

Somerset West and Taunton Council

Roles and Responsibilities of Councillors

Background

The new Council will face many challenges and will be ambitious in its objectives. Particular issues that it will want to address include:

- The opportunities for 'commercialisation' by which services are more effectively commissioned and delivered
- Further and extensive use of modern technology to access and deliver services
- To maximise opportunities for regeneration of parts of the new Authority and thereby maximising opportunities for businesses and the creation of new jobs.
- Dealing with financial pressures in a way that seeks to 'deliver more with less'
- Creating opportunities for 'locality-based' decision-making
- To help address 'climate change' by aiming to make Somerset West and Taunton carbon neutral by 2030

In order for the Council to fully deliver its new ambitions, it is important that all Members within the Council are able to carry out their roles in a way that delivers effective change in the shortest possible time. Below is a summary of the key points that will set the framework for what will be expected of Councillors in the new Council.

Roles and Responsibilities of All Councillors

Over-riding responsibility to demonstrate community leadership through representing their community at individual, ward and council level objectively taking into account all views and information before reaching their own view of how to act for the greater good.

In particular, to:

- Represent the community within the Council and other agencies
- Deal with individual casework fairly and without prejudice
- To help resolve issues raised by constituents/community groups, working with Officers when necessary
- Campaign on some local issues
- Keep in touch with constituents
- Engage with groups within the community
- Make well-informed decisions at Council meetings
- To be collectively responsible for Council Policy
- Work with partners and outside bodies as a representative of the Council
- Liaise with local parish councils/local organisations
- Proactively engage in the Scrutiny process
- Proactively engage with individual executive portfolio areas
- To undertake appropriate training
- To abide by the Code of Conduct

Role and Responsibilities of the Scrutiny Member

- The Scrutiny Committee Member reviews and scrutinises decisions made or actions taken by the Executive. They may also be involved in policy development prior to decisions being taken by the Executive. The Committees may make reports and recommendations to full Council and the Executive and any relevant partner in connection with Council functions.
- Assist with the development of an effective work programme
- Engage with all stages of the scrutiny process
- Collectively develop a constructive relationship with the Executive, especially with relevant portfolio holders
- Collectively develop a constructive relationship with Corporate Leadership Team in the areas that the Committee scrutinises
- Be collectively 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 deliberations

Role and Responsibilities of the Chairs of the Main Committees including Scrutiny Committees, Audit and Governance Committee, Standards Committee, Licensing Committee and Planning Committee

- Lead the work of the Committee and ensure it carries out its business effectively and efficiently within its terms of reference
- Chair the meetings impartially and in such a way as to facilitate proper discussion
- Ensure that contributions by the public are facilitated and controlled in accordance with agreed procedure
- Liaise with Officers on the contents of the agenda
- Act as spokesperson for the Committee and liaise as appropriate with external entities
- Encourage high standards of conduct
- Work with Officers to ensure Committee Members develop necessary skills
- Monitor the outcome of the Committee's decisions and follow up on action points

Roles and Responsibilities of the Chair of the Council

- Represent the whole community served by the Council
- Preside over meetings of the full Council
- Act as host on behalf of the Council and/or citizens of the area at functions arranged by the Council
- Attend important functions as a representative of the Council
- Perform official openings or presentations
- Promote business, commercial and community activities
- Uphold the office of the Chair
- Notwithstanding representing the Ward for which they were elected as a Ward member bearing in mind they have a view not just as the Chairman but as an individual councillor.

Role and Responsibilities of an Executive Member

- The Executive Member is responsible for delivery of services within the ambit of the portfolio
- Participate effectively as an Executive Member taking joint responsibility for all actions and be collectively accountable
- Build good relationships with appropriate officers and work with them in developing policy
- To take a proactive approach to the early engagement of scrutiny Committees to help in policy development
- Give political 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 the Executive 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
- 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 the Executive any issues of relevance and importance.
- Undertake to consider the views of Council members with due weight as well as that of the "executive" for the well-being and benefit of the Council Wards.

Role and Responsibilities of the Deputy Leader

- Assist and work with the Leader of the Council in delivering their responsibilities to the Council
- Deputise for the Leader of the Council in their absence from Executive meetings

- Carry out the requirements of their role so far as legally possible in the absence of the Leader of the Council
- Carry out such other duties and undertake portfolio responsibility as delegated by the Leader of the Council
- Undertake to consider the views of Council members with due weight as well as that of the “executive” for the well- being and benefit of the Council Wards.

Role and Responsibilities of the Leader

A) Leadership

- Provide an overall cohesive, corporate and strategic leadership and direction for the Council
- Lead and chair the Executive 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 Executive’s responsibilities
- Ensure effective communication and explanation of all Executive’s decisions and recommendations to Council and the public
- Ensure that the Executive manages the business of the Council within the financial limits set by the Council
- Ensure members of the Executive and all councillors abide by Somerset West and Taunton’s code of conduct
- Undertake to consider the views of Council members with due weight as well as that of the “executive” for the well- being and benefit of the Council Wards.
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B) Overall responsibility

- Ensure that Executive exercises responsibility for the prudent management of the Council’s budget
- Have overall responsibility for the political management of the authority and the delivery of agreed Council priorities, strategies and policies

C) 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, regional and national organisations
- Ensure effective liaison with other political groups within the Council
- Undertake to consider the views of Council members with due weight as well as that of the “executive” for the well- being of the Council Wards.

Shadow Portfolio Holder

Purpose of Role:

To assist the Leader of the majority opposition group by providing informed comment and advice in respect of their particular shadow portfolio and with regard to the work being undertaken by the current Portfolio Holder.

Duties and responsibilities (in addition to those of a Ward Councillor):

- a) To provide constructive challenge to the policies of the administration.
- b) To assist in shaping the policy of the opposition group with regard to its shadow portfolio.
- c) To liaise and work with other shadow portfolio holders on cross-cutting areas of responsibility.
- d) To receive briefings at regular intervals from senior officers of the Council as required. These briefings may be held together with the Executive Members if this can be agreed, or separately if it cannot. Service officers will alert Shadow Executive Members to issues of importance affecting their shadow portfolio.
- e) To participate effectively as a member of the Shadow Executive by becoming thoroughly conversant with the area of expertise relevant to their specific portfolio