

The Role of Members

Members are collectively responsible for making Council policy, for which they are accountable to the electorate.

Members are not directly involved in the day-to-day provision of services to the public. This does not of course mean that there should be no contact between Members and the Town Clerk on such matters and, indeed, Members may often find that they are asked by electors to pursue matters on their behalf. However, Members have no executive authority, and will need to deal with all matters either through their collective Council membership or in liaison with the Town Clerk concerning, say, a parish problem.

It therefore follows that there are no circumstances where an individual Member can issue an instruction to the Town Clerk, a member of staff or a contractor. Likewise, a Member must never act "on behalf of the Council" in the organisation of any function or service. Particular care should be taken in letters/comments to the Press, to ensure they understand you speak as a 'Town Councillor' and not on behalf of the Council as a whole. Generally, press statements are issued by the Town Clerk on behalf of the Council.

The Role of the Town Mayor

The role of Town Mayor is non-political. The Town Mayor will act as the Town Council's representative at official events. He or she will act with the authority of, and be responsible to, the Town Council. The Town Mayor will preside at any meeting of the Town Council at which he/she is present. The Town Mayor collects his or her authority from the meeting. His/her powers are to keep order during the meeting; to adjourn the meeting; to order the removal of a disorderly person from the meeting; and to give rulings on points or order. The duties of the Town Mayor (although not prescribed by law) are:-

- To ensure that a meeting is properly constituted and a quorum is present
- To observe all statutory rules and standing orders governing the meeting
- To take items on the agenda in order, varying them only with the consent of the meeting
- To give the opportunity for speakers to express their views
- To discourage irrelevant discussion
- To conduct the meeting properly by putting motions and amendments
- To preserve order
- To make sure decisions reached are strictly relevant and are clear and precise
- To ensure that matters under discussion appear on the agenda

The position of Town Mayor confers no additional advantages or authority other than the honour of representing the town of Thame, however when in Council the Mayor has the right to provide a "casting vote" in order to achieve a majority decision. In the absence of the Town Mayor, the Deputy Town Mayor will carry out all duties normally performed by the Town Mayor.

The Role of the Town Clerk

The role of the Town Clerk is twofold, for which they are accountable to the Council. Firstly, the Town Clerk is the professional advisor to the Council on matters of policy and, secondly, the executor of Council policy, i.e. in carrying out the instructions of the Council.

How These Roles Work in Practice

Decisions on matters of major policy are taken by Members at meetings of the Council, having considered the recommendations of any Committee. Any Committee will, in turn, have considered the recommendations of the Town Clerk. Decisions on policy matters of more limited significance are taken by Members, at meetings of any Committees or Sub-Committees, having considered the recommendations of the Town Clerk. Within the framework of policies decided by Members, either at Full Council or Committee level, many decisions will be taken every working day by the Town Clerk. Most of these decisions will be concerned with the day-to-day management of services to the public but others will be concerned with more important matters.

Statutory Powers and Duties

The Council derives its powers from statute. A few of these are mandatory (i.e. the Council *must* carry them out) but most are discretionary (i.e. the Council *can* carry them out if it wishes). In all cases, both Members and Officers must work within the law.

Summary

- Members are responsible for making Council policy but do not have executive authority.
- The Town Clerk is responsible for advising Members on the making of Council policy and for ensuring that such policy is carried out.
- Many matters are delegated to the Town Clerk, who can make decisions on them working within established Council policies.
- The day-to-day management of services is the responsibility of the Town Clerk.
- Both Members and the Town Clerk must work within the law.
- Mutual respect between the Town Clerk and Members is essential in order for the council to function effectively. Personal attacks on the Town Clerk should be avoided (and would be contrary to the Code of Conduct) as, under the convention of Local Government, Officers are unable to defend themselves from such comments in public.