

St Helens - A Member led Council –

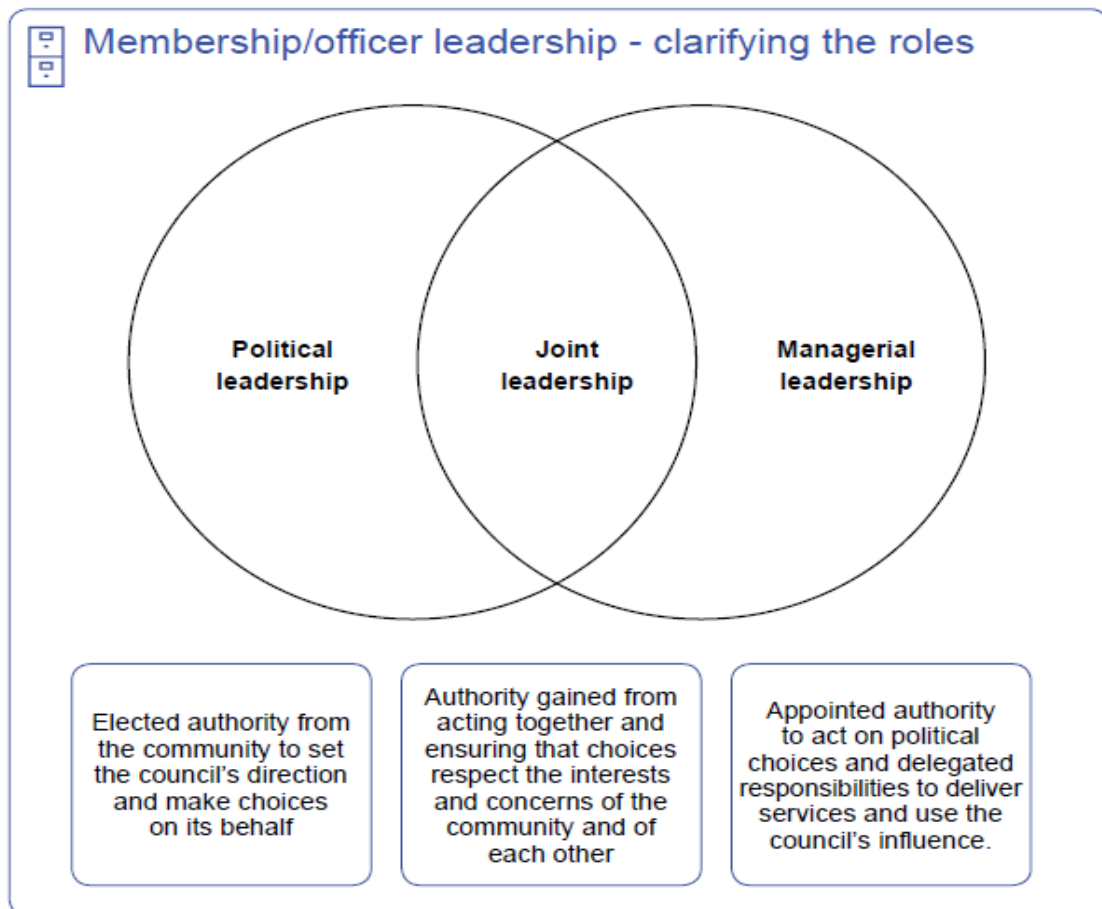
Developing effective Member and Officer relations

As part of our approach to refining member and officer relations it is useful to identify some of the issues and differences that will need to be addressed. The following points are based on the LGA guidance on member and officer relationships.

1. Members provide democratic mandate to the council and set the policy framework for the Council; whereas officers provide the professional advice and expertise needed to deliver the policy framework that has been agreed by members.
2. Officers are employees of the Council and are the people who put policies into effect and organise the provision of services. Officers also have powers and responsibilities delegated by members to make decisions on behalf of the Council.
3. Officers must act with political impartiality, serving the whole council rather than particular groups or members. They have a duty to provide unbiased professional advice and, as such, may have to advise members that certain courses of action should not be taken.
4. The Council has an agreed Member/Officer Protocol in place.
5. This document is not intended to replace this but is of key importance in understanding the wider issues related to the way in which members of the Council and its officers should work together.
6. The following diagram outlines some of the differences in role:

A Quick Guide to some of the distinct roles	
Members ←	→ Officers
Are accountable to the electorate.	Accountable to the Council.
Are a Community Leader for a Ward.	Serve the whole Council.
Add a political dimension.	Politically Impartial.
Set high level policy/strategy.	Ensure operational delivery is effective.
Are involved in Chief Officer/CLT appointments.	Day to day staff and resources management.
Provide political perspective.	
Collectively set the policy and strategy framework for the Council.	

7. The roles of Members and officers are not however divided into distinct areas. The effective running of the Council requires an effective partnership and collaboration between Members and officers. The diagram below provides some further examples. Further to the descriptor above the following model outlines the differences and the overlaps:



8. Again, a useful table to consider is as follows:

What all Members can expect from Officers	What Officers can expect from Members
A commitment to the authority as a whole, not to an individual political group	Political leadership and direction
A working partnership	A working partnership
A timely response to enquiries and complaints	Compliance with ethical standards and probity requirements
Professional advice not influenced by political views or preference	Non-involvement in the day to day management
Integrity, mutual support and appropriate confidentiality	Respect, dignity and integrity, but no special consideration

9. Based on the above information and guidance we agree to sign up to, and work within the following principles:

Principles

- i. Officers will work based on a model of “no surprises” when it comes to providing information to Members. The principles of timeliness, effective forward- planning and the planning of appropriate communications will be key.
- ii. Respecting each other, in terms of:
 - Political Leadership
 - The role of the local ward member
 - Officer political neutrality / professional role of officers
- iii. Officer responsiveness and even-handedness to members of all political groups, whilst acknowledging that officers must implement the policies of the ruling administration, irrespective of political colour.
- iv. Effective communication

Reports (written or verbal) will be in plain English and where possible free of technical terms. Members will be provided with documents in alternative formats where required.
- v. The role of officers is to support Members leadership and activity in the development of strategy and policy, and by monitoring and reviewing of

implementation. This is done through the provision of accurate information /data/advice. Officers will also provide material information and briefing on operational and service delivery matters as appropriate.

- vi. Officers will also prepare information for Members by way of periodic member-briefing.
- vii. Provision of consistent and timely officer advice:
 - Which represents the collective view of departments of the Council.
 - Members must not 'shop-around' for advice, seeking to obtain advice which they may prefer from certain officers, or by seeking a secondary opinion once formal advice has been provided.
 - If Members have concerns about the accuracy of advice or information provided, they should raise it with the relevant Executive Director.
- viii. Observance of the Nolan Principles:
 1. Selflessness
 2. Integrity
 3. Objectivity
 4. Accountability
 5. Openness
 6. Honesty
 7. Leadership
- ix. Members and officers will be committed to setting and enforcing positive behaviours:
 - It is expected that the political groups will have a significant role to play in dealing with the behaviour of members of the group generally, and in assisting the Monitoring Officer in dealing with complaints made against any group members specifically.
 - Officer conduct will be dealt with via line management arrangements with more serious matters being addressed via appropriate HR processes.
- x. Members and officers will share responsibility for identifying when a strategy or policy needs to be developed, monitored or reviewed.
- xi. Co-production – Members make political decisions, but officers will work with them and advise them in order to inform the process.
 - Members ultimately make the decisions
 - Officers then implement the decisions
- xii. Staffing matters have joint responsibility amongst Members and officers:

- Statutory officer and appointments for Director level posts and above are the responsibility of the Appointments committee, subject to the required processes.
- HR Policies are to be developed by Officers based on legislation and good practice. These pertain to the operational management of the workforce
- Management of staff and implementation of HR procedures are the responsibility of Officers.
- Management of disciplinary and whistleblowing matters are the responsibility of officers.

10. The Model

The following establishes the model which underpins our approach as a member-led authority. In the development of policy/strategy within St Helens Council there is a process or cycle that is undertaken:

- a) The development of the policy/strategy
- b) Delivery of the policy/strategy
- c) Monitoring of the policy/strategy
- d) Review of the policy/strategy linking to the revision of it and back to the beginning of the cycle

Within this model, 3 of the 4 activities are led by **elected members**: -

- Development
- Monitoring
- Review

One of the four domains is identified as activity led by **officers**

- Delivery

It is of course accepted that officers will support members in the provision of information, data and advice in relation to the 3 processes of **development; monitoring and review**, and that officers would keep members briefed on any key issues in relation to the **delivery** of strategy and policy.

Whilst it is the case under an executive and leader model of local governance that the Cabinet will lead on many areas of strategy/policy development, monitoring and review, other members across all parties have a significant role to play.

Committee members and chairs and, in particular overview and scrutiny committee members and chairs, can play a key role in policy development and

review. Equally, there is a clear role for ward members in liaison with communities to raise awareness of strategy and policy, and to feedback from a grass-roots level on proposals for development or review.

11. Officers responsibilities to elected members

Whilst it is understood that officers of the Council have a responsibility to deliver the policies, and action the formal decisions of the Cabinet, it is of key importance that they understand their responsibilities to the Council as a whole and to members of all political groups.

Whilst officers will treat all members in an even-handed, appropriate manner, members must recognise that officer resources can only be directed towards implementing those decisions which have been lawfully taken by the Council.

All members have responsibilities to their residents, who often raise queries and enquiries with them. Members also have general responsibilities in respect of their local areas.

The Council's Constitution contains a Ward Member Protocol [provide hyperlink], which captures the role of the ward member and which sets out the responsibilities of officers in respect of local issues. Local issues are of key importance to ward members who are accountable to the electors in their wards. Members also have responsibilities to their political groups, and officers must provide impartial advice on procedures and the proposed handling of important issues, such as the budget and the administration of Council meetings.

Officers also have responsibilities towards those elected to senior Council office e.g. Chairmanship of Council or committees. Irrespective of political allegiance, such members can expect to receive support and assistance in order to ensure that they can effectively perform their roles.

Officers must also support those members of Council who do not have "special responsibilities". They are nevertheless equal members of Council and have a right to be appropriately supported.

It will be acknowledged that members have different working patterns, caring responsibilities and preferred ways of working, and officers will endeavour to be flexible to accommodate these when arranging meetings.

Where a member requires adjustments as a result of disability, illness or caring responsibilities, reasonable efforts will be made to accommodate the member's requirements, to enable all members to participate fully in the business of the Council.

Officers will provide appropriate support and advice to members where they encounter abuse, harassment or threats as a result of their role as a Councillor.

12. Communicating with public, business, and stakeholder audiences

Officers, (including the corporate communications team) will:

- Deliver information about Council's services and how to access them, prioritising those services where evidence shows that these are the most important to residents, and which are council priorities.
- Communicate, publicise and promote decisions, service changes, priorities etc that are the result of decisions taken through the democratic processes of the authority, for example:
 - Decisions taken at full council
 - Decisions taken at cabinet
 - Leader decisions
 - Decisions otherwise delegated through any of the above meetings or otherwise described through the constitution
- Defend the reputation of the organisation, rebutting and correcting factual inaccuracies where they enter the public conversation about the organisation

The Corporate Communications Team will, at all times, observe the requirements of:

- St Helens media-relations protocol (Currently being developed) and other St Helens Borough Council policies and protocols
- Code of recommended practice for local government publicity
- And relevant legislation

The Corporate Communications Team will work on matters that relate to the activity, decisions and priorities of the Council as an organisation, and will not operate in any way that is party-political in nature.

In public relations, as in all council business, it is the role of Members to be party-political and the role of officers to create content that is neutral, or occasionally to speak neutrally, on behalf of the whole Council (albeit including the delivery of a majority party's programme). Any clearly party-political communications must be through Members' own channels (e.g. their own party newsletters and their own social media channels) rather than those owned and supported by officers (and funded by taxpayer resources).