

5.5 - Member, Mayor and Officer Protocol

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this protocol is to guide members and officers of the Combined Authority in their relations with one another.

2. Principles

- 2.1 Members and officers must at all times observe this protocol.
- 2.2 The protocol has been approved by the Combined Authority who will monitor its operation.
- 2.3 The protocol seeks to maintain and enhance the integrity (real and perceived) of local government which demands the highest standards of personal conduct.
- 2.4 Members and officers must always respect the roles and duties of each other. They must show respect in all their dealings by observing reasonable standards of courtesy, and by not seeking to take unfair advantage by virtue of their position.
- 2.5 Whilst members and officers are indispensable to one another, their responsibilities are distinct. Members are accountable to the electorate and serve only as long as their term of office lasts. Officers are accountable to the Combined Authority as a whole. Their job is to give advice to members (individually and collectively) and to carry out the Combined Authority's work under the direction of the Combined Authority.
- 2.6 The Combined Authority has adopted codes of conduct for both members and officers. Both represent best practice. The members' code follows the national code which in turn is based on the general principles governing members' conduct enshrined in law, namely:
- Selflessness - serving only the public interest.
 - Honesty and integrity - not allowing these to be questioned; not behaving improperly.
 - Objectivity - taking decisions on merit.
 - Accountability – to the public; being open to scrutiny.
 - Openness - giving reasons for decisions.
 - Personal judgement - reaching one's own conclusions and acting accordingly.
 - Respect for others - promoting equality; avoiding discrimination; respecting others (member/member, as well as member/officer).
 - Duty to uphold the law - not acting unlawfully.
 - Stewardship - ensuring the prudent use of a Combined Authority's resources.
 - Leadership - acting in a way which has public confidence.

- 2.7 These principles underpin this protocol. They will also be reflected in a new statutory code of conduct for employees due to be introduced in the near future.
- 2.8 Until such time as a new national code appears, officers are bound by the Combined Authority's own code of conduct for staff and, in some cases, by the codes of their professional associations.
- 2.9 Breaches of this protocol by a member may result in a complaint to the Monitoring Officer if it appears the members' code has also been breached. Breaches by an officer may lead to disciplinary action.

3. The Role of Members

- 3.1 Members have a number of roles and need to be alert to the potential for conflicts of interest which may arise between the roles. Where such conflicts are likely, members may wish to seek the advice of the Monitoring Officer.

Role	Potential Conflict
Executive Member	Officer implementation of portfolio responsibilities
Scrutiny Member	Review of own decisions
Representative Members on Outside Bodies	Outside bodies' policies/actions not in line with Combined Authority interests
Political Party Members	Party political beliefs not in line with Combined Authority policy

- 3.2 Collectively, members are the ultimate policymakers determining the core values of the Combined Authority and approving the authority's policy framework, strategic plans and budget.
- 3.3 Members represent the community, act as community leaders and promote the social, economic and environmental well-being of the community often in partnership with other agencies.

4. Relationships with Officers

- 4.1 Members are not authorised to instruct officers other than:
- through the formal decision-making process;
 - to request the provision of consumable resources provided by the Combined Authority for members' use;
 - where staff have been specifically allocated to give support to a member or group of members; and
 - in the case of political assistants.
- 4.2 Members are not authorised to initiate or certify financial transactions, or to enter into a contract on behalf of the Combined Authority.

- 4.3 Members must avoid taking actions which are unlawful, financially improper or likely to amount to maladministration. Members have an obligation under their code of conduct to have regard, when reaching decisions, to any advice provided by the Monitoring Officer or the designated Finance Officer.
- 4.4 Members must respect the impartiality of officers and do nothing to compromise it, eg by insisting that an officer change his/her professional advice.
- 4.5 Members have a duty under their code of conduct:
- to promote equality by not discriminating unlawfully against any person, and
 - to treat others with respect.
- 4.6 Under the code, a member must not when acting as a member or in any other capacity:
- bring the Combined Authority or his/her position as a member into disrepute, or
 - use his/her position as a member improperly to gain an advantage or disadvantage for his/herself or any other person.

5. The Role of Officers

- 5.1 Officers are responsible for giving advice to members to enable them to fulfil their roles. In doing so, officers will take into account all available relevant factors.
- 5.2 Under the direction and control of the Combined Authority (including, as appropriate, the Mayor, committees and sub-committees), officers manage and provide the Combined Authority's services within the framework of responsibilities delegated to them. This includes the effective management of employees and operational issues.
- 5.3 Officers have a duty to implement decisions of the Combined Authority, the Mayor, committees and sub-committees which are lawful, and which have been properly approved in accordance with the requirements of the law and the Combined Authority's constitution, and duly minuted.
- 5.4 Officers have a contractual and legal duty to be impartial. They must not allow their professional judgement and advice to be influenced by their own personal views.
- 5.5 Officers must assist and advise all parts of the Combined Authority and the Mayor. They must always act to the best of their abilities in the best interests of the authority as expressed in the Combined Authority's formal decisions.
- 5.6 Officers must be alert to issues which are, or are likely to be, contentious or politically sensitive, and be aware of the implications for members, the media or other sections of the public.
- 5.7 Officers have the right not to support members in any role other than that of member, and not to engage in actions incompatible with this protocol. In particular, there is a statutory limitation on officers' involvement in political activities.

6. The Relationship between Members and Officers: General

- 6.1 The conduct of members and officers should be such as to instill mutual confidence and trust.
- 6.2 The key elements are a recognition of and a respect for each other's roles and responsibilities. These should be reflected in the behaviour and attitude of each to the other, both publicly and privately.
- 6.3 Informal and collaborative two-way contact between members and officers is encouraged. But personal familiarity can damage the relationship, as might a family or business connection.
- 6.4 Members and officers should inform the Monitoring Officer of any relationship which might be seen as unduly influencing their work in their respective roles.
- 6.5 It is not enough to avoid actual impropriety. Members and officers should always be open about their relationships to avoid any reason for suspicion and any appearance of improper conduct. Where a personal relationship has been disclosed, those concerned should avoid a situation where conflict could be perceived. Specifically, a member should not sit on a body or participate in any decision which directly affects the officer on a personal basis.
- 6.6 Officers work to the instructions of their senior officers, not individual members. It follows that, whilst such officers will always seek to assist a member, they must not be asked to exceed the bounds of authority they have been given by their managers. Except when the purpose of an enquiry is purely to seek factual information, members should normally direct their requests and concerns to a senior officer, at least in the first instance.
- 6.7 Officers will do their best to give timely responses to members' enquiries. However, officers should not have unreasonable requests placed on them. Their work priorities are set and managed by senior managers. Members should avoid disrupting officers' work by imposing their own priorities.
- 6.8 Members will endeavour to give timely responses to enquiries from officers.
- 6.9 An officer shall not discuss with a member personal matters concerning him/herself or another individual employee. This does not prevent an officer raising on a personal basis, and in his/her own time, a matter with his/her ward member.
- 6.10 Members and officers should respect each other's free (ie non-Combined Authority) time.

7. The Combined Authority as Employer

- 7.1 Officers are employed by the Combined Authority as a whole.

7.2 Members' roles are limited to:

- the appointment of specified senior posts,
- determining human resources policies and conditions of employment, and
- hearing and determining appeals.

7.3 Members shall not act outside these roles.

7.4 If participating in the appointment of officers, members should:

- remember that the sole criterion is merit
- never canvass support for a particular candidate,
- not take part where one of the candidates is a close friend or relative,
- not be influenced by personal preferences, and
- not favour a candidate by giving him/her information not available to the other candidates.

7.5 A member should not sit on an appeal hearing if the appellant is a friend, a relative, or an officer with whom the member has had a working relationship.

8. Mayor, Combined Authority Members and Officers

8.1 Officers will respect the position of Mayor and provide appropriate support.

8.2 Combined Authority Members will take decisions in accordance with the constitution and will not otherwise direct staff. Senior officers will be responsible for instructing staff to implement the decisions of the Mayor and the Combined Authority.

8.3 In addition to the Mayor and individual members of the Combined Authority, senior officers (including the Monitoring Officer and the designated Finance Officer) have the right to submit papers to the Mayor and the Combined Authority as a whole or to individual Combined Authority Members for consideration.

8.4 Senior officers and the Mayor and Combined Authority Members shall agree mutually convenient methods of regular contact. Before taking any formal decisions, the Mayor and the Combined Authority Members will seek appropriate professional advice including, without exception, the Monitoring Officer and designated S73 Chief Finance Officer, and will not direct officers in the framing of recommendations.

8.5 Before any formal decisions with a financial implication are taken by the Mayor and/or the Combined Authority, the s73 Chief Finance Officer and the senior officer(s) for the service(s) concerned must be consulted. This is to ensure that those officers who are budget holders:

- are aware of the proposed decision,
- have the opportunity to offer advice, and
- are subsequently able properly to authorise the financial transactions needed to implement decisions.

8.6 An individual Combined Authority Member who is minded to write or commission a report or to make a decision about a matter within his/her portfolio must ensure that the Mayor and other Combined Authority Members and officers who need to know of

the matter are so informed. There is a particular requirement to involve the Mayor and other Combined Authority Members on cross-cutting issues.

- 8.7 The Mayor and all Combined Authority Members when making decisions (whether collectively or individually) must state the reasons for those decisions. The written record of the decisions must include the reasons.
- 8.8 Officers taking decisions under their delegated powers must consider the advisability of informing the Mayor and relevant Combined Authority Member(s) of their intentions in advance when the matter to which the decisions relates is likely to be sensitive or contentious or has wider policy implications.

9. Overview and Scrutiny Members and Officers

- 9.1 Chairmen and other leading overview and scrutiny members shall maintain regular contact with the officer(s) providing the principal support to the overview and scrutiny function. In consultation with chairmen, it shall be the responsibility of the latter to ensure that those who need to know of matters being considered or for possible future consideration are so informed.
- 9.2 An overview and scrutiny committee or its chairman acting on its behalf may require officers to attend overview and scrutiny meetings. Members should not normally expect junior officers to give evidence. All requests should be made to senior officers in the first instance.
- 9.3 When making requests for officer attendance, overview and scrutiny members shall have regard to the workload of officers.
- 9.4 It is recognised that officers required to appear before an overview and scrutiny committee may often be those who have advised the Mayor or another part of the Combined Authority on the matter under investigation. In these circumstances, an officer may have a conflict of interest. Both members and officers need to consider the severity of the conflict. If deemed appropriate, research and advice may be sought elsewhere - from the Combined Authority's dedicated Scrutiny Officer or externally.
- 9.5 Subject to 9.4 above, officers should be prepared to justify advice given to the Combined Authority, the Mayor, or other committees and sub-committees even when the advice was not accepted.
- 9.6 Officers must also be prepared to justify decisions they have taken under delegated powers.
- 9.7 In giving evidence, officers must not be asked to give political views.
- 9.8 Officers should respect members in the way they respond to members' questions.
- 9.9 Members should not question officers in a way which could be interpreted as harassment. Neither should they ask about matters of a disciplinary nature.
- 9.10 Overview and scrutiny proceedings must not be used to question the capability or competence of officers. Chairmen and members need to make a distinction between

reviewing the policies and performance of the Mayor and/or the Combined Authority and its services and appraising the personal performance of staff. The latter is not an overview and scrutiny function.

- 9.11 In exercising the right to call-in a decision of the Mayor and/or the Combined Authority, overview and scrutiny members must seek the advice of the Monitoring Officer if they consider the decision is contrary to the Combined Authority's approved plans, policies or frameworks, or is unlawful.

10. Members of other Committees or Sub-Committees and Officers

- 10.1 The appropriate senior officers will offer to arrange regular informal meetings with chairmen, vice-chairmen, and spokesmen of committees and subcommittees.
- 10.2 Senior officers (including the Monitoring Officer and the designated S73 Chief Finance Officer) have the right to present reports and give advice to committees and sub-committees.
- 10.3 Members of a committee or sub-committee shall take decisions within the remit of that committee or sub-committee and will not otherwise instruct officers to act.
- 10.4 At some committee or sub-committee meetings, a resolution may be passed which authorises a named officer to take action between meetings in consultation with the chairman. In these circumstances it is the officer, not the chairman, who takes the action and is responsible for it. A chairman has no legal power to take decisions on behalf of a committee or sub-committee, neither should he/she apply inappropriate pressure on the officer.

11. Party Groups and Officers

- 11.1 Senior officers may properly be asked to contribute to deliberations of matters concerning Combined Authority business by party groups.
- 11.2 Officer support will not extend beyond providing factual information or professional advice in relation to matters of Combined Authority business. Officers must not be involved in advising on matters of party business and therefore should not be expected to be present at meetings or parts of meetings when such matters are to be discussed.
- 11.3 Party group meetings are not empowered to make decisions on behalf of the Combined Authority, and conclusions reached at such meetings do not rank as formal decisions. The presence of an officer confers no formal status on such meetings in terms of Combined Authority business and must not be interpreted as doing so.
- 11.4 Where officers provide factual information and advice to a party group in relation to a matter of Combined Authority business, this is not a substitute for providing all the necessary information and advice when the matter in question is formally considered by the relevant part of the Combined Authority.

- 11.5 It must not be assumed that an officer is supportive of a particular policy or view considered at a party group meeting simply because he/she has attended or provided information to the meeting.
- 11.6 Officers will respect the confidentiality of any party group discussions at which they are present and, unless requested to do so by that party group, will not relay the content of such discussions to another party group or to any other members. This shall not prevent an officer providing feedback to other senior officers on a need-to-know basis.
- 11.7 In their dealings with party groups, officers must treat each group in a fair and even-handed manner.
- 11.8 Members must not do anything which compromises or is likely to compromise officers' impartiality.
- 11.9 The duration of an officer's attendance at a party group meeting will be at the discretion of the group, but an officer may leave at any time if he/she feels it is no longer appropriate to be there.
- 11.10 An officer accepting an invitation to the meeting of one party group shall not decline an invitation to advise another group about the same matter. He/she must give substantially the same advice to each.
- 11.11 An officer who is not a senior officer shall not be invited to attend a party/ group meeting, but a senior officer may nominate another officer to attend on his/her behalf.
- 11.12 An officer should be given the opportunity of verifying comments and advice attributed to him/her in any written record of a party group meeting.
- 11.13 No member will refer in public or at meetings of the Combined Authority to advice or information given by officers to a party group meeting.
- 11.14 At party group meetings where some of those present are not members of the Combined Authority, care must be taken not to divulge confidential information relating to Combined Authority business. Persons who are not members are not bound by the members' code of conduct. They do not have the same rights to Combined Authority information as members.

12. Members' Access to Documents and Information

- 12.1 This part of the protocol should be read in conjunction with the Access to Information Rules in the Combined Authority's constitution.
- 12.2 Members may request senior officers to provide them with such information, explanation and advice as they may reasonably need to assist them to discharge their roles as members. This may range from general information about some aspect of the Combined Authority's services to specific information on behalf of a constituent. Where information is requested on behalf of a third party, it will only be provided if:
- it is in the public domain, and
 - it is not barred by the Data Protection Act from being given.

- 12.3 The Mayor and every member of the Combined Authority, an overview and scrutiny committee/ commission, and/or any other committee or sub-committee has a right to inspect documents about the business of that overview and scrutiny committee, other committee or subcommittee or the Combined Authority.
- 12.4 A member should obtain advice from the Monitoring Officer in circumstances where he/she wishes to have access to documents or information:
- where to do so is likely to be in breach of the Data Protection Act, or
 - where the subject matter is one in which he/she has a personal or prejudicial interest as defined in the members' code of conduct.
- 12.5 Information given to a member must only be used for the purpose for which it was requested.
- 12.6 It is an accepted convention that a member of one party group will not have a need to know and therefore a right to inspect a document which forms part of the internal workings of another party group.
- 12.7 Members and officers must not disclose information given to them in confidence without the consent of a person authorised to give it, or unless required by law to do so.
- 12.8 When requested to do so, officers will keep confidential from other members advice requested by a member.
- 12.9 Members and officers must not prevent another person from gaining access to information to which that person is entitled by law.

13. Media Relations

- 13.1 All formal relations with the media must be conducted in accordance with the Combined Authority's agreed procedures and the law on local authority publicity.
- 13.2 Press releases or statements made by officers must promote or give information on Combined Authority policy or services. They will be factual and consistent with Combined Authority policy. They cannot be used to promote a party group.
- 13.3 Officers will keep relevant members informed of media interest in the Combined Authority's activities, especially regarding strategic or contentious matters.
- 13.4 Before responding to enquiries from the media, officers shall ensure they are authorised to do so.
- 13.5 Likewise, officers will inform the Combined Authority's press office of issues likely to be of media interest, since that unit is often the media's first point of contact.
- 13.6 If a member is contacted by, or contacts, the media on an issue, he/she should:
- indicate in what capacity he/she is speaking (eg as ward member, in a personal capacity, as an Executive member, on behalf of the Combined Authority, or on behalf of a party group);

- be sure of what he/she wants to say or not to say;
- if necessary, and always when he/she would like a press release to be issued, seek assistance from the Combined Authority's press office
- consider the likely consequences for the Combined Authority of his/her statement (eg commitment to a particular course of action, image, allegations of jumping to conclusions);
- never give a commitment in relation to matters which may be subject to claims from third parties and/or are likely to be an insurance matter;
- consider whether to consult other relevant members; and
- take particular care in what he/she says in the run-up to local or national elections to avoid giving the impression of electioneering, unless he/she has been contacted as an election candidate or political party activist.

14. Correspondence

- 14.1 If an officer wishes to share correspondence between an individual member and an officer with another member, regardless of the reason, they must first seek and receive the permission of the first member. If an officer considers that he/she has a legal obligation to share correspondence between a member and an officer with a member (other than a member who the member correspondent has copied into the correspondence) then the officer must inform the member whose correspondence is proposed to be shared that he/she intends to share it and refer the member to the relevant legal provision. In the event that agreement to share the correspondence is not provided, the decision upon sharing the correspondence will be referred to the Monitoring Officer for determination. The presumption is that correspondence between a member and an officer will not be shared with another member unless the originator gives express permission for it to be so shared. This applies to both paper-based and electronic correspondence.
- 14.2 Official letters written on behalf of the Combined Authority should normally be in the name of the relevant officer. It may be appropriate in some circumstances (eg representations to a Government Minister) for letters to appear in the name of an Executive member or the chairman of an overview and scrutiny committee.
- 14.3 The Mayor may initiate correspondence in his/her own name.
- 14.4 Letters which create legally enforceable obligations or which give instructions on behalf of the Combined Authority should never be sent in the name of a member.
- 14.5 When writing in an individual capacity as a ward member, a member must make clear that fact.

15. Access to Premises

- 15.1 Officers have the right to enter Combined Authority land and premises to carry out their work. Some officers have the legal power to enter property in the ownership of others.

15.2 Members have a right of access to Combined Authority land and premises to fulfil their duties.

15.3 When making visits as individual members, members should:

- whenever practicable, notify and make advance arrangements with the appropriate manager or officer in charge;
- comply with health and safety, security and other workplace rules;
- not interfere with the services or activities being provided at the time of the visit;
- if outside his/her own ward, notify the ward member(s) beforehand; and
- take special care at schools and establishments serving vulnerable sections of society to avoid giving any impression of improper or inappropriate behaviour.

16. Use of Combined Authority Resources

16.1 The Combined Authority provides all members with services such as typing, printing and photocopying, and goods such as stationery and computer equipment, to assist them in discharging their roles as members of the Combined Authority. These goods and services are paid for from the public purse. They should not be used for private purposes or in connection with party political or campaigning activities.

16.2 Members should ensure they understand and comply with the Combined Authority's own rules about the use of such resources, particularly:

- where facilities are provided in members' homes at the Combined Authority's expense;
- in relation to any locally-agreed arrangements, eg payment for private photocopying; and
- regarding ICT security.

16.3. Members should not put pressure on staff to provide resources or support which officers are not permitted to give. Examples are:

- business which is solely to do with a political party;
- work in connection with a ward or constituency party political meeting;
- electioneering;
- work associated with an event attended by a member in a capacity other than as a member of the Combined Authority;
- private personal correspondence;
- work in connection with another body or organisation where a member's involvement is other than as a member of the Combined Authority; and
- support to a member in his/her capacity as a member of another local authority.

17. Interpretation, Complaints and Allegations of Breaches

- 17.1 Members or officers with questions about the implementation or interpretation of any part of this protocol should seek the guidance of the Monitoring Officer.
- 17.2 A member 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,
 - never make a criticism in public, and
 - take up the concern with the officer privately.
- 17.3 If direct discussion with the officer is inappropriate (eg because of the seriousness of the concern) or fails to resolve the matter, the member should raise the issue with the officer's manager or the relevant senior officer.
- 17.4 A serious breach of this protocol by an officer may lead to an investigation under the Combined Authority's disciplinary procedure.
- 17.5 An officer who believes a member may have acted other than in accordance with this protocol should raise his/her concern with the Monitoring Officer. He/she will consider how the complaint or allegation should be dealt with. At a minor level, this may be no more than informally referring the matter to the leader of the relevant party group. More serious complaints may involve alleged breaches of the members' code of conduct.