

Somerset West and Taunton Council

Member Champions Protocol

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Member champions are Members who act as an advocate or spokesperson for a specific area of the Council's business. The main responsibility of each Member Champion is to encourage communication and positive action over the issue they represent.

2.0 Appointment of Member Champions

- 2.1 The appointment of Member Champions will be at the discretion of the Leader of the Council, following discussion with all Group Leaders, and then be subject to ratification by a delegated Portfolio Holder decision.
- 2.2 Each political group will be made aware of proposals to appoint Member Champions and given the opportunity to submit nominations. The proposed list of Member Champions is attached as Annex 1 to this Protocol.
- 2.3 Member Champions will not be Members of the Council's Executive.
- 2.4 There is no legal requirement to apply the political balance rules to the appointment so they will be made based on skills, knowledge and suitability for the role, and relevant national and local guidance.
- 2.5 Any Member Champion may resign from office by giving written notice to their Group Leader, the Leader of the Council and the Monitoring Officer.

3.0 Role of Member Champions

- 3.1 All Member Champions will have a role description setting out of their respective roles. These Roles will be developed by the relevant Director/Assistant Director in consultation with the Leader of the Council and Group Leaders and the champion concerned.
- 3.2 A generic role description is set out in Annex 2 to this protocol.
- 3.3 By appointing a member as a Champion, the Council is empowering that Member to act in that capacity. It follows, therefore, that the Council should put in place such arrangements as it thinks appropriate to support the Champion in that capacity.

4.0 The Parameters of the Member Champion Role

- 4.1 The above role is set in the context of the specific interest or theme. The following parameters apply to the role:
- All Member Champions must act reasonably in the role.

- All Member Champions must recognise and work effectively within the political management and working arrangements agreed by the Council.

4.2 A Member Champion:

- Is effectively given authority by the Council to take all reasonable actions judged by the Member as being necessary to perform the role of Champion
- Cannot commit the Council in any way that is contrary to established policy, budget and practice, but may confirm a Council position, as stated in published policy.
- Cannot make decisions that bind the Council.
- Is a recognised media contact on matters relating to the interest being championed, but is expected to follow the Council's Media Protocol and keep the Communications Team plus relevant Portfolio Holder and/or Leader informed of such contact.
- Is entitled to have access to information held by the Council relating to the interest being championed
- Access to a support from senior officers
- The Champion's programme of activities should reflect the Council's overall priorities as set out in the Corporate Strategy and Directorate Plans, but the Champion may include such aspects as seem to him/her to be relevant for attention, as long as overall priorities are not directly prejudiced by those aspects.

5.0 Support for Member Champions in their role

5.1 Member Champions play an important role in promoting their area of interest on behalf of the Council. In recognition of the importance of the respective roles of Member Champions, officer support will be provided at a senior level.

5.2 Each Member Champion will be advised by an appropriate Assistant Director, who will meet with the relevant Member Champion on a regular basis to discuss action plans, current activities, national developments or any other matters relating to the interest being championed.

5.3 The relevant Assistance Director will give reasonable support to the Member Champion, including the provision of Council information, government communications and national publications within their remit.

5.4 Taking all the above into account, the Council will:

- Take steps to promote understanding within the Council of the role of a Member Champion and describe how it relates to other member level functions.
- Promote similar understanding among its working partners, external bodies and the local community.
- Arrange for Member Champions to be supported by the Democratic Services Team. This support will be for the functionality of the role – signposting and assistance with administration and research, where appropriate - not the professional input.

- Ensure that the professional lead officer(s) relating to each championed interest are aware of the Champion roles that affect them and the rights of Champions to access/discuss information about the service.
- Require each Member Champion to report annually to the Council about their programme of activity and how they have contributed to the achievement of the Council's overall priorities
- Member Champions are able to report any issues arising to the Scrutiny Committee, as and when appropriate and following discussion with the relevant Portfolio Holder and Scrutiny Chairman.
- Put in place appropriate training and development opportunities for Member Champions.
- Keep under review the relevance of the role of Member Champions in the context of the Council's Scheme of Member Allowances and to make a request to the Independent Remuneration Panel to consider this at such time in the future, should it be felt to be appropriate.

6.0 Internal Working Relationships

6.1 The Member Champion will:

- Liaise regularly with Portfolio Holders whose portfolios are relevant to the role (for some generic interests this will be all or many of them).
- Monitor the notice of key decisions and seek information from the relevant officers and Portfolio Holders about forthcoming business and exert influence on behalf of the interest.
- Monitor forward plans for all Committees and seek information and offer views on relevant review subjects and exert influence on behalf of the interest.
- Take advice from the appointed lead functional officer and the relevant lead professional officer(s).
- Seek to place appropriate items on relevant Council meeting agendas, seeking guidance from the Governance Team where appropriate.
- Keep other councillors up to date with activities within the interest.
- Generally promote the interest.

6.2 Portfolio Holders will:

- Acknowledge the right of Member Champions to be consulted on matters relating to their interest.
- Take full account of any views offered by Member Champions prior to any decision (irrespective of whether it is a delegated Portfolio Holder decision or Executive decision) being taken on matters within their area of interest (and demonstrate this in the record of the decision)
- Ensure there is appropriate engagement or consultation with Champions in the formulation of policy and other Executive matters and that any views are contained in the information provided to decision-makers.
- Consider inviting the relevant Champion to represent the Council at any relevant conference/seminar on the subject matter of the interest on the basis that the Champion will report back to the Cabinet member.

6.3 Scrutiny Committee members will:

- Acknowledge the right of Champions to be consulted and to participate in discussion on matters relating to their interest.
- Ensure there is appropriate engagement or consultation with Champions in the formulation of policy and in service review activity.
- Ensure Champions are specifically invited to be contributors to any reviews that have a direct bearing on the interest (recognising the right of a Champion to attend as an observer at any such session).
- Ensure that opportunity is provided for Member Champions to contribute to, or comment on, the work programme of the Scrutiny Committee

6.4 Officers will:

- Ensure there is appropriate engagement or consultation with relevant Member Champion(s) where the issue clearly relates to the interest.
- Co-operate fully with Member Champions in enabling them to perform their functions and to discuss directly with Member Champions and Portfolio Holder(s) where proposed actions might prejudice Council or other priorities.

7.0 External Working Arrangements

7.1 The Member Champion:

- Will need to acknowledge that there is no statutory authority for the Member Champion role.
- Will need to recognise that the Council does have some legal powers with regard to the scrutiny of external bodies and other working relationships with outside bodies arising from legal provisions.
- Will monitor and work closely with partner bodies in the field of the interest being championed.
- May be the Council's representative on certain relevant external bodies.
- Will identify the most relevant community bodies whose work is associated with the interest and foster good working relationships with those groups.
- Will take steps to promote within the wider community the specific issues on which the Member Champion is to focus and to provide opportunities for local engagement – involving the relevant Assistant Director and Portfolio Holder, as appropriate.

List of Member Champion Roles

It is proposed that Member Champions be appointed to the following roles:

- Heritage
- Tonedale
- Trees
- Public Transport
- Wellington Station
- Equalities
- Firepool
- IT
- Mental Health
- Safeguarding
- Health & Safety
- Member Training and Development
- Armed Forces – currently have this as an area with two Member Champions
- Town centres – currently have a Taunton Town Centre Ambassador but should this be rolled out to all towns in the District
- Rural Affairs
- Disability
- Sports and Recreation
- Nuclear
- Unpaid Carers

Member Champion Role Description

The following examples may be appropriate to include in a Member Champion role description:

- (a) To champion the adopted policy of this Council for the relevant theme;
- (b) To promote their area of interest both within and outside the Council;
- (c) To contribute to the review and development of policies pertaining to the area of interest;
- (d) To act as a critical friend to challenge and question the Council, the Leader and Portfolio Holders on issues affecting their area or responsibility;
- (e) To attend meetings of the Council, its Committees and the Executive and speak on issues (when permitted by the Chair of the meeting) relevant to their area;
- (f) To act as a catalyst for change and improvement in service delivery;
- (g) To monitor the Executive Forward Plans and seek information from the Leader, Portfolio Holders and relevant officers about forthcoming business and exert influence on behalf of the interest;
- (h) To monitor the work programme, work plans and activity of the Scrutiny Committee and seek information, and offer views on relevant review subjects and exert influence on behalf of the interest;
- (i) To seek to place appropriate items on Member Working Group agendas (where an appropriate topic/project is being considered);
- (j) To keep other councillors up-to-date with activities relevant to the area of interest;
- (k) To network with Member Champions from other local authorities with the same interest to keep up-to-date with current developments;
- (l) To provide positive support, and on occasions, constructive challenge to Members and officers in driving forward the Council's agenda on relevant issues; and
- (m) To act as the Council's representative on relevant external bodies where Council representation is required or sought.