

## **Standards Committee**

**2 November 2020**

### **Member Officer Relations Protocol**

#### **Report by Director of Law and Assurance**

**Electoral division: Not applicable**

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### **Summary**

The attached document is a draft of a proposed replacement of the Protocol on Relationships between Members and Officers which forms part of the Code of Conduct section of the Council's constitution. The revision is intended to address changes in member expectations, the need for alignment with the Council's values and plans for a new policy on respect and dignity at work. The proposal is made in the context of the good governance review covering aspects of the Council's culture.

### **Recommendations**

- (1) That, subject to any amendments agreed by the Committee, the draft revised protocol be approved and recommended to the County Council on 11 December 2020 for inclusion in the Code of Conduct section of the Constitution.
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### **Proposal**

#### **1 Background and context**

- 1.1 The Committee is responsible for ensuring the highest standards of behaviour by elected members. The Code of Conduct in the Council's constitution includes a long-established protocol which sets out the expectations for member conduct towards officers in a range of contexts. It also covers how officers are expected to behave towards elected members in any role or setting. The protocol also covers aspects of member rights and responsibilities including rights of access to information and advice from officers, including to political groups.

#### **2 Proposal details**

- 2.1 The Council embarked upon a set of actions to address aspects of how the Council functions and which touch upon the culture within the Council including all aspects of officer conduct and relations. The behavior of members in their roles and in relations with officers should also be subject to that review. This falls within the remit of this Committee which has responsibility for maintaining the highest standard of behavior by elected members in accordance with the Code of Conduct and the principles of public life.
- 2.2 The Protocol on Member Officer Relationships has long been the reference point for defining the expectations of behavior for the effective management of

Council business between officers and members. It sets out a number of expectations for member and officer conduct in all aspects of Council business and in any situation which may arise. It has not been substantively revised since the adoption of the current Code of Conduct several years ago although some updating was carried out and approved by this Committee in June 2018.

- 2.3 A proposed revision of the protocol has been prepared and is attached as an appendix to the report. It seeks to maintain all of the aims of the current protocol whilst ensuring that it is better aligned with the Council's values. As part of the wider good governance project a new 'dignity and respect at work' policy is under preparation and this has been referenced in the preparation of this draft revised protocol.
- 2.4 The Committee is asked to review the draft, make suggestions for change and agree whether to endorse the document for adoption as part of the Code of Conduct by the County Council.

### **3 Other options considered (and reasons for not proposing)**

- 3.1 Such a protocol is considered essential to good governance and the upholding of the Council's values. A differently worded text could arise following member consideration of the draft and debate.

### **4 Consultation, engagement and advice**

- 4.1 This Committee has the role of overseeing all aspects of member conduct to which this protocol relates. External consultation has not been undertaken although the document refers to the well-established general principles of public life

### **5 Finance**

- 5.1 There are no revenue budget consequences.

### **6 Risk implications and mitigations**

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Mitigating Action (in place or planned)</b>
Reputational risks and risks to effective member officer relations if no protocol in place.	An up to date and sound protocol is to be approved for immediate adoption. It will be subject to further review.

### **7 Policy alignment and compliance**

- 7.1 The Council's public sector equality duty and its obligations to equality and diversity in the workplace have informed the draft protocol.

Tony Kershaw  
**Director of Law and Assurance**

**Contact Officer:** Tony Kershaw, 033022 22662  
tony.kershaw@westsussex.gov.uk

**Appendix** – Draft Member Officer Relations Protocol

**Background papers** – None.