

## **Part 5.6 - Protocol for Communications with Elected Members**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This Protocol explains how communication will take place with Members of the Council. It encompasses communication between Members themselves and between Members and officers of the Council.

It is intended to state clearly, to Members and officers:

- What information will be provided?
- What support will be provided?
- How it will be provided?
- Who is responsible for providing information and support?

The Protocol identifies three key areas:

- **Information provision**
- **Consultation**
- **Support Services**

### **INFORMATION PROVISION**

Members are looking for information within the following broad categories:

- **Executive Decisions**
- **Ward Information**
- **Contact Information**
- **Council News**

### **EXECUTIVE DECISIONS**

Members want access to information about the decisions being made by the Executive Board and Executive Board Members.

Under the new political arrangements Executive Board Members make decisions in two forums – 1) Executive Board Meetings, and 2) Executive Board Member Decision-making meetings.

The Council will:

- 1) Publish Executive Board Agendas at least three working days in advance of meetings
  - Copies of Agendas are published on the Council Intranet and Internet
  - Emails are sent to all Members, informing them that the Agendas are available to view on the Intranet
  - Hard copies are available in all Members Rooms
  - Executive Board meetings are held in public and Members can attend as observers.

Members are entitled to have access to public committee papers and background information identified in a public report to Council, Executive Board or any committee.  
Circulation of exempt reports is restricted to the Members of the Committee considering that report.

Democratic Services are responsible for publication of all Agendas.  
**Contact: Colin Davies, Democratic Services Manager 01267 224029 ext 4029**

2) Produce and Publish all Executive Board and Executive Board Member Decision Notices no more than three working days after the meeting.

- Copies of Decision Notices are published on the Council Intranet and Internet
- Copies of Decision Notices are sent to all Members on the relevant Scrutiny Committee, by email, within three working days of the meeting.
- Scrutiny Committee members then have an opportunity to “Call in” any decision within a further 3 working days where there are genuine and serious grounds for doing so
- Decision Notices are then published on the Intranet for all Members to view
- Hard copies of Decision Notices are also available in all Members Rooms

Democratic Services are responsible for publication of all Decision Notices.  
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3) Publish Press Releases, relating to Agenda items and Decision Notices, in advance of, and after, the respective meeting.

- All press releases will be published in accordance with the Protocol for Dealing with the Press & Media
- All press releases will be published daily on the Council’s Intranet and Internet sites
- Weekly News Bulletin ‘Hot off the press’, will be sent to Members, in hard copy
- Weekly press cuttings will be sent to all Executive Board Members, Group Leaders, Chair and Vice-Chair and copies made available in all Members Rooms

The Communications Section is responsible for publishing all press releases.

**Contact: Debbie Williams, Press Manager 01267 224037 Ext 4037**

4) All Members also have access to information through their respective Group Meetings, the Opposition Spokespersons Liaison Committee and by contacting Executive Board Members direct.

## **WARD INFORMATION**

Members want to be kept informed about what is happening in their area.

The Council will:

- 1) Inform local Members, by email, about
  - **Planning Applications** – the Council has a statutory responsibility to inform Members about applications
  - **New capital schemes** – e.g. highway schemes, new developments or buildings
  - **Major work on Council property or facilities** – e.g. housing repair schemes, school extensions
  - **Service developments/launch of new services or initiatives** – e.g. grant schemes, environmental initiatives, road safety projects, extension to schools
  - **Closure of facilities or suspension of services** – e.g. closure of a leisure centre, school or care facility
  - **Changes or disruption to service delivery** – e.g. road closure, refuse collection

**The Council's Constitution clearly states what information Members have a right to access. Under the Data Protection Act there are restrictions on accessing personal information. For further details please see Appendix One.**

Heads of Service are responsible for ensuring that Members are kept informed.

### **Contact Information**

Members want an effective system for dealing with their enquiries/complaints and they want up to date contact information for key officers.

The Council will:

- 1) Publish a contact list of key officers, within each Department. This information will be published in hard copy, updated quarterly, and on the Council Intranet.
- 2) Operate a Members Enquiry Service with Enquiry Forms available on the Intranet. Heads of Service must respond to Members enquiries within 10 working days.

Democratic Services is responsible for Member Support

**Contact: Colin Davies, Democratic Services Manager 01267 224029 ext 4029**

## **Council News**

Members want to be kept up to date with news and information relating to the Council and services.

The Council will:

- Published press releases in accordance with the Protocol for Dealing with the Press & Media
- Publish all press releases on the Council's Intranet and Internet sites
- Weekly News Bulletin 'Hot off the press', will be sent to Members, in hard copy
- Weekly press cuttings will be sent to all Executive Board Members, Group Leaders, Chair and Vice-Chair and copies made available in all Members Rooms

The Communications Section is responsible for publishing all press releases.

**Contact: Debbie Williams, Press Manager 01267 224037 Ext 4037**

- 1) Ensure that all policy/strategy documents have a concise executive summary.
- 2) Ensure that all Members Rooms [Carmarthen, Llanelli Town Hall, Ammanford and Llandeilo] provide a library of council information and access to computers.

## **Consultation**

Members want to be consulted on matters affecting their ward.

The Council will:

- Consult Members on issues, concerning their ward, before the matter goes before Executive Board/Council/Committee for decision
  - Consult Members, by post or email, allowing at least five working days for that Member to respond
  - The consultation document will include a brief overview/letter detailing the purpose of the consultation, an executive summary of any relevant documentation and details of where further information is available
  - Where consultation meetings are being arranged for Members they will be sent a notice at least three working days in advance of the meeting
  - A summary of the response from Members will be included on the report cover sheet distributed with the Agenda
- 2) Consult Members through the a number of forums
    - Scrutiny Committees – have a role in policy development and will be used to consult Members on policy developments and decisions being considered by the Executive Board/Council

- Area Committees – have a role in policy development and implications for local areas, and will be used to consult Members
- County Council – ‘first readings’ of new policies at County Council will be used to consult all Members.
- Advisory Panels – are forums for consulting Members on policy development
- Where specific consultation meetings are being arranged for Members they will be sent a notice at least three working days in advance of the meeting
- A summary of the response from Committees will be included on the report cover sheet distributed with the Agenda

Heads of Service are responsible for ensuring that local Members are consulted on matters going to Executive Board/Council/Committee for decision.

### **Member Support**

- **IT Support**
- **Postal Service**
- **Council Diary**

### **IT Support**

Members want support in using IT and expect all Members to use their computers for accessing information.

The Council will:

- Provide an IT Support Service during normal office hours 08:45 to 17:00 Monday to Thursday, 08:45 to 16:30 Friday, excluding all Public and Extra Statutory Holidays.
- Provide IT support outside of these times for e-mail and Internet access. Support is available by contacting Careline on 01267 222288 between 18:00 until midnight Monday to Friday; 08:00 to Midnight at the weekend. Excluding all Public and Extra Statutory Holidays:
- Aim to resolve all technical problems within 10 hours and also, if there is a requirement, provide support after 6pm, provided a Help Desk Call has been made that day.

IT Services are responsible for IT support

**Contact IT Services Help Desk 01267 246789 ext 6789**

- Provide IT Training for all Members, on a one to one basis, being proactive about encouraging Members to take advantage of the training available
- Provide access to ECDL Training to enable Members to achieve the European Computer Driving Licence.

**People Management and Performance is responsible for IT training.  
Contact Caroline Blackburn 01267 246171 ext 6171.**

### **Postal Service**

Members want to minimise the amount of information sent, to them, in the post.

The Council will:

- Use email as the main method of communication with Members including sending notices of meetings and decisions
- Provide Members with a hard copy of agendas for those Committees on which they serve
- Provide each Member with a pigeon hole in the Members Room at County Hall
- Post mail to Members at the end of each week, if it has not been collected from their pigeon hole

### **Council Diary**

Members want the Council Diary to be managed to minimise instances where meetings clash.

The Council will:

- Ensure that all meetings involving Members are included in the Council Diary
- Publish the Council Diary on the Internet and Intranet
- Avoid arranging meetings on the same day as County Council, to allow for Council meetings extending into the afternoon

Democratic Services are responsible for managing the Council Diary.

**Contact: Colin Davies, Democratic Services Manager 01267 224029 ext 4029**

## **Appendix One - Restrictions on access to information**

The Council's Constitution clearly states what information Members have a right to access:

“Members have a right to inspect Council documents, so far as their access to the documents is reasonably necessary to enable them to properly to perform their duties as a members of the Council. This principle is commonly referred to as the “need to know” principle...but a member has no right to a “roving commission” to examine documents of the Council. Mere curiosity is not sufficient”.

The decision, on whether there is a “need to know” basis for a member to access that information, must initially be made by the relevant Director and Monitoring Officer. In the event of a dispute, the matter may be referred to the relevant Executive Board Member(s) and Director, with legal advice from the Monitoring Officer.

**Members do not have the right to access personal or confidential information relating to a resident or business. In these instances, individuals are protected by the Data Protection Act.**

**More detailed advice regarding Members rights to inspect Council documents can be obtained from the Monitoring Officer, Lyn Thomas on 01267 224010 ext 4010.**