

Section 9 – Guide to roles and responsibilities of councillors

5.9.1 **Summary**

- 5.9.2 To serve all constituents within the ward, and the citizens of Herefordshire as a whole by acting as an effective advocate, campaigner and representative.
- 5.9.3 To promote the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of ward constituents and the those who live and work in the county as a whole, and to act in accordance with the high standards of probity in public life, seeking to serve the community without personal gain.
- 5.9.4 To be a corporate parent to looked after children and young people in the county.

5.9.5 **Being effective**

5.9.6 To be effective councillors should:

- fully understand and act in accordance with the councillors' code of conduct and the general principles that govern councillors' conduct.
- have a knowledge and understanding of the council's constitution.
- have a knowledge and understanding of the council's organisation and management structure and who to ask for information and advice.
- attend all meetings of bodies on which they serve together with seminars and training sessions on subjects of relevance to them and their particular areas of involvement and interest.
- accept personal responsibility to take up opportunities for training and development that may be provided and generally to extend and broaden their knowledge of local government affairs through reading, discussion and enquiry.

5.9.7 **Different roles for some councillors**

5.9.8 Some councillors will undertake markedly different roles (e.g. the leader, cabinet member, committee chairperson, scrutiny member etc). These differing roles are outlined in the role profiles at appendix 1 to this section.

5.9.9 **Standards of conduct and probity**

- 5.9.10 All councillors must agree to abide by the councillor code of conduct. Councillors will be given suitable training on taking office and receive ongoing support and briefings on this subject during their time in office.
- 5.9.11 Councillors must also abide by all the requirements of the council's own constitutional arrangements. Any breach of the codes in the constitution may constitute a breach of the councillor code of conduct and councillors should be aware of the procedures for dealing with complaints.
- 5.9.12 Councillors are expected to behave at all times in accordance with the high standards of personal conduct and in a manner that is consistent with the values

of the council to achieve best value for residents and maintain public confidence in Herefordshire Council.

5.9.13 Working as part of the council

5.9.14 At meetings of the council and as a member of one or more of the different council bodies, councillors will be expected to contribute to the formulation and review of policies and strategies and the review and development of services and programmes as appropriate.

5.9.15 Councillors should be constructive and forward looking. An innovative and questioning approach is required.

5.9.16 The work of the council is conducted in a political environment. As a councillor, who may have been elected with the endorsement and backing of a political party, or who may be a member of a political group within the council, members will naturally wish to secure aims and objectives that match their political affiliation. A political approach is legitimate, however, councillors should guard against pursuing political objectives to the point that it impedes the effective management of the council's affairs and undermines people's' confidence in the council's ability to exercise a leadership role in the wider community.

5.9.17 Councillors should have regard to the council's corporate plan and other council policies and strategies, especially when considering the quality and scope of services and weighing the merits of competing interests and demands upon the council budget.

5.9.18 When participating in scrutiny activity councillors should have regard to the council's scrutiny procedure rules and in particular the requirement to take an independent approach, seek consensus on outcomes, be constructive and not judgmental.

5.9.19 Community representative and advocate

5.9.20 Councillors should be aware of the needs, priorities and aspirations of their local community. To do this, they should make yourself known to those who live and work in their ward (your constituents). Councillors may wish to hold regular surgeries, publish newsletters or otherwise make themselves accessible. Liaise/consult extensively and meet with local groups and organisations including parish councils.

5.9.21 Councillors should represent the views of ward constituents and local groups. In doing so councillors should take careful note of the different, often conflicting, interests, and attempt to represent the community as a whole. Councillors should act as an advisor or advocate to local groups with a special interest, or generally provide advice and assistance on matters within their ward and the implications of particular courses of action.

5.9.22 Such a representational role must be undertaken responsibly. As politicians, councillors will naturally want to have regard to the views of voters and avoid, or at least minimise criticism by political opponents. Councillors do, however, have a wider responsibility to protect the council's interests and reputation and help reach the best decision.

- 5.9.23 Councillors should encourage constituents to raise matters of importance or personal concern and take appropriate action, either responding personally or ensuring a response is provided. Where necessary councillors should seek advice on any response made as they may be seen to be acting on behalf of the council as a whole.
- 5.9.24 Councillors should seek to foster a sense of civic pride within the community and encourage all citizens to develop and maintain a personal commitment to civic responsibility, and should avoid statements and actions that serve to undermine confidence in the institutions of local government without justification or good cause.
- 5.9.25 Working with others in the local community**
- 5.9.26 Councillors are expected to work with partners and other organisations with which the council is actively involved.
- 5.9.27 If a councillor is appointed by the council representative on any outside bodies they will have a responsibility to explain the council's policies and position where appropriate and to listen to the views of others and report back to the council.
- 5.9.28 Councillors should play a leading role in explaining to others outside the council how the decision making process operates and the respective roles of members and officers have.
- 5.9.29 Councillors may also be involved in other local organisations, such as those in the voluntary sector, and should recognise that as an elected councillor others may regard statements they make as having council backing. Councillors should always make it clear when they are speaking in an individual capacity, and follow the council's approved communication protocols.
- 5.9.30 Accountability**
- 5.9.31 The roles, duties and responsibilities outlined in this guide relate to the political or member level activities of the council. Accountability for a councillor's performance is through the political and electoral process.

Appendix 1: Member role profiles

All councillors:

Community leader

- Champion your ward
- Deal with casework
- Represent the community within the council and other agencies
- Campaign on local issues
- Keep in touch with constituents
- Able to engage with all groups within your community

Decision maker and influencer

- Actively contribute to the development and scrutiny of the council's policies, strategies, budget, and service delivery
- Attend meetings of full Council and any committees you are appointed to
- Work with partners and outside bodies as a representative of the council
- Act as a corporate parent for children and young people in the care of the council
- Liaise with town and parish councils

Day to day councillor

- Juggle roles and responsibilities
- Understand and interpret information
- Use ICT effectively
- Communicate using all types of media ensuring adherence to corporate guidance for media, social media and internet usage
- Use a communication style that takes into account different needs of different audiences
- Act as a facilitator.
- Take personal responsibility for continuous professional development to develop and build understanding, knowledge and skills to ensure that the role is undertaken as effectively as possible
- Interact with officers, partners, community and fellow councillors in accordance with the council's codes of conduct and behaviour.

Chairperson of the Council

- Uphold and promote the purpose of the constitution
- Decide what the constitution means if there is a dispute, on advice from the monitoring officer
- Chair full Council meetings so that decisions can be taken efficiently and with regard to the rights of councillors and the interests of the community
- Make sure that Council meetings are a place for debating matters of concern to the local community and the place at which members who are not on the Cabinet are able to hold the Cabinet to account
- Promote public involvement in the council's activities and in the democratic process
- Be the conscience of the council
- Attend those civic and ceremonial functions which they or the council consider appropriate
- Approve, as urgent, decisions which will not be subject to call in, when no chair of a scrutiny committee is available.

The chairperson of the council fulfils several roles:

- (a) **Ceremonial role** - The chairperson is the ceremonial head of the whole Council and its countywide representative at civic and social occasions. The chairperson has considerable discretion in exercising the ceremonial aspects of the office.
- (b) **Apolitical role** - It is important that the chairperson maintains an apolitical stance especially when chairing Council meetings. The chairperson must act entirely neutrally allowing different opinions to be fully and fairly presented and debated subject to any relevant procedure rules.
- (c) **Chairperson's announcements** - Any group leader or committee chairperson may approach the chairperson before a Council meeting to suggest items for the chairperson to use in making announcements to Council. The chairperson has complete discretion as to which items they may think appropriate to announce.
- (d) **Rules of debate** - The chairperson's role in conducting meetings is to enforce the council rules at the Council meeting as set out in part 4.
- (e) **Casting vote** - If there are equal numbers of votes for and against, the chairperson will have a second or casting vote. There will be no restriction on how the chairperson chooses to exercise a casting vote.

Committee chairperson:

- Understand the role of the committee
- Understand the role of the chairperson
- Provide leadership and direction
- Provide effective meeting management
- Spend time with relevant officers to agree agendas and minutes
- Ensure all attendees have an opportunity to contribute to the meeting

Group leader

- Provide clear leadership to and be the main spokesperson and representative for members of their political group
- Promote the best interests of the county and ensure that members of their political group act in the same matter
- Lead their group by ensuring that:
 - Members of their group understand and uphold the council's codes of conduct
 - Members actively engage with and liaise in a positive manner with other political groups to further the interests of the council
 - Members actively engage with and liaise with members of the management board on all matters affecting the services provided, or commissioned by, them on behalf of the council
 - There is regular and meaningful communication within their groups and that members are fully briefed on all council matters
 - If in opposition, engage in constructive criticism, to provide credible checks and balances, challenges and realistic alternatives or amendments on proposed decisions of the cabinet where appropriate
 - There is adequate support is provided to group members to carry out and develop in their role (e.g. induction, regular meetings, supervision, identification of training needs and support)
- Make nominations to the membership of, and substitutes at, committees, as and when required
- Work with their group to formulate overall policy and priorities for the group
- Represent the council on local, regional and national bodies as appropriate

Group leader meetings

The purpose of Group Leaders' meeting should be to:

- Provide information and communication to and from political groups
- Facilitate cross-party working to achieve County Plan objectives
- To promote good working relationships between political parties and between Members and Officers of the council for the benefit of all.
- To otherwise liaise with other group leaders as appropriate and as required

Leader of the council

- Provide an overall cohesive, corporate and strategic leadership and direction for the council
- Lead and chair the cabinet and ensure its overall effectiveness
- Lead in developing the council's partnerships with other organisations
- Work with portfolio holders to ensure effective delivery of services within their portfolios against the agreed policies of the council, and to ensure the delivery of the cabinet's responsibilities
- Ensure effective communication and explanation of all cabinet's decisions and recommendations to Council and the public
- Ensure that the cabinet manages the business of the council within the financial limits set by the council

Cabinet member

The cabinet is responsible for all council functions which are not the responsibility of any other part of the council, provided the decisions made are within the council's agreed policy and budget framework.

- Participate effectively as a cabinet member taking joint responsibility for all actions and be collectively accountable.
- Build good relationships with appropriate officers and work with them in developing policy
- Take a proactive approach to the early engagement of scrutiny committees to help in policy development
- Give political and strategic direction to officers working within the portfolio
- Ensure up to date knowledge of related developments and policies at national, regional and local level
- Enhance the council's reputation through taking the national stage where possible and participating in regional and national networks
- Have an overview of performance management, efficiency and effectiveness of the portfolio
- Represent cabinet by attending scrutiny committees if requested in connection with any issues associated with the portfolio and consider scrutiny reports as required.
- Make executive decisions within the portfolio and in accordance with the principles of good decision-making
- Act as a strong, competent and persuasive figure to represent the portfolio and a figurehead in meetings with stakeholders
- Be prepared to take part in learning and development opportunities to ensure that the role is undertaken as effectively as possible
- Represent the council on external bodies and feedback to cabinet any issues of relevance and importance

Overall responsibility

- Ensure that cabinet exercises responsibility for the prudent management of the council's resources
- Have overall responsibility for the political management of the authority and the delivery of agreed council priorities, strategies and policies

Working with partners

- Be the main representative of the council, with others as appropriate, in dealing with the community, business, voluntary sector and other local and national organisations
- Ensure effective liaison with other political groups within the council

Scrutiny member

The scrutiny committees, and any task groups they establish, review and scrutinise decisions made or actions taken by the cabinet. They may also be involved in policy development prior to decisions being taken by the cabinet. The committees may make reports and recommendations to full Council, cabinet or any relevant partner in connection with council or certain other public functions such as health.

- Assist with the development of an effective work programme
- Engage with all stages of the scrutiny process
- Lead the committee in prioritising its work so as to ensure effective scrutiny
- Develop a constructive relationship with cabinet, especially with relevant portfolio holders
- Develop a constructive relationship with members of management board in the areas that the committee scrutinises
- Be responsible for outputs and outcomes of scrutiny
- Receive evidence in an impartial manner
- Analyse information presented to the committee
- Make recommendations based on the committee's deliberation

Committee member

Council has established a number of committees through which functions which are not the responsibility of cabinet are fulfilled. Seats on these committees are allocated to political groups on a proportional basis and appointments to fill those seats are a matter for the relevant group leaders to determine. Members who are appointed to certain committees, such as planning and regulatory committee, are required to undertake training before taking up their seats.

- Maintain up to date knowledge of council and national policies and processes relevant to the work of the committee
- Attend meetings and, if unable to attend, liaise with your group leader or the monitoring officer to arrange a substitute
- Receive evidence in an impartial manner
- Analyse information presented to the committee
- Take decisions in accordance with the principles of good decision-making