

**Committee:** Standards  
**Date:** 21 January 2003  
**Agenda Item No:** 4  
**Title:** Member/Officer Protocol  
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### **Summary**

- 1 This report introduces and proposes a revised protocol for member/officer relations. It also seeks the Committee's views on the process which might be adopted to enable wider consideration of the issues among members.

### **Background**

- 2 The current Member/officer protocol was approved by the Council on 10 October 2000. It is included in the Members' Handbook. Since then new legislation and the introduction of the new Code of Conduct for members has necessitated some review of the protocol. Recent reports from the Improvement & Development Agency (IDeA) and the Audit Commission have highlighted some decline in the quality of member/officer relations in Uttlesford and have also recommended that the protocol be reviewed.
- 3 The attached draft has been prepared by officers taking account of changes in the statutory provisions and comments from colleagues and members over a period of time. Changes from the previous document are indicated by italics.
- 4 The draft was circulated recently to Group Leaders. Some suggestions for editorial changes have been made and it has been proposed that there should be added in the early part of the document a statement about the framework within which officers operate to balance the references to legislation and the Code of Conduct for members. A national code for officers is in preparation. These changes can be made at the next draft stage.

### **Consideration of the Draft**

- 5 The new protocol will need finally to be approved by the Council and it is suggested that this should be no later than the meeting on 15 April 2003 so that it is in place for the new Council to be elected on 1 May.
- 6 This Committee will wish to consider how to involve members more widely in consideration of the draft to ensure that there is full understanding and

commitment to the issues before final approval. In its recent report the IDeA recommended that:

“...steps be taken to arrest this deterioration in relationships by members and officers reviewing the existing joint protocol. There may be benefits with such a discussion being externally facilitated with opportunities for Members to reflect on what they expect from officers and vice versa. Thought should also be given as to what each of the two groups should be offering to the other in the way of support.

“Once the protocol has either been revised or confirmed, care should be taken to ensure that behaviours match that specified, and where they fall short that use is made of the appropriate standards channels. It is recommended that this action is also taken as soon as possible and in advance of the election.”

- 7 It will also be important to ensure that new members from May have the opportunity to understand fully the protocol and the expectations it places on members and officers.

**RECOMMENDED** that

- 1) The Committee comments on the revised draft protocol.
- 2) The Committee determines the approach to involving members in its consideration prior to formal approval by the Council.

Background Papers:  
Uttlesford District Council - Councillors' Code of Conduct