

# Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Agenda  
Item No.

Report of Chief Executive,  
To

Standards Committee

11 November 2020

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## Refresh of Protocol on Councillor / Officer Relations

Standards Committee  
Cabinet Member: Councillor Ian Gilbert  
Part 1, Public Agenda Item

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### 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report presents progress to date on the refresh of the Protocol on Councillor/Officer Relations work following the Standards Committee meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> July 2020 where the way forward was agreed. In light of the comments and decisions of Standards Committee a new Protocol and related Action Plan to support implementation are presented in **Appendices 1 and 2**.

### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Standards Committee is invited to review the new Protocol on Councillor / Officer Relations at **Appendix 1** and the associated Action Plan to support implementation at **Appendix 2**, and agree final versions for referral to Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee prior to adoption of the new Protocol by full Council
- 2.2 Standards Committee should adopt the approach described in section 6 and use its role to champion these actions and key messages in order to promote this work.

### 3. Background

- 3.1 On the 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2019, Standards Committee agreed to review and refresh the Protocol on Councillor/Officer Relations, in Part 5d of the Constitution. The aim of the work is to improve the effective working relations between Councillors and Officers.
- 3.2 The EELGA (East of England Local Government Association) representative (Cecilia Tredget, Managing Director) met with each Party or Group Leader and their members, as well as non-aligned Councillors to gain representations.

- 3.3 Officers had the opportunity to feed into the review via written feedback and face to face interviews.
- 3.4 A summary of both the Councillor and Officer contributions by theme along with recommendations were presented to Standards Committee on 28<sup>th</sup> July 2020. At that meeting the Committee agreed with all the recommendations and the proposal to return to a future meeting with:
- A redrafted Protocol
  - An Action Plan

#### **4. New Protocol**

- 4.1 The existing Protocol has been redrafted and a new version is provided in **Appendix 1**. The new Protocol takes account of the following recommendations agreed by Standards Committee:
- Updates to reflect social media use.
  - Section 5.8 has been amended to be consistent with the Nolan Principles and the Members' Code of Conduct and the Employee Code of Conduct.
  - Section 7.2 has been removed as not relevant to the effective working between Councillors and Officers.
- 4.2 In addition, and at the request of the Chair, gender references have been updated with neutral language.
- 4.3 The opportunity was also taken to update the roles of Executive Directors from Strategic Directors, as well as changes to reflect the new Councillors Enquiries process.
- 4.4 It is recommended that the new Protocol is finalised by the Committee and then sent to Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee. It is also recommended that the Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee should consider the contributions of Councillors and Officers which were considered at the meeting of the Standards Committee on 28<sup>th</sup> July as they provide important context from which to move forward.

#### **5. Action Plan**

- 5.1 As mentioned above, at its last meeting Standards Committee agreed to a number of recommendations which would help to support implementation and embed the new Protocol.
- 5.2 These recommended actions align to the outcomes of the Transforming together (TT) programme which has been set up as a Council-wide group responsible for a programme of transformation and behaviour change. The primary aim of TT is to enable the Council to modernise as part of a commitment to delivering quality services and delivering on the 2050 ambition
- 5.3 The work programme of TT is split under 4 areas, which are:
- Skills, Learning and Development
  - Behaviours and Culture
  - People and Networks

- Managing TT and Corporate

- 5.4 It is recommended that these recommendations to support implementation of the new Protocol be incorporated into the four areas above, tracked and reported as part of the wider TT governance process. The governance process involves an officer lead for each area to oversee the programme of work, and a report through Cabinet and CMT leads.
- 5.5 In addition, it is recommended that Standards Committee receive an annual update on progress of the relevant actions.
- 5.6 An Action Plan incorporating the above is attached at **Appendix 2.**

## **6. Championing key messages**

- 6.1 At the last meeting, Standards Committee were unanimous in their desire to move beyond incidents of negative behaviour and working relations. The Committee gave a clear steer that they want to ensure the best possible outcome from this piece of work.
- 6.2 Standards Committee represents all political groups and, therefore, can provide consensus on the subject and act as a voice of authority in matters relating to the promotion and maintenance of high standards of conduct between Councillors and Officers.
- 6.3 It is therefore recommend that Standards Committee champion the following actions (as recommended by Standards Committee at the last meeting) and where appropriate promote key messages to all parties and engage both Councillors and Officers in the work:
- Councillors to be reminded of the Nolan Principles with additional training if required
  - Training opportunities for Councillors to align with Officers (such as the equality & diversity training) and to meet any gaps in knowledge or skills
  - Group Leaders to attend regular meetings with the Chief Executive
  - Implement a buddying system between new and experienced councillors
  - Encourage Councillors to continue to support the Cabinet Working Parties approach
  - Encourage Councillors to meet with officers and attend tours of work when invited
  - For Councillors to have profiles on the intranet
  - Political groups and Leaders to explore ways to support Officers in resolving low level inappropriate and unprofessional behaviour by Councillors, before it escalates to a formal complaint.
- 6.4 Standards Committee would be supported by Officers as part of the TT programme to implement this work.

## **7. Other Options**

No other options have been identified at this time.

## **8. Reasons for Recommendations**

The recommendations contained within this report were formed following the contributions made by the Councillors and Officers. The recommendations consider what steps can be taken to address the points and concerns raised by Councillors and Officers to aid more effective working relations, both in terms of refreshing the Protocol, embedding its principles and looking for opportunities and activities to strengthen good practices.

## **9. Corporate Implications**

### **9.1 Contribution to the Southend 2050 Road Map**

This work aims to increase effective working relationships between Councillors and Officers, which in turn enables more opportunity for greater understanding of priorities, strengthened collaboration, and better outcomes towards the Southend 2050 roadmap.

This work supports the Transforming Together theme work on behaviours and cultures and specifically the Council's agreed values and behaviours. In addition, it supports the TT conditions for closer collaboration with staff, Councillors, residents and partners and simple and effective governance, as well as to building an agile, collaborative and skilled workforce equipped to deliver Southend 2050

### **9.2 Financial Implications**

There are no specific financial implications for this report, there may be some in the future.

### **9.3 Legal Implications**

The new Protocol needs to be agreed by full Council.

### **9.4 People Implications**

This work aims to enhance the effective working relations between Councillors and Officers and to help build upon the culture underpinned by the values and behaviours work. However, no further specific people implications are noted in relation to this report.

### **9.5 Property Implications**

There are no property implications at this stage.

### **9.6 Consultation**

Consultation exercises have been undertaken with Councillors and Officers as outlined in body of report.

### **9.7 Equalities and Diversity Implications**

The report highlights an opportunity to raise awareness of equality implications for Councillors and Officers when interacting. The report further addressed how effective working could be enhanced by the values and behaviours programme of work.

#### 9.8 Risk Assessment

Poor relations between Councillors and Officers risks reducing the effectiveness of outcomes for residents and risks damage to the reputation of the Council. The report outlines some steps to better raise awareness and address these issues.

#### 9.9 Value for Money

This report aims to address and balance the significant Councillor and Officer time spent, on unproductive ways of working.

#### 9.10 Community Safety Implications

There are no community safety implications.

#### 9.11 Environmental Impact

There is no environmental impact of this work.

### **10. Background Papers**

Previous report to Standards Committee on 28 July 2020 including the Councillors and Officer contributions in the Appendices.

### **11. Appendices**

#### **Appendix 1 – Redraft of the Protocol**

#### **Appendix 2 – Action Plan**