

Berkhamsted Town Council
Protocol for the Operation of Working Groups
16 March 2020

1. introduction

1.1 The purpose of this document is to give guidance on the operation of working groups within Berkhamsted Town Council.

1.2 There is no legal definition of a working group. Generally, however, a working group will be made up of a small group of councillors who will be tasked to investigate and make recommendations to a standing committee and/or Full Council on a particular policy or project. They may be short term, seasonal or long-term.

1.3 In a number of cases there would be no officers in attendance at meetings to provide support and advice. Officer attendance should be decided when terms of reference are drawn up or reviewed and will also be dependent on staff resources available.

1.4 Working groups operate on a less formal basis than that of a standing committee or Full Council. They do not have executive decision-making powers but can make recommendations to the committee to which it reports.

2. Appointment of Working Groups

2.1 The Council or its committees can propose the establishment of a working group or amend the terms of reference or membership of existing working groups. The committee will set out the terms of reference of a working group, addressing matters such as the purpose, objectives, quorum and membership, for approval at Full Council.

3. Meeting Dates, Agenda Notes and Working Methods

3.1 As stated above, working groups will be tasked with investigating complex issues or policies and will be expected to formulate recommendations for the Council.

3.3 Although less formal than Council and Committee meetings, it is necessary to be organised and efficient so as not to waste valuable time and effort. All involved need to know when and where meetings are taking place, what is going to be discussed and at the conclusion of the meeting understand what actions/recommendations have been agreed.

3.4 An agenda for a working group meeting will normally be sent by the chair prior to a meeting of the working group setting the items to be discussed. Agenda should also be circulated to councillors who are not formal members of the group for information and in case they might wish to attend. A copy should also be sent to Town Clerk for information and saving to the G drive.

3.5 When possible a series of dates and times will be agreed in advance and entered by the working group onto an electronic shared diary (*format to be agreed*) so that Council Chamber bookings can be managed. Given the nature of working groups, in practice, it may be necessary to agree dates on a more ad hoc basis. Whatever the circumstances, the

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dates and times agreed are to be entered in the shared diary. When meeting dates are finalised for they should be notified by e-mail to the Deputy Town Clerk by the working group chair. For civic centre meetings the Deputy Clerk will advise the building managers about all evening meetings to ensure that the building is staffed and open.

3.6 Attendance and apologies for absence will be recorded in the notes of each meeting together with any actions/recommendations agreed. The notes will be circulated to Working Group members by the chair of the group or a person within the group who has been delegated that role. A copy will be sent to the Town Clerk who will make arrangements for all Working Group notes to be circulated to Town Council members, the Town Clerk and saved to the G drive in advance of reporting to the relevant Standing Committee and/or Full Council.

3.7 Working groups can consider whether to invite external representatives to attend e.g. stakeholders or business representatives and members of the public with specialist interest, experience, knowledge or skill, to assist with the group's work. External representatives attending working groups do so in a voluntary capacity.

3.8 Any working group at any time may review its decision to invite external representatives to assist with its work and may add or remove external representatives as appropriate.

3.9 External representatives, when undertaking activities and investigations as part of a working group, must make it clear to any third parties they engage with that they are acting as a member of a Town Council working group. This principle applies equally to Town Councillors.

4. General Data Protection Regulations and the Use of Personally Identifiable Information of Working Group Members

4.1 Councillor members of working groups have already agreed to the contact information they wish to be used and shared..

4.2 Permission will be sought of each external representative to keep a record of their name, organisation, e-mail address and telephone number. This is to facilitate communication within the group through the creation of e-mail circulation lists and the distribution of pertinent documents and information.

4.3 The chair of each group is responsible for the completion of the appropriate form and ensuring that details of each working group are kept up to date. A copy of each completed or amended form should be passed to the Deputy Town Clerk who will maintain a central register of Working Group membership. A copy of the form used for this purpose is attached.

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5. Location of Meetings

5.1 Normally, meetings of working groups will be held in the Town Council Chamber. As meetings of working groups operate in a less formal manner than committees, it may be appropriate to hold them in other locations.

6. Interests of Members

6.1 Councillors who are members of working groups, when attending meetings of working groups, shall declare any personal interest and shall not take part in any discussions in which they have a personal prejudicial interest, in accordance with the Code of Conduct. Similarly, any external representative attending, who could be seen to have a personal interest shall declare it and if they have a prejudicial interest in any item under discussion shall not vote on any recommendation to be made to the parent committee or Full Council.

7. Terms of Reference

7.1 Working Groups will comply with the terms of reference agreed for each particular group;
7.2 This protocol is deemed to be part of the terms of reference of each working group.

8. Town Council Standing Orders

8.1 Standing Orders provide a useful reference point in relation to the operation of working groups, in particular:-

- a) Standing Order 1 – Meetings generally: particularly 1a; 1b; 1s i,ii,iii,iv and vi.
- b) Standing Order 6 – Disorderly conduct at meetings;
- c) Standing Order 13 – The Code of Conduct (including the Nolan Principles);
- d) Standing Order 19 – Financial controls and procurement;
- d) Standing Order 24 – Restriction on councillor activities.

9. Review of this Protocol

9.1 In March 2023 or as required by legislation or for operational reasons.

JEM 29-02-20