

**LANCASHIRE COMBINED FIRE AUTHORITY**  
**PROTOCOL ON COUNCILLOR/OFFICER RELATIONS**

**APPROVED BY THE COMBINED FIRE AUTHORITY ON THE 18<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2005**

General Principles

Councillors who serve on the Combined Fire Authority and professional officers who are its employees or appointed to serve it, have complementary roles in providing local governance which is transparent and accountable. Effective partnership requires mutual respect and a proper understanding of the status and obligations of the individuals concerned.

Councillors and Officers are expected to adhere to the principles relating to conduct and behaviour as laid down in their respective codes.

This protocol applies, where appropriate, to voting co-opted members of the Combined Fire Authority or any of its committees.

Expectations of Officers by Councillors

Councillors are the elected representatives of their communities and are accountable to the electorate for the delivery of policies and services. Officers are required to respect the representational role of Councillors. Councillors should not involve themselves in the day to day management of services but they are entitled to be listened to when raising issues on behalf of the people they represent. In fulfilling their role, the following standards can be expected of officers:

- Officers to provide objective unbiased information and advice on matters of Authority business;
- Officers to act with integrity and respect confidentiality within the limits of their own responsibilities;
- Officers to respect and support the representational and leadership role of councillors and associated workloads and pressures.

Expectations of Councillors by Officers

Officers are accountable to the Authority for the implementation of policies and the delivery of services, and are responsible for the day to day management of services. In fulfilling these roles, officers can expect:

- To be treated with dignity, courtesy and respect by councillors;
- Councillors to provide mutual support and respect appropriate confidentiality;
- Not to be put under any undue or unnecessary pressure by councillors, who will have regard to the respective seniority of officers and demands that can reasonably be made upon relevant grades of officers;

- Councillors reasonably to fulfil commitment to attend and participate in public meetings and events;
- Respect for their own working time and requirements of their posts.

### Officers

Officers employed by the Fire and Rescue Service are accountable to the Chief Fire Officer. Although they should always seek to assist a Councillor, in doing so they must not exceed the powers which they have been authorised to exercise by the Chief Fire Officer.

### Relationships between Officers and Councillors performing particular roles

The Chairman of the Authority and the Vice-Chairman require regular briefings from the Chief Fire Officer, the Clerk and the Treasurer.

Chairs and deputies of committees will be consulted and briefed routinely as part of the process of preparing agenda reports for committees. Any advice given by officers must be considered by chairs and members of committees in reaching a decision.

### Group Briefings

Group spokespersons are entitled to request and receive regular briefings on issues of Authority business.

### Non group councillors

Councillors who do not belong to a party group are entitled to seek and receive information on authority business on a similar basis.

### Officer relationships with party groups

Officers will not normally provide advice or information to a party group. Similarly officers should not normally be asked to brief party group meetings or discussions which involve non-authority representatives.

### Councillors access to documents and information

Councillors can approach the Chief Fire Officer, the Clerk or the Treasurer to provide them with such information, explanation and advice as they may reasonably need in order to assist them in discharging their role as a Councillor. A request might be for general information about a particular aspect of activities or a request for specific information on behalf of the constituent. If councillors wish to visit Authority premises, they should, whenever possible, contact the Chief Fire Officer *or an Area Service Delivery Manager* so that the necessary arrangements can be made.

Councillors have legal rights of access to documents and information held by the Authority. However, these rights are not absolute and in some instances a councillor may have to establish a “need to know” to justify access. Data Protection and Human Rights considerations may also apply in particular circumstances.

When Part II reports are provided to councillors this is on the basis that they are private and confidential and disclosure may be unlawful. Any information contained within a Part II report must not be given to the Press or members of the public unless permission is specifically given by the Chairman or Chair of a Committee following advice from the monitoring officer.

A Councillor of one party group does not have the right to inspect a document that forms part of the internal workings of another party group or any document or part of a document containing advice provided by a political adviser or assistant.

### Confidential Information

The requirements of confidentiality referred to in the Code of Conduct for councillors must be strictly observed. Any material provided on a confidential basis must remain so unless permission to share that information is given by the person providing it. Officers must also at all times consider Data Protection and any other statutory provision relating to confidentiality and confidential material.

### Local Government Act 1968 – Publication of Material

Material must not be published which in whole or in part appears to affect public support for political party and information published is restricted to the provision of information relating to the functions of the authority only. Restrictions also apply to the publication of material within 28 days of any local election or referendum.

### Correspondence

Correspondence between an individual councillor and an officer should not normally be copied by the officer to any other councillor. Where it is felt necessary to copy the correspondence to another councillor, this should be made clear to the councillor who originated the enquiry. If the correspondence includes information relating to another councillor then it will automatically be copied to the other councillor concerned, without reference to the councillor originating the enquiry.

### Support Services to Councillors and Party Groups

The only basis on which the authority can lawfully provide support services such as stationery, typing, printing, photocopying, transport to councillors is to assist them in discharging their role as councillors. Such support services must therefore only be used for authority business. The services should not

be used in connection with party political campaigning activity. Any service used for this type of activity can only be provided with prior approval and is subject to payment of an appropriate charge by the individual councillor or group. Councillors must ensure that they adhere to the relevant codes of conduct or procedures relating to the use of computers. The Code on Recommended Practice on Publicity is attached to this Protocol. They should also follow Health and Safety procedures.

#### Monitoring and Evaluation of the Protocol

The operation of this protocol will be monitored by the Authority's Standards Committee.

#### Advice on the Operation of the Protocol

The protocol is intended to act as a guide for both councillors and officers. The Clerk to the Authority will offer advice on the implementation and operation of the protocol.

LS/KS  
April 2005

## **CODE OF RECOMMENDED PRACTICE**

### **Subject matter**

1. Local authorities have a variety of statutory powers which enable them to produce publicity and circulate it widely, or to assist others to do so. Those commonly used include the powers in sections 111, 142, 144 and 145 of the Local Government Act 1972, sections 69, 88 and 90 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 and sections 15 and 16 of the Local Government and Planning (Scotland) Act 1982; but there are several others.
2. Some of these powers relate directly to the publishing authority's functions. Others give a more general discretion to publicise matters which go beyond an authority's primary responsibilities. For example, section 142(1A) of the 1972 Act and 88(1) of the 1973 Act authorise local authorities to arrange for the publication within their area of information as to the services available in the area provided by them or by other local authorities; and Section 54 of the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984 empowers local authorities to arrange for the publication within their area of information on questions relating to health or disease.
3. This discretion provides an important degree of flexibility, but also heightens the need for a responsible approach to expenditure decisions.
4. In considering the subject areas in which publicity is to be issued, the following matters will be important:
  - (i) the publicity should be relevant to the functions of the authority.
  - (ii) it should not duplicate unnecessarily publicity produced by central government, another local authority or another public authority.

### **Costs**

5. Local authorities are accountable to the public for the efficiency and effectiveness of their expenditure, in the first instance through the audit arrangements.
6. For publicity, as for all other expenditure, the aim should therefore be to achieve the greatest possible cost-effectiveness.
7. To achieve this, there may well be cases where the benefit of higher expenditure to gain better presentation or improve other aspects of publicity will justify the extra cost.
8. Local authorities should therefore always have in mind the extent to which expert advice is needed for publicity.
9. In some cases publicity may justify its cost by virtue of savings which it achieves. More commonly it will be necessary to take a view of the importance of the unquantifiable benefits as compared with other uses to which the resources could be put.

10. In deciding whether the nature and scale of proposed publicity, and consequently its cost, are justified, the following matters will be relevant:
  - (i) whether the publicity is statutorily required or is discretionary.
  - (ii) where it is statutorily required, the purpose to be served by the publicity.
  - (iii) whether the expenditure envisaged is in keeping with the purpose and expected effect of the publicity.

### **Content and Style**

11. Local authorities produce a variety of publicity material. It ranges from factual information about the services provided by the authority, designed to inform clients or attract new ones, to material necessary to the administration of the authority, such as staff recruitment advertising. There will also be publicity to explain or justify the council's policies either in general, as in the annual report, or on specific topics, for example as background to consultation on the line chosen for a new road.
12. Any publicity describing the council's policies and aims should be as objective as possible, concentrating on facts or explanation or both.
13. Where publicity is used to comment on, or respond to, the policies and proposals of central government, other local authorities or other public authorities, the comment or response should be objective, balanced, informative, and accurate. It should aim to set out the reasons for the council's views, and should not be a prejudiced, unreasoning or political attack on the policies or proposals in question or on those putting them forward. Slogans alone will not be an adequate means of justifying or explaining the authority's views or their policy decisions.
14. Publicity relating to the provision of a service should concentrate on providing factual information about the service.
15. In some cases promotional publicity may be appropriate - for example about the local authority's sports and leisure facilities or about tourist attractions.
16. Publicity touching on issues that are controversial, or on which there are arguments for and against the views or policies of the council, is unavoidable, particularly given the importance of wide consultation whenever material issues arise. Such publicity should be handled with particular care. Issues must be presented clearly, fairly and as simply as possible, although councils should not over-simplify facts, issues or arguments. Again, it is unlikely that slogans alone will achieve the necessary degree of balance, or capture the complexities of opposing political arguments.
17. Publicity should not attack, nor appear to undermine, generally accepted moral standards.
18. Publicity campaigns by local authorities are appropriate in some circumstances: for example, as part of consultation processes where local views are being sought, or to promote the effective and efficient use of local services and facilities, or to attract tourists or investment. Publicity campaigns may also be an appropriate

means of influencing public behaviour or attitudes on such matters as health, safety, crime prevention or equal opportunities.

19. Legitimate concern is, however, caused by the use of public resources for some forms of campaigns, which are designed to have a persuasive effect. Publicity campaigns can provide an appropriate means of ensuring that the local community is properly informed about a matter relating to a function of the local authority and about the authority's policies in relation to that function and the reasons for them. But local authorities, like other public authorities, should not use public funds to mount publicity campaigns whose primary purpose is to persuade the public to hold a particular view on a question of policy.

### **Dissemination**

20. The main purposes of local authority publicity are to increase public awareness of the services provided by the authority and the functions it performs; to allow local people to have a real and informed say about issues that affect them; to explain to electors and ratepayers the reasons for particular policies and priorities; and in general to improve local accountability.
21. Information and publicity produced by the council should be made available to all those who want or need it. Local authorities should not discriminate in favour of, or against, persons or groups in the compilation and distribution of material for reasons not connected with the efficiency and effectiveness of issuing the publicity.
22. Where material is distributed on matters closely affecting vulnerable sections of the community - for example, the elderly - particular care should be taken to ensure that it is unambiguous, readily intelligible, and unlikely to cause needless concern to those reading, seeing or listening to it.
23. Local authority newspapers, leaflets, other publicity distributed unsolicited from house to house and information on websites are able to reach far wider audiences than publicity available on application to the council. Councils should give particular consideration to the use of electronic and other new media communication systems. However, councils should ensure that they do not rely solely on such mechanisms and that they do not exclude those without access or easy access to such systems.
24. Such publicity should be targeted as appropriate for its purposes, taking particular care with material touching on politically controversial issues.
25. there is no paragraph 25
26. Local authority newspapers or information bulletins are a special case. They are often a cost-effective means of disseminating information, or facilitating consultation and can provide a means for local people to participate in debate on decisions the council is to take. The advantage of using websites and other information technology for consultations should also be considered. Inevitably such publications will touch on controversial issues and where they do they should

treat such issues in an objective and informative way, bearing in mind the principles set out in paragraphs 11-19 of the Code.

27. Where it is important for information to reach a particular target audience, consideration should be given to using the communications networks of other bodies, for example those of voluntary organisations, and making use of electronic communication systems.

### **Advertising**

28. Advertising, especially on billboards or on television and radio, is a highly intrusive medium. It can also be expensive. It may however provide a cost-effective, efficient means of conveying public information to the widest possible audience. Advertising on local radio networks has, for example, been used as a relatively inexpensive means of telling potential clients about local authority services. Advertising can also be the most cost-effective means of publicising a local authority's activities on promoting the social, economic and environmental well-being of the area.
29. The primary criterion for decisions on whether to use advertising should be cost-effectiveness.
30. Advertisements are not normally likely to be appropriate as a means of explaining policy or commenting on proposals, since an advertisement by its nature summarises information, compresses issues and arguments, and markets views and opinions.
31. Advertising in media which cover an area significantly wider than that of the authority is not likely to be an appropriate means of conveying information about a local authority's policies as opposed to attracting people to the authority's area or to use its facilities.
32. The attribution of advertising material leaflets and other forms of publicity that reach the public unsolicited should be clearly set out.
33. It is not acceptable, in terms of public accountability, to use the purchase of advertising space as a disguised means of subsidy to a voluntary, industrial or commercial organisation. Such support should be given openly through the normal grant arrangements. However, the conditions attached to a grant may require the provision of publicity, including publicity for the work of the authority.
34. Any decision to take advertising space in a publication produced by a voluntary, industrial or commercial organisation should be made only on the grounds that it provides an effective and efficient means of securing the desired publicity.
35. Local authorities should never use advertising as a means of giving financial support to any publication associated with a political party

## **Recruitment Advertising**

36. Local authorities have respected in their staff employment policies the tradition of a politically impartial public service. Their recruitment publicity should reflect this tradition, and the fact that local authority staff are expected to serve the authority as a whole, whatever its composition from time to time.
37. The content of recruitment publicity and the media chosen for advertising job vacancies should be in keeping with the objective of maintaining the politically independent status of local authority staff.
38. Advertisements for staff should not be placed in party political publications.

## **Individual Councillors**

39. Publicity about individual councillors may include the contact details, the positions they hold in the Council (for example, member of the Executive or Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee), and their responsibilities. Publicity may also include information about individual councillors' proposals, decisions and recommendations only where this is relevant to their position and responsibilities within the Council. All such publicity should be objective and explanatory, and whilst it may acknowledge the part played by individual councillors as holders of particular positions in the Council, personalisation of issues or personal image making should be avoided.
40. Publicity should not be, or liable to misrepresentation as being, party political. Whilst it may be appropriate to describe policies put forward by an individual councillor which are relevant to her/his position and responsibilities within the Council, and to put forward her/his justification in defence of them, this should not be done in party political terms, using political slogans, expressly advocating policies of those of a particular political party or directly attacking policies and opinions of other parties, groups or individuals.

## **Elections, referendums and petitions**

41. The period between the notice of an election and the election itself should preclude proactive publicity in all its forms of candidates and other politicians involved directly in the election. Publicity should not deal with controversial issues or report views, proposals or recommendations in such a way that identifies them with individual members or groups of members. However, it is acceptable for the authority to respond in appropriate circumstances to events and legitimate service enquiries provided that their answers are factual and not party political. Members holding key political or civic positions should be able to comment in an emergency or where there is a genuine need for a member level response to an important event outside the authority's control. Proactive events arranged in this period should not involve members likely to be standing for election.

42. The Local Authorities (Referendums) (Petitions and Directions) (England) Regulations 2000 (which apply under the Local Government Act 2000 to county councils, district councils and London borough councils) prohibit an authority from incurring any expenditure to
- Publish material which appears designed to influence local people in deciding whether or not to sign a petition requesting a referendum on proposals for an elected mayor;
  - Assist anyone else in publishing such material; or
  - Influence or assist others to influence local people in deciding whether or not to sign a petition.

Publicity in these circumstances should, therefore, be restricted to the publication of factual details which are presented fairly about the petition proposition and to explaining the council's existing arrangements. Local authorities should not mount publicity campaigns whose primary purpose is to persuade the public to hold a particular view in relation to petitions generally or on a specific proposal.

43. County councils, district councils and London borough councils should ensure that any publicity about a referendum under Part II of the Local Government Act 2000 (the 2000 Act) either prior to or during the referendum period is factually accurate and objective. The referendum period means the period beginning with the date on which proposals under Part II of the 2000 Act are sent to the Secretary of State and ending with the date of the referendum. The publicity should not be capable of being perceived as seeking to influence public support for, or opposition to, the referendum proposals and should not associate support for, or opposition to, the proposals with any individual or group. Local authorities must conform with any specific restrictions on publicity activities which are required by Regulations under section 45 of the 2000 Act.

#### **Assistance to others for publicity**

44. The principles set out above apply to decisions on publicity issued by local authorities. They should also be taken into account by local authorities in decisions on assistance to others to issue publicity. In all such decisions local authorities should, to the extent appropriate:
- (a) incorporate the relevant principles of the Code in published guidance for applicants for grants;
  - (b) make the observance of that guidance a condition of the grant or other assistance;
  - (c) undertake monitoring to ensure that the guidance is observed.
45. It is appropriate for local authorities to help charities and voluntary organisations by arranging for pamphlets or other material produced and paid for by the organisation to be available for collection by the public in public libraries and other suitable locations. Such material should not offend against any legal provision, (authorities may be able to draw on their powers of well-being in section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000) but (subject to this) any such facility should be made available on a fair and equal basis.