

Aylesbury Town Council Liberal Democrat Group Standing Orders

1 Aims

The aims of the Aylesbury Town Council Liberal Democrat Group ("the Group") shall be:

- a) To advance collectively the aims and objectives of the Liberal Democrats within Aylesbury Town Council ("the Council") through the expression of a co-ordinated and cohesive viewpoint and action.
- b) To secure the implementation of Liberal Democrat policies and principles applied to local needs
- c) To increase the effectiveness of members as representatives of their constituents
- d) To support local and community-based organisations to progress their aims where those aims are consistent with Liberal Democrat principles and policies
- e) To work with Liberal Democrats on other councils and with the Aylesbury Liberal Democrats (referred to as "the Local Party") on the fulfilment of local needs, the development of policy and the selection and election of candidates for public office.

2) Membership of the Council Group

a) Voting Members of the Council Group are:

i) Members of the Liberal Democrats elected to the Council after having been sanctioned as a Liberal Democrat Candidate by a Delegated Nominating Officer and signing the Local Party's Candidate Contract, a copy of which is attached at Annex A to these Standing Orders.

ii) Any other Councillor who has following, their election to the Council, been accepted as a member of the Liberal Democrats and who has been accepted into the Council Group by a majority of its existing members in a vote. They must also have been successfully approved according to the procedure laid down by the Local Party and signed the Candidate Contract either prior to joining the Group or within five weeks after.

b) Non-voting membership of the Group is open to:

- i) A representative of the Local Party covering the Council's area
- ii) All approved and/or selected prospective candidates for the Council
- iii) The Prospective Parliamentary Candidate and Prospective Police and Crime Commissioner candidate for the area of the Council

iv) Members of other local authorities representing wards or divisions wholly or partly within the area if the Council

c) All members of the group must remain members of the Liberal Democrats at all times and observe the terms of the Candidate Contract. Any member of the Group in arrears with the financial contribution set out in the Candidate Contract may not vote in any Group Election and is not eligible to stand as a candidate. Where giving a contribution would cause financial hardship, a reduced rate can be agreed by the Local Party Treasurer.

3) Officers, Group Spokespersons and their duties

3.1 The Annual Meeting shall elect the following officers:

- a) Group Leader
- b) Group Deputy Leader*
- c) Group Secretary*

*These posts are Group administrative posts and hold no authority within the Council itself.

3.2 The Annual Meeting shall also decide nominations for the following positions at the Annual Meeting of Aylesbury Town Council:

- a) Council Leader.
- b) Mayor
- c) Deputy Mayor

Preference for Mayor or Deputy Mayor will be given to those that have not previously performed the role of Mayor/Deputy Mayor.

- d) Candidates for Chairs of council committees
- e) Candidates for Vice Chairs of council committees
- f) Nominations to serve on outside bodies (these normally serve for the full term of the Council rather than being elected each year)

3.3 When the Group does not have a majority on the Council it may decide not to put forward nominations for any of the posts in 3.2 above. It may, however, nominate a spokesperson to take the lead on each individual committee.

3.4 Nominations for Chairs and Vice Chairs of Committees will normally be decided by the Leader putting forward a set of nominations to be

agreed on block by the Group but this shall not prevent the Group deciding on nominations for individual Chairs and Vice Chairs should it so wish.

3.5 Those elected at the AGM will hold office for a year, unless stated, but should any of these positions fall vacant during the Council year, the next Group Meeting shall choose a replacement to serve for the remainder of the term.

3.6 Duties of Officers

a) The Group Leader will:

- i) be responsible for the general coordination of Liberal Democrat initiatives and Group activity.
- ii) be the spokesperson for the Group when necessary and the Group's nominee for Council Leader.
- iii) ensure that Liberal Democrat initiatives are properly publicised, as well as Group responses on topical matters and that copies of press statements shall be circulated to Group members
- iv) be responsible for official communication with Council staff on Group concerns.

The Group Leader may devolve specific actions or duties listed above to other Group Officers or members subject to retaining overall responsibility.

The Group Leader may devolve specific actions or duties listed above to Group spokespeople/committee chairs where those actions or duties primarily concern their spokesperson or committee.

b) The Group Deputy Leader will:

- i) support the Leader in their work;
- ii) take on such leadership duties as the Leader may, from time to time, decide;
- iii) cover for the Leader and take action on their behalf when the Leader is unavailable and cannot take action in the timescale required.

For avoidance of doubt, when the Leader is also Leader of the Council their role under c above only applies to Group matters and not Council duties.

c) The Group Secretary will:

- i) organise and give notice of Group Meetings etc to members;
- ii) record and publish as appropriate decisions of Group meetings;
- iii) carry out general secretarial duties on behalf of the Group;
- iv) assume such administrative tasks as the Leader may, from time to time, decide.

4) Group Elections

4.1 The Leader will recommend to a Group meeting a Returning Officer (RO), who shall be independent of the Group in good time for elections to be held at the Group's Annual Meeting. All communications from or to the RO may be in writing or by e-mail unless stated otherwise.

4.2 All officers and Group spokesperson outlined in Section 3 shall be subject to election at the Group's Annual Meeting. The Returning Officer will circulate a list of all positions to be elected to voting Group Members 21 days before the Annual Meeting. Nominations must be submitted to the RO at least 14 days before the Annual Meeting. A list of valid nominations will be circulated to all Group Members not less than seven days before the Annual Meeting. The RO may delegate the sending out of this information to the Group Secretary but not the receipt of nominations.

4.3 Where the full Council elections occur so close to the Annual Council meeting to make this timetable impractical a shorter timetable will operate. In this case the Returning Officer shall circulate an amended timetable to all councillors and selected candidates at the Group meeting preceding the annual elections. Where practical, the close of nominations shall be not less than 48 hours before the meeting.

4.4 The Returning Officer shall run the elections in accordance with the Party's nationally mandated Election Rules.

4.5 The Group Leader must submit their own resignation as Leader of the Council to the Council if a new Group Leader is elected.

4.6 If a vacancy occurs for any officer or group spokesperson outlined in Section 3 before their appointment would expire at the Annual Meeting, the vacancy shall be filled:

- i) through a by-election held following the same timetable outlined in section 4b: or
- ii) by the Group Leader nominating a member of the Group to fill the vacancy and seeking approval to that nomination at the next Group Meeting.

5 Group Meetings

5.1 Councillors are expected to attend all full Group meetings and any pre-meetings for any committee of which they are members. If unable to attend, they should inform the Group Secretary, Leader or relevant Spokesperson.

5.2 A quorum at any meeting of the Group shall be one third of the voting membership of the Group (or committee).

5.3 Pre-Council Meetings

a) The Group may meet prior to every meeting of the Council to discuss the agenda for the Council Meeting and other business brought forward by Group Members. The meeting prior to the Annual Council will be the Annual Meeting of the Group as detailed in section 3 of these Standing Orders.

b) The Leader and, where appropriate, Committee Spokespersons/Chairs will report and answer questions on their areas of responsibility. The Group will agree arrangements for questions/statements/speeches by Liberal Democrat group members in individual debates.

c) All Group Members will be given at least 7 days' notice of any items to be discussed at a pre-council meeting that do not arise from the Council Agenda.

5.4 Ordinary Meetings

a) The Group will meet at least four times a year to discuss Group strategy, policies and business. The Annual Meeting will count as one such meeting. Such meetings may take place immediately before or after a pre-council meeting or as a dedicated session of a wider Lib Dem "away-day" or as stand-alone meetings.

b) Agendas and any relevant papers for Ordinary meetings should be circulated seven days in advance of the meeting, either on paper or by e-mail. No items for decision can be taken under Any Other Business, except in exceptional circumstances with the agreement of two thirds of the group present at the meeting.

5.5 Special Meetings.

Special Group Meetings may be called by not less than one third of the voting group membership (or two members – whichever is the larger) who shall submit a duly signed request to the Group Secretary, or at the request of the Leader or a majority of the Group Officers. Such a meeting must be held within 14 days of the Group Secretary's receipt of the request. 7 days' notice of the meeting must be given to all Group members save in exceptional and urgent circumstances, when this may be reduced.

5.6 General Rules Concerning Group Business

- a) The Group will operate any national or local code of conduct in respect of all formal Group Meetings, particularly in regard to the declaration of pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests of members.
- b) Members (both voting and non-voting) declaring a disclosable pecuniary interest in a matter must leave the room during its discussion at Group meetings.
- c) Members should inform the Group Leader of any problems or concerns that arise over their declaration of interests.
- d) Members will present a united public face on matters that concern Liberal Democrat policy and principles in so far as may be compatible with individual conscience.
- d) The Group will prepare for Liberal Democrat initiatives at future meetings of Committees or Council.

6 Respect for others and Disciplinary Issues

6.1 All Group members must comply with the following:

- a) You must treat others with respect and must not bully, harass or intimidate any party member, member of party staff, member of Parliamentary staff, party volunteer, employee of Aylesbury Town Council or member of the public.
- b) Any member of the Group with doubts about their future commitment to the Group shall discuss the matter with the Group Leader. A decision to resign from the Group should be notified to the Group Leader and Group members at least 24 hours before the appropriate Council Officer is informed or any public statement made.

- c) Members of the Group must ensure that they do not fall into arrears with Council Tax (which may affect their right to vote at Council Meetings) and do not incur any other debts that may cause political embarrassment to the Group. Any Councillor finding themselves in such a position should notify the Group Leader at the earliest possible opportunity.
 - d) A member of the Group charged by the police with a criminal offence shall immediately inform the Group Leader. They shall be suspended without prejudice until charges have been dropped or until all legal proceedings have been concluded.
 - e) A member of the group under investigation by any Council Standards Committee shall immediately inform the Group Leader.
- 6.2 Where a member of the Group has failed to comply with the rules outlined in these Standing Orders or otherwise behaved in a way that might be considered to bring the Party into disrepute, the Liberal Democrats' nationally agreed procedures governing such matters may be invoked.

6.3 Nothing in these Standing Orders shall prevent any claimant from using the Liberal Democrat Party's official Complaints Procedure

6.4 Nothing in these Standing Orders shall prevent any Group Member against whom disciplinary action is taken availing themselves of the Liberal Democrat Party's appeal procedures.

7) Group Loyalty

7.1 Members are expected to support all Group decisions on "organisational matters" such as the appointment of members to Committees, nominations of Mayor, Deputy Mayor, Chairs and Vice Chairs of Committees and appointments to outside bodies.

7.2 On matters of policy fully discussed by the Group, members are expected to support the Group. The Group recognises that occasionally a member will feel unable to do so through deeply held conviction or conscience. In these circumstances the member shall inform the Group Leader/Committee Spokesperson in advance and is requested to refrain from speaking or voting against the Group position.

7.3 Members are asked to support Liberal Democrat Councillor colleagues on local ward matters that have little or no impact politically on other areas of the Council. If they feel unable to do so, they should inform the Leader and the Ward Councillor(s) in advance of the meeting.

7.4 If a matter that has not been discussed by the Group, does not follow from decisions that have been taken by the Group and does not arise

from a manifesto commitment arises in Committee or at Council, it is recognised that, in the absence of a formal Group position, members may wish to disagree with colleagues. When doing so, members are expected to treat colleagues and their views with respect and avoid giving political ammunition to other parties.

7.5 Before raising matters in Committee relating to an area without Liberal Democrat Councillors, members are asked to find out the views of any selected prospective candidate for that Ward or, if no candidate has yet been approved, those of the nearest Liberal Democrat Councillor or the relevant Local/Brach/Party.

7.6 Group members who fail to attend a Group Meeting and who do not make their intentions known on matters discussed at the Group meeting are expected to abide by Group decisions. It is not sufficient to abstain from voting in these circumstances.

7.7 All Notices of Motions for the Council should be agreed by the Group before being submitted. In emergency or when the timetabling of Group Meetings makes this impractical, consultation with the Group Leader and any relevant Committee Spokesperson, if appropriate, is sufficient.

7.8 Members of the Planning and Licensing Committee and any other committee with a quasi-judicial function cannot and will not be asked to follow a Group line.

7.9 Group Members (both voting and non-voting) shall respect the confidentiality of any politically or personally sensitive information that they receive from other members of the group or from Council Officers. In particular, all Group agendas, minutes and reports shall be treated as confidential. This confidentiality provision shall not apply to any information that is already in the public domain where the person from whom the information came has given express permission for disclosure or where the information would be available under any Freedom of Information legislation.

8 Attendance at Council and Committee Meetings

8.1 Full Council

a) All members are expected to attend full Council Meetings

b) Any member who cannot attend a Council Meeting or expects to arrive late or to have to leave early must inform the Group Leader as soon as possible before the meeting. Members should not leave early without the consent of the Leader.

8.2 Committees

- a) All members are expected to serve on at least one committee.
- b) Any member who cannot attend a Committee Meeting must inform the Committee spokesperson as soon as possible beforehand.
- c) For any Committee on which the Council allows substitute members, a member who cannot attend should seek to arrange a substitute. If they are unable to find one, they should let the Committee spokesperson know as soon as possible.
- d) Members are expected to attend the whole of any Committee Meeting of which they are a member. and, if they have to leave early or arrive late, they should inform the Committee Spokesperson in advance of the meeting and discuss whether it might be better to appoint a substitute for them at that meeting. Members should not leave early without the consent of the Committee spokesperson.

9 Representing the Community and Campaigning

9.1 All members of the Group must co-operate with Ward colleagues and the local party in keeping in touch with the residents of their Ward by means of newsletters/Focus leaflets regularly. Newsletters and digital communications should be issued in co-operation with the Local Party regularly outside election periods and copies retaining and available on request to any member of the group.

9.2 Officers of the Group shall ensure that it complies with procedures outlined in the constitution of the Liberal Democrats in England or relevant instructions issued by the Party at a National or Regional level.

9.3 Members of the Group are expected to keep the public and press informed of their activities by using the Party's usual campaign techniques. Press releases about the Group's views should be issued by the Local Party, the Group Leader or the Councillor leading on the subject area with the agreement of the leader.

10 Training and Development

10.1 Members of the Group will discuss their personal training and development needs annually with Group officers. This discussion will include consideration of the development of Ward organisation and their contribution to the strategic objectives of the Local Party. Actions will be agreed as appropriate.

10.2 Members of the Group are expected to comply with the Councillor Contract/Agreement which they signed with the Local Party when they were approved as a candidate. A copy of the current contract is annexed to these SOs for information.

11 Amendments to Standing Orders

11.1 Any amendments or additions to these Standing Orders can only be made at a Group Meeting called in accordance with Section 5 above and by a two thirds majority of those present and voting.

11.2 Nothing in these Standing Orders, or omitted from them, countermands any rights or duties granted to, or imposed upon, group members by the provisions of the State or Federal Liberal Democrat constitutions or rulings by the Party at a Federal, National or Regional level.

11.3 Nothing in these Standing Orders restricts a Group Member's right to use the Liberal Democrat Complaints process – though Members are expected to seek to resolve issues informally through the Group and/or the Local Party before raising any formal complaint.

11.4 In case of dispute as to the meaning or intent of these Standing Orders, if the issue cannot be resolved locally, the regional or state party may be asked to interpret these standing orders and their decision shall be final.