a briefing once a cycle to Group Leaders on an individual basis if they wish to take this up. Notes from any such meetings would be confidential and would not be shared with any other Members or officers (outside the Management Team). This regular briefing will be in addition to any ad hoc briefings or meetings on specific issues.

2.5 In addition, a Group Leader may request the Chief Executive or Chief Operating Officer to arrange a confidential briefing for the Party Group on any matter of

relevance to the Council. In such cases, a similar briefing will be offered to other Groups. The role of Officers at such briefings will be to provide information and answer questions; any debate within the Party Group should take place after the Officer has left. Normally, only the Chief Executive and Chief Operating Officer or Heads of Service will attend briefings, although they may ask a colleague for 'technical' information to accompany them if required. Group Leaders should refer their requests for officer attendance to the Chief Operating Officer in the first instance. (Note: Officers will not attend Party Group meetings at which there are persons present who are neither elected Members of the Council, nor in the service of the Council).

2.6 All Council media (Press) Releases will be accessible to all Members at the relevant time through the Council website.

2.7 The Chief Executive will consider whether it is appropriate to ensure that all Ministerial/VIP visits have cross-party involvement.

### **3. Information**

3.1 There is a long-standing arrangement that a copy of any information supplied by an officer to a Member is sent to the appropriate Executive Member or Committee Chair. If this information is requested on a confidential basis, however, officers will not pass this information to any other Member.

### **4. Member attendance at Conference, Courses, etc.**

4.1 Members' attendance at unscheduled meetings, conferences, seminars or courses will be dealt with by referring them to the Executive or appropriate Committee for a decision on whether the Council should attend and, if so, who should be the Council's representatives.

4.2 If the event is to be held before a decision can be obtained from the appropriate meeting, the Head of Legal and Democratic Services will consult Group Leaders before considering the issue under delegated powers.

4.3 The Scrutiny Committees Co-ordinating Panel no longer exists. Agreement will be sought by other methods for the attendance of Scrutiny Members at relevant conferences, seminars, workshops etc within the budget set by the Council.

4.4 Executive Members may agree their own attendance at conferences but must give the Head of Legal and Democratic Services advance notice to allow him to confirm that there is sufficient budget provision.