

OVERVIEW OF STOTFOLD TOWN COUNCIL

About the Council

The number of Members serving on a Town/Parish Council is determined by Central Bedfordshire Council. Stotfold Town Council has a total of 15 Councillors.

Elections are held every four years and normally take place on the first Thursday in May. If, following an election, there are insufficient Members a Council may, if a quorum exists, fill the vacancies by co-opting people to serve as Members of the Council.

It is important to emphasize that a Council as a separate identity from its Members. It enjoys its own legal status. The fact that a Council derives its existence from statute means that it can only do things that are expressly or impliedly authorised by statute.

Meetings

Committees

A Council can set up Committees to deal with its business, and it has a wide discretion regarding what business can be allocated to Committees (please see Overview of Committees)

Calendar of meetings

The Town Council meeting dates are the 1st Wednesday of every month (apart from August sabbatical). Committee meetings take place on Wednesday's throughout each month.

Organisation of meetings

Meetings usually take place in the Council Chamber of the Simpson Centre. All Council meetings start at 7.30pm, with Committees starting at 7.00pm, unless there is more than one Committee meeting in one evening.

An agenda is produced by the Town Clerk for each meeting, and copies of the agenda and supporting material are circulated to Members by Friday of the week preceding a meeting.

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 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 Clerk concerning, say, a town problem.

It therefore follows that there are no circumstances where an individual Member can issue an instruction to the Clerk 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, the Clerk of the Council issues Press statements.

The role of the Town Clerk

The role of the Town Clerk is twofold, for which she is accountable to the Council. Firstly, she 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.

The Clerk's role is crucial to the operation of the Council. All appropriate training and support is an absolute requirement for a competent Clerk in post. Budgets should reflect this. The Clerk is the source of legal advice for the Council.

How these roles work in practice

Members take decision on matters of major policy at meetings of the Council, after having considered the recommendations of any Committee. Any Committee will, in turn, having considered the recommendations of the Town Clerk. Members take decisions on policy matters of more limited significance at meetings of any Committees, after having considered the recommendations of the Clerk and depending on their delegated powers. Within the framework of policies decided by Members, either at full Council or Committee level, the Clerk, often in consultation with the Chairman, will take many decisions every working day. 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 Clerk is responsible for advising Members on the making of Council policy and for ensuring that such policy is carried out.

The Council's Terms of Reference determines which Committees, if any, deal with particular matters and at which level decisions are taken.

Many matters are delegated to the Clerk, who can make decisions on them working within established Council policies.

The day to day management of staff and services is the responsibility of the Clerk.

Both Members and the Clerk must work within the law.