

Shrewley Parish Council

MEMBER-OFFICER PROTOCOL DIGNITY AT WORK

1. References in this document to the “Clerk” relate to the parish council’s officer known as the Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer.
2. A Parish or Town Council is a Statutory Local Authority which usually employs a Clerk and may employ other Officers. Every appointment to paid employment must be on merit.
3. The Clerk is the Council’s Proper Officer and Chief Executive. They should guard against inappropriate public statements and should not act in a party-political capacity within the parish.
4. Officers must be politically neutral: they are employed by the Council as a corporate body, **not** by Committees or individual Councillors. The political neutrality of Officers should be respected. They should not be asked to play any role or undertake any task that is likely to prejudice that neutrality.
5. All Members of the Council (Councillors) have a right of access to the Clerk. Where a Councillor requires information, it will be provided if it is readily available; for example, in Council or Committee papers or material published on behalf of the Council. The Clerk is free to give advice on a confidential basis about procedural matters to any Councillor.
6. The Clerk must always be free to seek advice from the County Association of Local Councils and/or other appropriate bodies on matters concerning the proper exercise of their duties.
7. Councillors should recognise that, for Officers to properly carry out their duties, appropriate training and reference material are required.
8. Councillors and employees must understand that Council decisions can only be made by full Council, Committees or Clerk acting under delegated authority. The law does not allow for decisions relating to the discharge of any of the Council’s functions to be taken by a Chair or indeed by any other single Councillor. Councillors and employees must ensure that representations made to the Council on any matter during any stage of the formal decision-making process should be directed to the Council or appropriate Committee *via the Clerk*.
9. Reports to Council and Committees should be written by the Clerk or another authorised Officer.
 - 9.1 If the Chair or another Councillor in exceptional circumstances is unhappy with its contents, it should not be amended by the Chair or another Councillor, save with the express approval of the Clerk.
 - 9.2 In most cases, discussion between the Chair and the Clerk will resolve any disagreement over a report; however, if the Clerk’s report is not regarded as appropriate by the Chair, then exceptionally the Chair should write their own report in addition to the report submitted by the Clerk. The Chair should, under no circumstances, use undue pressure to persuade the Clerk to withdraw the original report.
10. Mutual respect between Officers and Councillors is essential for the operation of good local government. If the Clerk is closely related to a Councillor, then they must be especially careful to ensure that their official dealings are open and transparent.
11. Where the Clerk works from home, Councillors must respect agreed practical arrangements for liaison with the Clerk.

12. In line with the Code of Conduct's reference to treating others with respect, it is important that any dealings between Councillors and Officers should observe reasonable standards of courtesy:
 - 12.1 Neither party should seek to take unfair advantage of their position;
 - 12.2 Employees whether individually or collectively, should not be the subject of attacks or criticism;
 - 12.3 Councillors should avoid naming individual employees, if possible, and neither Councillor nor employee should resort to the media to resolve a disagreement between them.
13. The Code of Conduct also requires the promotion of equality by not discriminating unlawfully against any person, please refer to separate policy on Equal Opportunities:
 - 13.1 Council will regard as a serious offence action by an employee or a Councillor which amount to work-related bullying, harassment, discrimination against or victimisation of any employee or Councillor.
 - 13.2 Bullying can take the form of shouting at an individual, making persistently negative attacks on an individual's personal or professional performance, criticising an individual in front of others, persistently setting objectives with impossible deadlines or unachievable tasks, excessive monitoring of an individual's performance or withholding information with the intent of deliberately affecting an individual's performance.
14. Confidentiality is often vitally important and must always be respected by Councillors and Officers. A breach of confidentiality may have serious implications for the individual Councillor or Officer who "leaks" the information.
15. It is the duty of the Clerk to ensure that the work and responses of employees are conducive to and not undermining of, the foregoing general principles. They are entitled to expect Councillors to respect political restriction and the duties and limitations of employees.
16. It is also the duty of the Clerk to arrange matters so that other employees properly understand the roles of Councillors and employees and the Council's required approaches to the relations between them. They are also entitled to expect Councillors to respect the degree of seniority of employees who are answerable to the Council via the Clerk and not an individual Councillor.
17. Official correspondence on behalf of the Council should normally be sent out in the name of the appropriate Officer, rather than in the name of the Councillor. It may be appropriate in certain circumstances (e.g. representations to a Government Minister, or on behalf of the Chair in their Civic capacity) for a letter to appear in the name of the Councillor, but this should be the exception rather than the norm. Letters which for example, create obligations or give instructions on behalf of the Council, should never be sent out in the name of a Councillor.
18. Complaints of alleged breaches of this protocol will be dealt with under the Council's Complaints Procedure. The Councillor concerned may be censured and/or reported to the Standards Board for breach of the Code of Conduct. The employee concerned may face disciplinary action.

Adopted by Shrewley Parish Council at the Parish Council Meeting 9th January 2023 and signed by the Chair

Review Date: January 2025

Date _____

