



Leicester
City Council

WARDS AFFECTED
All Wards

FORWARD TIMETABLE OF CONSULTATION AND MEETINGS:
Standards Committee

12 September 2001

POLITICAL CONVENTIONS
TRAINING OF MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

**Report of the Town Clerk and Director
of Corporate Resources**

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. To seek the Committee's views on the nature and types of training, briefing and awareness-raising which will be required, both for Member and officers, in relation to the Political Conventions.

2. Report

- 2.1. The City Council has had Political Conventions in place since 1998. These are currently being updated to reflect the new national framework and the Cabinet and Scrutiny system now operational with in the City Council. They are the subject of a separate report to this meeting of the Standards Committee.
- 2.2. To be wholly effective in their operation, it is, of course, fundamental that the Conventions themselves are understood by the various parties with whom they impact, i.e. Members, Co-opted Members and officers and, of course, those with particular requirements.

Issues which will need to be addressed within the training package are likely to include:

- How is the training best delivered, e.g. by way of courses or workshops.
- Should the training be mandatory or optional
- Should the training be provided departmentally – to address their specific perspectives, or cross-service – thereby developing a corporate appreciation
- How should the training be incorporated into induction training and also integrated into the corporate management development programme.
- How frequently should refresher training take place.

- How is the effectiveness of the training determined
- How is the delegate's understanding tested
- How far should combined sessions for both Members and officers be provided (These proved to be extremely beneficial when the Conventions were originally launched.)
- To what extent do Members of the Standards Committee wish to be involved in the promotion or delivery of this training.

2.3. To give an idea of the range of practical issues and specific circumstances which need to be addressed, a set of scenarios used very successfully in previously held Workshops on Political Conventions and updated for the Cabinet/Scrutiny system are attached at Appendix A.

3. Financial and legal Implications

3.1. Within its role of promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct within the City Council, effective training on Political Conventions and associated issues is a central task.

Within this report there are no financial implications, although the means of providing training, once determined, may, of course, have cost implications. These will be reported, as necessary.

4. Recommendations

4.1. That the Members of the Standards Committee put forward their views on the overall shape of training which should be provided, which can then be worked up into a detailed training package for delivery to both Members and officers.

4. Report Author/Officer to contact:

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POLITICAL CONVENTIONS

SCENARIOS

1. A close personal relationship is developing between the Vice-Chair of Planning and a senior Planning Officer.
 - When does it become unacceptable?
 - Who should do something about it?
 - What should be done about it?

2. A Councillor on the Housing Scrutiny Committee goes on family holidays with a major private landlord and his family.
 - Should this be declared?
 - Does it prevent the Councillor from participating in business affecting the landlord's properties only, or all private rented accommodation?
 - Should the Councillor be on the Committee?
 - Would the Councillor be able to be the Cabinet Lead for Housing?

3. A Councillor insists that the Cabinet Lead and the Director move a really needy constituent's disabled adaptation higher up on the waiting list.
 - What can the Cabinet Lead do about it?
 - What can the Director do about it?

4. A Councillor wants to represent an employee who has brought a harassment and discrimination complaint against a Council manager. The Councillor's intention is to demonstrate that the Department is institutionally racist, and asks for all related files and documents.
 - What are the employee's and the Councillor's rights?
 - What is the best practice for addressing the individual case and the general issue of institutional racism?
 - How should the manager respond?

5. Some majority Group Councillors, opposed to the staffing effects of a restructuring, are putting pressure on a Director to abandon the proposal which would produce savings. After the agenda has gone out, the Cabinet Lead wants to withdraw the report to give the Group more time for discussion.
- How far should the Director's report reflect or recommend the majority Group's views?
 - Can the report be withdrawn and whose decision is that?
 - Who is responsible for the financial effects of abandoning or delaying the proposals?
6. During budget preparation, a Councillor, who works for a voluntary organisation, asks for information about the funding of other voluntary organisations.
- What could this Councillor's "need to know" be?
 - What types of information should officers provide and what is inappropriate?
 - What can the Councillor do if unhappy with a refusal?
 - What can the officers do if unhappy about supplying information?
7. A panel of Councillors is about to hear an appeal. An opposition Councillor asks an officer for advice about how the Chair's social connections with the appellant affect the appeal. The Councillor insists that the request and the advice is kept totally confidential.
- Is the Councillor entitled to confidentiality?
 - How should the officer respond?
8. A Ward Councillor asks an officer to take action to help a constituent. The officer thinks there may be a relationship between the Councillor and the constituent but is unsure of the extent.
- How should a Councillor pursue a Ward issue of this kind?
 - How should the officer respond?
9. A Ward Councillor is an ordinary member of a local organisation which has been investigated by Internal Audit. She asks for a full briefing and for a copy of the investigator's report and evidence.

- What limitations are there on the Councillor's need to know?
 - What difference does membership of the voluntary organisation make?
 - What is the best way of meeting any "*need to know*"?
10. A party Group officer asks a Director for a report to the Group and to attend a meeting to advise the Group on a new policy development. The policy is likely to be controversial and the Director is asked to avoid other Groups knowing until after the Group meeting.
- What is the status of Group meetings in the Council's decision-making?
 - What procedure should the Director follow before and at the Group meeting?
 - What, if anything, should the other Groups be told?
11. A minority Group Scrutiny Spokesperson asks a Director for a confidential briefing on the budget reduction options available to the Department, and for some awkward questions to put to the Cabinet Lead during the budget debate.
- To what information is the Spokesperson entitled?
 - How far should the request and briefing be confidential?
 - Should the awkward questions be supplied?
12. A major new policy of the majority Group will have most impact in an opposition Ward.
- What is the extent of the Ward Councillor's "*need to know*"?
 - At what stage does the "*need to know*" arise?
 - What are the Director's responsibilities to inform the Ward Councillor and can the majority Group override them?
13. A Scrutiny Chair would like outside consultants and service users to advise the Committee, with a view to the Committee recommending a new policy to the Cabinet.
- Who decides whether consultants can be commissioned to advise the Scrutiny Committee? What should happen if the consultants' fee would be substantial?
 - Who decides on whom to invite to a Committee meeting? How should non-members of the Committee be involved in the meeting?

- What should happen if the Cabinet has already commissioned work and received advice on the same topic?
14. The Cabinet has asked a Scrutiny Committee for views on proposals before making a final decision. The two minority Scrutiny Spokespersons want a further, more detailed report, and to question the Director at a public meeting before the Committee formulates its view.
- Is the Scrutiny Committee entitled to more detailed advice than the Cabinet has received or made available? If so, who decides on that?
 - Can the Scrutiny Committee delay its response to Cabinet and so delay the Cabinet's final decision?
 - Should the Committee question the Director on the proposals?
15. A Director has briefed a Cabinet Lead on a highly political question on the Council agenda. The Councillor who put down the question asks the Director for the same briefing and for the answers to likely supplementaries.
- How should a Director brief a Cabinet Lead on politically sensitive questions?
 - How should the Director respond to the questioner's request?
16. A majority Group Councillor asks a Director for confidential help in developing a policy which is contrary to the policy supported by the Cabinet Lead.
- What are the Councillor's rights to information, advice and research?
 - Is confidentiality an individual Councillor's right or a right of the Group?
 - What are the Cabinet Lead's entitlements?
 - What are the Directors' responsibilities?
17. An employee approaches a Councillor in surgery to oppose a possible budget reduction which affects the constituent as both employee and local service user. The Councillor is sympathetic to the constituent.
- Has the employee used the proper channels and, if not, what are they?
 - How should the Councillor pursue the matter?

18. Whilst briefing his Cabinet Lead, a Director learns that an officer from another Department has already provided contrary advice.
- Should this situation have been avoided and, if so, how?
 - What should happen to enable the Chair and the Committee to resolve the conflicting advice?
19. A Councillor attends advice sessions provided by an outside body and there agrees to support a constituent in complaining to a Council Department about inadequate service. The Councillor asks the Director for the case file.
- In what capacity is the Councillor acting and what is the extent of the “*need to know*”?
 - If the file is confidential, is it the Council’s confidentiality or that of the individual concerned? Can the Councillor see it?
20. A Scrutiny Chair would like to cancel a Committee meeting where there is very little business but one politically contentious item.
- Whose decision is this?
 - What are the rights of other Councillors?
 - What should the Director do if a decision by the Cabinet is becoming urgent?
21. The local radio station asks an officer to comment on a controversial issue relating to Government policy, on which he has published a report to a Cabinet meeting the next day. There has already been media coverage. The Cabinet Lead is unavailable.
- Should the officer make a media comment prior to a decision?
 - If so, in what circumstances and with what content?
 - How should officer reports deal with Government policies on which party Groups may have different views?
22. The run up to a snap General Election coincides with the publication of a Council strategy document containing photographs of Cabinet Leads and local MPs. A launch event has been arranged to be attended by a Government Minister.
- What effect does the election have on the publication and the launch event?