

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF RINGWOOD TOWN COUNCIL

Held on Wednesday 29th November 2023 at 7pm at Ringwood Gateway, The Furlong, Ringwood

PRESENT: Cllr Gareth DeBoos (Chairman)
Cllr Rae Frederick (Deputy Chair)
Cllr Andrew Briers
Cllr Luke Dadford
Cllr Philip Day
Cllr Mary DeBoos
Cllr Ingrid De Bruyn
Cllr Janet Georgiou
Cllr John Haywood
Cllr James Swyer
Cllr Glenys Turner
Cllr Becci Windsor

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr Chris Wilkins, Town Clerk
Mrs Jo Hurd, Deputy Town Clerk
District Cllr Jeremy Heron
District Cllr Steve Rippon-Swaine
District Cllr Nigel Linford

ABSENT: Cllr Peter Kelleher
Cllr Michael Thierry

C/7049

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

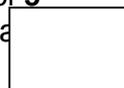
There were several members of the public present.

A young resident of Northfield Road asked for signs to be installed to warn of hedgehogs in the area, as she had seen several crossing the road and one had been killed. All were encouraged to take any rescued hedgehogs to Moyles Court Wildlife Rescue and to support the national Hedgehogs R Us Highway project.

A town centre resident reported on a worsening parking situation, with very few spaces, if any, available. Also, with a maximum of 20 hours parking available there is no provision for residents when, for example, they go on holiday. When increasing parking charges, Ringwood had been compared with much larger towns with more parking available, whereas the limited parking in Ringwood was shared between residents, local businesses and workers, and shoppers. The significant increase in charges was not justifiable on this basis.

A small business owner had started a petition against the increase in parking charges – this was putting greater strain on businesses and, as many customers had said they would not be purchasing a parking clock in 2024, would have a detrimental impact on footfall and lead to loss of business. The increase in charges is disproportionate in an area where the cost of living is higher than average.

The Town Mayor had been contacted by over 100 people alarmed by the increase in parking charges – in a personal capacity, he had written to District Cllr Rippon-Swaine, Chairman of the Panel that had agreed the increase, suggesting a discount be applied for people working in the town centre.



Cllr Swyer noted there had been a 66% decline in frequency of bus services in the New Forest since 2010 and said there was a need to be mindful of the broader issues. If people were unable to access public transport, it should be affordable to travel by car and park.

Agenda item 11 was brought forward for the benefit of members of public present, to enable District Councillors to respond to the comments about increased parking charges.

C/7050

REPORTS FROM COUNTY AND DISTRICT COUNCILLORS

District Councillor Heron (Portfolio Holder for Finance) encouraged all to attend Cabinet on 6 December when the Medium Term Financial Plan would be discussed. He explained the Council needs to balance its budget whilst continuing to deliver services, and is restricted by how much costs can be raised with limited ways to do this. He said the parking charges had previously been significantly below the national average and this had now been addressed. The clocks still represented good value, could be transferred between vehicles and used district wide.

District Councillor Rippon-Swaine had replied to the letter from the Town Mayor (but written in a personal capacity) – this and the original letter, and a subsequent letter, are attached as *Annex A*. He reported on the Rural England Prosperity Fund, which is a top-up to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, and can be used for capital schemes supporting business growth and improvements to community infrastructure. He encouraged Ringwood bids in the next round (from March 2025) .

It was noted that District Cllrs Haywood and Linford did not vote on the issue of parking charges.

County Councillor Thierry had given apologies for the meeting. Members wished him well in his recovery.

C/7051

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Town Clerk reported that apologies had been received from Cllrs Kelleher and Thierry.

C/7052

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none at this time.

C/7053

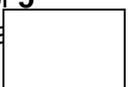
GRANT AID AWARDS

The Town Mayor presented a certificate for the Grant Aid award of £2,000 to the Head Teacher and representative of Ringwood Junior School PTA. It was noted the project to improve the school's wildlife pond and surrounding area was in progress and would be used as an outdoor classroom.

C/7054

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 25th October 2023, having been circulated, be approved and signed as a correct record.



C/7055

RECREATION, LEISURE AND OPEN SPACES COMMITTEE

Cllr Briers presented the minutes of the Recreation, Leisure and Open Spaces Committee meeting held on 1st November 2023.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Recreation, Leisure and Open Spaces Committee meeting on 1st November 2023 be received.

C/7056

PLANNING, TOWN & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

Cllr Day presented the minutes of the Planning, Town & Environment Committee meeting held on 3rd November 2023.

Members considered the recommendation to appoint Cllr G DeBoos to New Forest Association of Local Councils (NFALC), and thanked Cllr Haywood for his representation to date.

RESOLVED: 1) That the minutes of the Planning, Town and Environment Committee meeting held on 3rd November 2023 be received; and
2) That Cllr G DeBoos be appointed as the Council's representative to NFALC in place of Cllr Haywood.

C/7057

POLICY AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

Cllr M DeBoos presented the minutes of the Policy and Finance Committee meeting held on 22nd November 2023.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Policy and Finance Committee meeting on 22nd November 2023 be received.

C/7058

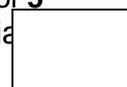
COUNCILLOR – OFFICER PROTOCOL

Members considered the Town Clerk's report (*Annex B*) on a draft Councillor-Officer Protocol.

He explained the Protocol is designed to regulate relations between councillors and officers and, although no problems of this nature have been experienced at the Council, it is intended to ward off any future difficulties.

Cllr Georgiou referred to the need for councillors to be accompanied by an officer when attending meetings with other parties or agencies (page 3) and suggested the same should apply to officers; that they should give relevant councillor(s) the opportunity to attend meetings and/or invite questions in advance.

It was noted that officers currently exercise judgement in these circumstances and usually report back to councillors following meetings of any significance. The Town Clerk reminded Members that officers have delegated powers to deal with matters and it was not always appropriate to involve them. It would also take additional time to organise meetings with a greater number of attendees. However, he agreed to review the draft protocol and bring it back to a future meeting for further consideration.



RESOLVED: That the Protocol be supported in principle, but that it be considered further at a future meeting following review by the Town Clerk on the issue of attendance at meetings.

ACTION C Wilkins

**C/7059
NFDC CIL FUNDING BID**

Members considered the Town Clerk's report (*Annex C*) on Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding available to bid for from New Forest District Council (NFDC).

Cllr Haywood declared an interest as a member of the NFDC Task & Finish Group that would consider bids. He therefore took no part in the discussion or voting.

As it was expected the fund would be heavily oversubscribed, it was recommended that a bid be submitted for the elements of the Carvers Recreation Ground Masterplan that would be hardest to obtain funding from other identified funding streams. The suggested work to the main entrance and provision of car park and improved pedestrian access to the Clubhouse would enable the whole Masterplan and would put the Council in a stronger position for other funding bids.

It was noted any unspent and uncommitted CIL funds held by the Council would need to be used to support the bid, but that this commitment would be conditional on the bid being successful.

- RESOLVED:**
- 1) That a bid be submitted to NFDC for CIL funding for the proposals outlined in the Carvers Recreation Ground Masterplan for changes to the main entrance; provision of car parking; and new pedestrian access to the Clubhouse.
 - 2) That the balance of the uncommitted CIL Reserve be committed the Carvers Masterplan.

ACTION C Wilkins

**C/7060
SPORTS DEVELOPMENT PROJECT AT LONG LANE**

The Town Clerk reported that he continues to have monthly meetings with the architect and contractors for the pavilion. It was now expected completion would be end February 2024. Work is ongoing on the lease and construction contract, and he hoped to have both documents ready for sealing next month. A meeting of the Steering Group was scheduled for next week.

The lease for the 10-acre field was also still to be completed. Again, it was hoped this would be ready for sealing next month.

It was noted that AFC Bournemouth Women's league matches are now being held at the Ringwood Community Hub.

RESOLVED: That the update be noted.

**C/7061
COMMUNICATIONS TO BE RECEIVED**

The Town Mayor reported on the opening of two new shops in the town; Remembrance events (with thanks to Reverend Terry Roberts and his team); the Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan (which

has now been submitted for independent examination); and the fabulous Fireworks and Winter Wanderland events (well done to everyone involved).

He referred to the Community Awards Scheme and it was noted this would need discussion in January or February 2024 in order to be prepared for presentation at the Annual Town Assembly. In the past these awards have acknowledged exceptional community service. Members were asked to consider nominations.

C/7062 REPORTS FROM TOWN COUNCILLORS

Cllr Frederick – reported on the Fireworks event, which had been a huge success with a fantastic turnout, and Winter Wanderland, which had been a brilliant event despite the weather. Her thanks went to all of the Events Team, and in particular to the Events Manager.

Cllr Swyer – as a new member of the Events Committee he said it had been incredible to see how the town had come together, and to see the amount of volunteers involved – well done to all.

Cllr Haywood – has been contacted by residents regarding the recent flooding in Poulner. Cllr Frederick had been informed by HCC that three jobs for jetting works had been raised by the local highways engineer.

Cllr Day - thanked everyone who had supported the various Remembrance events; the good turnout was greatly appreciated.

C/7063 FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

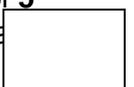
Forthcoming Meetings – to note the following dates:

Planning, Town and Environment	10.00am	Friday 1 st December 2023
Recreation, Leisure & Open Spaces	7.00pm	Wednesday 6 th December 2023
Policy & Finance	7.00pm	Wednesday 13 th December 2023
Full Council	7.00pm	Wednesday 20 th December 2023

There being no further business, the Town Mayor closed the meeting at 8.13pm.

APPROVED
29th November 2023

TOWN MAYOR





Twinned with
Pont Audemer

Ringwood Town Council

Ringwood Gateway
The Furlong
Ringwood
BH24 1AT

District Councillor Steve Rippon-Swaine,
22, Manor Road,
Ringwood.
BH24 1RA

17th November 2023

Dear Steve,

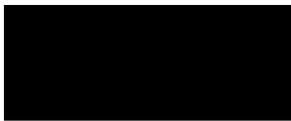
I have received emails representing over a hundred people that either work or own businesses with staff that work in Ringwood town centre about the increase in price next year of parking clocks and in particular the Long Stay parking clocks. As pointed out to me, the £80 increase is equivalent to a day's pay for a shop worker.

I fear that an early consequence of the increase will be people parking on places like the Bickerley or road parking on streets like Parsonage Barn Lane and Southampton Road, which will likely inhibit traffic flow. Longer term, it could become difficult to attract shop staff to Ringwood and I understand that some businesses already have an issue filling vacancies for these positions.

I have contacted Cllr Brice Stratford, Chair of NFALC, in order to assess whether there is similar disquiet across the Forest. I can imagine in Lyndhurst, for example, people preferring to park in the New Forest National Park car parks for free, which would negatively impact parking options for visitors and potentially lead to reduced trade for the shops in the town.

I would ask you, as Chair of the Place & Sustainability Overview & Scrutiny Panel, to consider offering a discount for people that can prove that they work locally.

Yours sincerely,



Gareth

*Cllr Gareth DeBoos, Town Mayor
Ringwood Town Council
07904195605*

copies to:
All Ringwood District Councillors
Cllr Brice Stratford
Chris Wilkins

Cllr G DeBoos, Town Mayor
Ringwood Town Council
Ringwood Gateway
The Furlong
RINGWOOD
BH24 1AT

23rd November 2023

Dear Gareth,

Thank you for your letter of 17 November 2023. Such changes to car parking charges is never a popular choice when prices are increased and as such the decision was not taken lightly nor without consideration to the impact that it will have on both those that are required to pay it and the businesses that operate within our towns and villages.

All Councils are facing the problem of high inflation and whereas Ringwood Town Council has just increased their precept by 10%, New Forest District Council is subject to restrictions imposed on areas of income; Council Tax has been capped by Government at 3%!

NFDC has to balance between i) rising costs, ii) the imposed restrictions on income and iii) the need to deliver services (often to some of the most vulnerable within our society), with iv) maintaining a fully funded budget, plus v) new pressures (such as proposed changes to waste and recycling expecting to cost NFDC in excess of £1 million); New Forest District Council finds itself having to make difficult choices.

Many of the parking charges have been **frozen for up to six years** and NFDC's position in relation to comparative Councils demonstrates good value for money particularly in relation to short and long stay Parking Clocks.

Benchmarking for Parking Clocks is stark! The new fee for long stay Clocks will be £220 versus other comparable local authorities which range from £520 (Fareham Season Ticket) to £704 (Chichester Season Ticket). For regular users for



the long stay Clock i.e. those who use it every day for work, it is still exceptional value for money. If you assume 220 working days in a year, allowing for weekends and holidays, etc., that is still parking for **about £1 per day**. NFDC has been giving a significant discount for a number of years to people who live and work in and around Ringwood (and the New Forest)!

The cost of a short stay Clock at £40 works out at **less than 78 pence per week**, which enables parking for up to 3 hours, 7 days a week.

Although NFDC has had to make some difficult choices, the financial pressures on our residents and businesses has been recognised and that is why the Council has retained the £1 fee for one hour parking throughout the year and also supporting users, the business economy, local shops and High Streets by providing 4 free parking days on:

Small Business Saturday (2nd December 2023),

Two days before Christmas (16th/17th December 2023 and

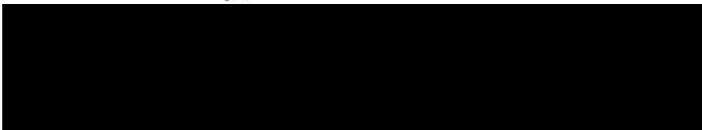
One additional free day to support Town/Parish Councils to support a Christmas event. (The loss in revenue of each day ranges from £5,000 to £10,000).

These 'free days' have been known to encourage return-visitors, who do not normally park in Ringwood, having discovered our lower parking prices!

Finally, you make reference to car parking displacement onto the highway due to these charges. As with the introduction of car parking charges, back in the 1990's, there may be an element, such is the case today on the Bickerley, but we would look to the highways authority, Hampshire County Council, to enforce against those who park in contravention to the traffic restriction orders or in such a way as to cause an obstruction.

As a thought, when shopping in Ringwood, would someone park as far away as Southampton Road or Parsonage Barn Lane, when it cost £1 to park right in the centre of the Town with the added security of CCTV surveillance?

Yours sincerely,



Cllr Steve Rippon-Swaine FRICS, DipGS

Chairman

NFDC Place & Sustainability Overview & Scrutiny Panel



Twinned with
Pont Audemer

Ringwood Town Council

Ringwood Gateway
The Furlong
Ringwood
BH24 1AT

District Councillor Steve Rippon-Swaine,
22, Manor Road,
Ringwood.
BH24 1RA

30th November 2023

Dear Steve,

Thank you for your letter dated 23rd November regarding changes to car parking charges. I would like to provide an update and responses to the points made.

I have now received emails representing well over a hundred long stay clock purchasers, from businesses that buy them for their employees or individuals that buy them as they work in the town. For ease of understanding in this letter, I will call these 'customers'. Here are some of the things that customers have stated:

- "My employer pays the minimum wage and I am currently considering the financial feasibility of paying to park and work in the town in the new year";
- "It is difficult enough to recruit staff without them having to pay excessive parking fees";
- "I don't think Ringwood should be compared to Chichester, Fareham or Test Valley.....these are not like for like places";
- "A gradual increase would be a fairer option";
- "There is no concession or discount for the hard-working people trying to keep Ringwood and its shops running".

Over a hundred of the customers use the Furlong Long Stay to park whilst they are at work in the Furlong or town centre. As that carpark has a capacity of a little over three hundred, one hundred is a sizable proportion and most of these customers say they are on low wages. A space is not guaranteed.

I realise that NFDC has challenges to its financing. However, the pressures you list in your letter are not caused by people buying car parking clocks. In the Council Meeting debate on the 9th October, it was stated that NFDC costs are ~£400,000 per annum to maintain the car parks, with the total income with the price increases expected to be over £3.5M, according to the officer report.

As you say, the benchmarking figures provided by officers are stark. A number of the customers questioned the basis of the benchmarking. Could you or officers let me know what the criteria were for selecting the benchmarks please?

Related to this, several customers have asked why Chichester, Fareham and Test Valley were chosen as benchmarks? One pointed out that Chichester doesn't have a parking clock scheme, so the comparison is flawed. To check this, I had a look at their council website. They don't have parking

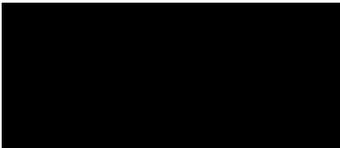
clocks, but they do have an 'X Roving season ticket' which allows parking in any of a list of carparks in Chichester and costs £704 per annum, so is presumably the scheme that officers are using as a benchmark. A better comparator for most of the customers using the clock in Ringwood when at work would be a season ticket for a carpark in one place. I realise this is relevant by and large only for long stay clocks – short stay clock buyers will likely park in various carparks around the district. For Chichester, these season tickets vary in cost, depending on the carparks. 'Avenue de Chartres' is £594, 'Bosham' is £288, 'Rural and Coastal' is £264. As the NFDC area is largely rural and coastal, perhaps the £264 season ticket would be a better benchmark than carparks in the middle of city of 30,000 people that has a good public transport system. So why was the 'X Roving' ticket used as a benchmark rather than the 'Rural and Coastal' ticket? An increase would still have been justified by that benchmark. Perhaps you or officers can let me know.

One customer is concerned that the comparison with, e.g., the Chichester £704 season ticket will be used to justify further £80 increases in future years until the cost exceeds £500. I don't believe that this is the aim of NFDC, but if the Task and Finish Group are intending that it is, please let me know.

I am also surprised by the figures that you mention related to loss of revenue from free parking days. Clearly if people have already bought long stay clocks, then these free days would be covered by their clock anyway. The point of free parking days is to encourage visitors. Can you provide any hard data please of free days encouraging "return-visitors, who do not normally park in Ringwood, having discovered our lower parking prices"?

On car parking displacement, I have to disagree with you. Parking on the Bickerley is illegal and a policing matter. Parking on Southampton Road and Parsonage Barn Road in unrestricted areas is perfectly legal. I have not heard of any plan for metered parking in these areas. Do let me know if this is incorrect.

Yours sincerely,



Gareth

*Cllr Gareth DeBoos, Town Mayor
Ringwood Town Council
07904195605*

copies to:
All Ringwood District Councillors
Cllr Brice Stratford
Chris Wilkins

TOWN COUNCIL

29th November 2023

Councillor-Officer Protocol

1. Introduction and reason for report

- 1.1 Officers invite members to consider adopting a protocol to regulate relations between councillors and officers.

2. Background

- 2.1 For some time NALC and SLCC have been working together to promote Civility and Respect in the local councils sector of public life. This initiative is a response to perceived weaknesses in the current standards regime and problems that have emerged at a significant number of councils as a result. Two measures have been promoted to local councils: the Civility and Respect Pledge and the adoption of Councillor-Officer protocols. Officers are not persuaded that the Pledge would be useful or helpful at this Council but would certainly be very happy to facilitate an opportunity for members to consider it, if desired. Officers believe however that a protocol is worth considering.
- 2.2 Happily, no problems have been experienced at Ringwood Town Council but nowhere can be assumed to be immune from them forever. Modest preventive action now may avoid much unpleasantness, poor publicity and even expense in future. Adopting a protocol that spells out clearly the respective roles of members and officers and the standards and conduct expected from both could be one such measure.

3. Options

- 3.1 A draft protocol is attached as Annex 1. This is based on the NALC/SLCC proposed form but has been edited fairly extensively by officers (to remove text that seemed unnecessarily repetitive and to add some detail thought particularly relevant here). Members could approve this as it stands, agree changes (that are modest enough to make at the meeting), request a re-write incorporating more significant changes (for further consideration at a later date) or reject the proposal altogether.

4. Issues for decision and any recommendations

Members are respectfully invited to consider and, if thought fit, approve the draft Councillor-Officer Protocol.

For further information, contact:

Christopher Wilkins, Town Clerk
Direct Dial: 01425 484720
Email: chris.wilkins@ringwood.gov.uk

Jo Hurd, Deputy Town Clerk
Direct Dial: 01425 484721
Email: jo.hurd@ringwood.gov.uk

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Protocol is to guide councillors and officers of the council in their relations with one another. The Protocol's intention is to build and maintain good working relationships between councillors and officers as they work together. Employees who are required to give advice to councillors are referred to as "officers" throughout. References to the Proper Officer are to the Town Clerk unless otherwise stated.

A strong, constructive, and trusting relationship between councillors and officers is essential to the effective and efficient working of the council.

This Protocol also seeks to reflect the principles underlying the Code of Conduct, which applies to councillors and the employment terms and conditions of officers. The shared objective is to enhance and maintain the integrity (real and perceived) of local government.

This Protocol covers:

- The respective roles and responsibilities of councillors and officers;
- Relationships between councillors and officers;
- Where/who a councillor or an officer should go to if they have concerns;
- Who is responsible for making decisions.

BACKGROUND

This Protocol is intended to assist councillors and officers in approaching some of the sensitive circumstances which arise in a challenging working environment.

The reputation and integrity of the council is significantly influenced by the effectiveness of councillors and officers working together to support each other's roles.

The aim is effective and professional working relationships characterised by mutual trust, respect and courtesy. Overly close personal familiarity between councillors and officers is not recommended as it has the potential to damage this relationship.

ROLES OF COUNCILLORS AND OFFICERS

The respective roles of councillors and officers 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 for their term of office.
- 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.

Councillors

Councillors have four main areas of responsibility:

- To determine council policy and provide community leadership;

- To monitor and review council performance in implementing policies and delivering services;
- To represent the council externally; and
- To act as advocates for their constituents.

All councillors have the same rights and obligations in their relationship with officers, regardless of their status, and should be treated equally.

Councillors should not involve themselves in the day-to-day running of the council. This is the responsibility of the Proper Officer and other employees, all of whom will be acting on instructions from the council or its committees, within agreed job descriptions. The council or its committees may from time-to-time delegate specific authority to individual councillors to undertake tasks such as research and information gathering and (exceptionally) other matters usually dealt with by officers but, as a general rule, councillors should not engage (or expect to be engaged) in the following:

- Preparation of reports to the council or its committees;
- Drafting of legal, policy or other documents;
- Arranging the procurement, purchase or ordering of goods or services by or on behalf of the council;
- Attending meetings with other parties or agencies to discuss council business (save as appointed representatives or unless accompanied by the appropriate officer or officers).

In line with the council's Code of Conduct, a councillor must treat others with respect, must not bully or harass people and must not do anything which compromises, or is likely to compromise, the impartiality of those who work for, or on behalf of, the council.

Officers can expect councillors:

- to give strategic leadership and direction and to seek to further their agreed policies and objectives with the understanding that councillors have the right to take the final decision on issues based on advice.
- to act within the policies, practices, processes and conventions established by the council.
- to work constructively in partnership with officers acknowledging their separate and distinct roles and responsibilities.
- to understand and support the respective roles and responsibilities of officers and their associated workloads, pressures and reporting lines.
- to treat them fairly and with respect, dignity and courtesy.
- to act with integrity, to give support and to respect appropriate confidentiality.
- to recognise that officers do not work under the instruction of individual councillors or groups.
- not to subject them to bullying, intimidation, harassment, or put them under undue pressure.
- to treat all officers, partners (those external people with whom the council works) and members of the public equally, and not discriminate based on any

characteristic such as age, sex, race, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability or religion.

- not to request officers to exercise discretion which involves acting outside the council's policies and procedures.
- not to authorise, initiate, or certify any financial transactions or to enter into any contract, agreement or undertaking on behalf of the council or in their role as a councillor without proper and lawful authority.
- not to use their position or relationship with officers to advance their personal interest or those of others or to influence decisions improperly.
- to comply at all times with the council's Code of Conduct, the law, and such other policies, procedures, protocols and conventions agreed by the council.
- to respect the impartiality of officers and not undermine their role in carrying out their duties.
- not to ask officers to undertake work, or act in a way which seeks to support or benefit a particular political party or gives rise to an officer being criticised for operating in a party-political manner.
- not to ask officers to exceed their authority where that authority is given.

Chairs and vice-chairs of council and committees

Chairs and vice-chairs have additional responsibilities as delegated by the council. These responsibilities mean that they may have to have a closer working relationship with officers than other councillors do. However, they must still respect the impartiality of officers and must not ask them to undertake work or anything else which would prejudice their impartiality.

Officers

The primary role of officers is to advise, inform and support all members and to implement the agreed policies of the council.

Officers are responsible for day-to-day managerial and operational decisions within the council, including directing and overseeing the work of any more junior employees. Councillors should avoid inappropriate involvement in such matters.

In performing their role officers will act professionally, impartially and with neutrality. Whilst officers must respect a councillor's view on an issue, no officer should be influenced or pressured to make comments, or recommendations which are contrary to their professional judgement or views.

Officers must:

- implement decisions of the council and its committees which are lawful, which have been properly approved in accordance with the requirements of the law and are duly recorded. This includes respecting the decisions made, regardless of any different advice given to the council or whether the decision differs from the officer's view.
- work in partnership with councillors in an impartial and professional manner.

- treat councillors fairly and with respect, dignity and courtesy.
- treat all councillors, partners and members of the public equally, and not discriminate based on any characteristic such as age, sex, race, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability or religion.
- assist and advise all parts of the council. Officers must always act to the best of their abilities in the best interests of the authority as expressed in the council's formal decisions.
- respond to enquiries and complaints in accordance with the council's Complaints Procedure (and any other relevant policies or protocols).
- be alert to issues which are, or are likely to be, contentious or politically sensitive, and be aware of the implications for councillors, the media or other sections of the public.
- act with honesty, respect, dignity and courtesy at all times.
- provide support and learning and development opportunities for councillors to help them in performing their various roles in line with the council's Training Policy & Procedure.
- not seek to use their relationship with councillors to advance their personal interests or to influence decisions improperly.
- comply, at all times, with the council's Employee Handbook, and all other policies or procedures approved by the council that are relevant.

Officers have the right not to support councillors in any role other than that of councillor, and not to engage in actions incompatible with this Protocol. Officers must never actively seek to undermine majority decisions of the corporate body or criticize such decisions or individual councillors at meetings held in public or on social media.

In giving 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.

Special situations

There are exceptional circumstances where a councillor can fulfil the role of an officer, for example where there is a vacancy. This can only be done if the councillor is not paid for the role and should only ever be short-term while the council seeks to fill a vacancy. Whenever this situation arises, care will need to be exercised to ensure there is clarity about when the councillor is acting as a councillor and when acting as an officer.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Whilst individual councillors should always be free to maintain and express their disagreement with decisions of the council, no councillor should ever actively seek to

undermine majority decisions of the corporate body, as this could then bring them into conflict with officers who have been charged with promoting and implementing the council's collectively determined course of action.

Councillors should not raise matters relating to the conduct or capability of an officer, or of officers collectively, in a manner that is incompatible with this Protocol at meetings held in public or on social media. This is a long-standing tradition in public service. An officer has no means of responding to criticisms like this in public.

A councillor who is unhappy about the actions taken by, or conduct of, an officer should:

- avoid personal attacks on, or abuse of, the officer at all times;
- ensure that any criticism is well founded and constructive;
- ensure that any criticism is made in private;
- take up the concern with the chair.

Neither should an officer raise with a councillor matters relating to the conduct or capability of another councillor or officer or to the internal management of the council in a manner that is incompatible with the objectives of this Protocol.

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.

Councillors are always entitled to communicate with the Proper Officer who should make every reasonable effort to respond promptly and helpfully to communications from councillors. Councillors may also communicate directly with other officers concerning matters within their respective areas of responsibility but must not abuse such direct access to undermine the authority of the Proper Officer as the council's head of paid service or circumvent his/her line-management responsibilities for all other council staff. Councillors should not give instructions directly to the Proper Officer's staff without the express approval of the Proper Officer. If an officer asks a councillor to direct their communication to the Proper Officer instead, the councillor should respect that request.

COUNCILLORS' ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND TO COUNCIL DOCUMENTS

Councillors are free to approach officers to provide them with such information, explanation and advice as they may reasonably need in order to assist them in discharging their role as members of the council. This can range from a request for general information about some aspect of the council's activities to a request for specific information on behalf of a constituent. Such approaches should normally be directed to the Proper Officer.

The legal rights of councillors to inspect council documents are covered partly by statute and partly by the common law.

The common law right of councillors is based on the principle that any member has a prima facie right to inspect council documents so far as their access to the documents is

reasonably necessary to enable the member properly to perform their duties as a member of the council. This principle is commonly referred to as the “need to know” principle.

The exercise of this common law right depends therefore upon the councillor’s ability to demonstrate that they have the necessary “need to know”. In this respect a member has no right to “a roving commission” to go and examine documents of the council. Mere curiosity is not sufficient. The crucial question is the determination of the “need to know”. This question must be determined by the Proper Officer.

In some circumstances (e.g. a committee member wishing to inspect documents relating to the functions of that committee) a councillor’s “need to know” will normally be presumed. In other circumstances (e.g. a councillor wishing to inspect documents which contain personal information about third parties) a councillor will normally be expected to justify the request in specific terms. Any council information provided to a councillor must only be used by the councillor for the purpose for which it was provided i.e. in connection with the proper performance of the councillor’s duties as a member of the council.

For completeness, councillors do, of course, have the same right as any other member of the public to make requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

CORRESPONDENCE

Correspondence between an individual councillor and an officer should not normally be copied (by the officer) to any other councillor. Where exceptionally it is necessary to copy the correspondence to another councillor, this should be made clear to the original councillor. In other words, a system of “silent copies” should not be employed.

Acknowledging that the “BCC” system of e-mailing is used, it should be made clear at the foot of any e-mails if another councillor has received an e-mail by adding “CC councillor X.”

Official letters or emails on behalf of the council should normally be sent out under the name of an officer, rather than under the name of a councillor. It may be appropriate in certain circumstances (e.g. representations to a Government Minister) for a letter or email to appear over the name of the chair, but this should be the exception rather than the norm. Letters or emails which, for example, create obligations or give instructions on behalf of the council should never be sent out in the name of a councillor. Councillors should not use the Town Crest or official council stationery without the prior approval of the Proper Officer (save that the Town Mayor or the Deputy Town Mayor may issue letters (which include the Town Crest and/or use official stationery) in response to invitations, hospitality or gifts received, etc. provided the content of these is strictly limited to the matter in hand and include no comment on council policy or other politically sensitive matters).

Correspondence to individual councillors from officers should not be sent or copied to complainants or other third parties if they are marked “confidential”. In doing so, the relevant officer should seek to make clear what is to be treated as being shared with the councillor in confidence only and why that is so.

PRESS AND MEDIA

Councils are accountable to their electorate. Accountability requires local understanding. This will be promoted by the council, explaining its objectives and policies to the electors and customers. Councils use publicity to keep the public informed and to encourage public participation. The council needs to tell the public about the services it provides. Good effective publicity should aim to improve public awareness of the council's activities. Publicity is a sensitive matter in any political environment because of the impact it can have. Expenditure on publicity can be significant.

Officers may respond to press enquiries but should confine any comments to the facts of the subject matter and the professional aspects of the function concerned. On no account must an officer expressly or impliedly make any political opinion, comment or statement.

Any press release that may be necessary to clarify the council's position in relation to disputes, major planning developments, court issues or individuals' complaints should be approved by the relevant officer.

The Mayor and the chairs of committees may act as spokespersons for the council in responding to the press and media and making public statements on behalf of the council or the relevant committee but should liaise with the relevant officer on all forms of contact with the press and media. The council may also appoint individual councillors as spokespeople where there is an area of particular expertise but this should only be done with the agreement of the council.

The council must comply with the provisions of the Local Government Act 1986 ("the Act") regarding publicity. All media relations work will comply with the national Code of Practice for Local Government Publicity. The Code is statutory guidance and the council must have regard to it and follow its provisions when making any decision on publicity.

For more detailed information and guidance regarding the role of councillors in connection with the use of social media, reference should be made to the council's Social Media Policy.

IF THINGS GO WRONG

From time to time the relationship between councillors and officers (or other employees) may break down or become strained. Whilst it is always preferable to resolve matters informally, it is necessary to have and follow formal protocols or procedures in cases of need.

Procedure for officers

Officers should raise any concerns they may have about breaches (or alleged breaches) of this protocol by a councillor or councillors with the Proper Officer in the first instance. The Proper Officer should raise the matter informally with the councillor or councillors concerned and may seek support from the Town Mayor. The principal council's

monitoring officer may be able to offer a mediation/conciliation role or it may be necessary to seek independent advice.

If an employee's concern cannot be resolved informally, the employee should proceed in accordance with the council's grievance procedure. No councillor should attempt to deal with employee grievances on their own. The necessary authority has already been delegated to the Council's Staffing Committee

Where the matter relates to a formal written complaint alleging a breach of the council's Code of Conduct the matter must be referred to the principal council's monitoring officer in the first instance in line with the Localism Act 2011. The council may however try to resolve any concerns raised informally before they become a formal written allegation.

Procedure for councillors

If a councillor is dissatisfied with the conduct, behaviour or performance of an officer or other employee, the matter should be reported to the chair and then raised with the Proper Officer in the first instance. If the matter cannot be resolved informally, it may be necessary to invoke the council's disciplinary procedure. Again, no councillor should attempt to deal with disciplinary, performance management or line-management issues on their own. The necessary authority has already been delegated to the Council's Staffing Committee.

TOWN COUNCIL

29th November 2023

Funding for infrastructure projects

1. Introduction and reason for report

- 1.1 The Council has been invited by New Forest District Council (NFDC) to bid for funding for qualifying infrastructure projects in Ringwood.
- 1.2 The invitation raises consequential issues for the Council's management of reserves intended to meet future infrastructure funding needs.

2. Background

- 2.1 NFDC has released £1M of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds received for locally-led projects to provide new or improved "infrastructure" (as defined in the CIL Regulations). Bidders must be prepared to commit any CIL funds they hold to the project. Bids must be submitted in early December.

3. Options and implications

- 3.1 In response to a briefing from the Town Clerk, Cllr. M. DeBoos proposed that the Council bid for funding for the new car park proposed at Carvers Recreation Ground in the emerging Masterplan. Her reasons are that it is an existing project, which has already had public consultation and it would be wonderful to show rapid progress, that we are likely to struggle to get this element funded from any other source but it is important because it will (a) provide greater access to sports and recreation facilities for those with limited mobility and (b) allow us to put on a wider range of activities due to the improved ability to get equipment on to site.
- 3.2 Cllr Frederick has since proposed varying this proposal to include the proposed changes to the main entrance and the provision of a new pedestrian access leading directly to the Clubhouse. The proposal for enhanced parking (especially for disabled visitors) was supported in the public consultation. She further suggests that these combined features should increase use of the Clubhouse and provide the infrastructure required for the other planned improvements. They would address concerns about under-use of the existing facilities. The parking would not involve tarmac it would be sympathetic to the surroundings it would be well planted (separate funding for this has been secured - RACE).
- 3.3 Officers recommend that members consider and, if thought fit, approve one project as the preferred option for funding but also consider a possible "back-up" project in case the preferred option is ruled ineligible for some reason. Officers advise against bidding for funding for more than one project.
- 3.4 The Council currently holds about £9,000 in CIL receipts not spent upon or formally committed towards any specific project. If members resolve to bid for funding for a project, officers recommend that this include a further resolution (i) to transfer to new earmarked reserves any sums which members wish to commit to other specific projects or purposes and (ii) to commit the whole of the remainder to the bid project if the bid is successful.

4. Issues for decision and any recommendations

Members are respectfully invited:

- 4.1 **to identify their preferred project to include in a bid for funding;**
- 4.2 **to identify a reserve project to include in the bid if the preferred project is deemed ineligible;**

- 4.3 to identify any other infrastructure projects to which it is desired formally to commit funds from the CIL reserve; and**
- 4.4 (if a bid for funding is to be made) to commit the balance of the CIL Reserve to the relevant project if the bid is successful.**

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