

# Think Councillor Guide

## 1. Overview

"Think Councillor" is all about encouraging staff to think about our councillors in the work they do. After all, councillors are responsible for much of what we do and the decisions that are made so we need to keep them as informed as possible.

Above all, councillors are elected representatives, which means they are the voice of the people of Fylde whom we all serve, and they're also the ones who are accountable to the public for council services at the ballot box.

"Think Councillor" isn't just about the formal contact you might have with councillors at committee meetings or working groups. It's about making sure you think about councillors in everything you do.

This guide sits alongside a governance ipool module aimed at outlining the way the council conducts business, sets policy, and the role of councillors within this framework.

## 2. Principles and responsibilities

There are six key principles which staff must observe:

1. Put the needs and expectations of our councillors at the heart of everything we do;
2. Keep our councillors informed particularly when a matter affects a specific electoral ward;
3. Provide a high standard of service and show respect to our councillors at all times, and seek that respect in return, whilst remaining politically neutral;
4. Support our councillors to carry out their roles;
5. Find out what our councillors need and respond to it; and
6. Work positively with our councillors to continually improve our services for the people of Fylde.

"Think Councillor" has the full backing of the Senior Management Team.

The Chief Executive, statutory officers and heads of service are responsible for ensuring that the principles of "Think Councillor" are embedded within service areas, leading by example.

## 3. If you are a manager

### **You should:**

- Support your staff to "Think Councillor"

- Ensure that your teams know how to "Think Councillor"
- Make sure your service is delivering the formal reports to council/committees in time, in the right format and with the information our councillors need to make a decision.
- Introduce the "Think Councillor" guide at team meetings or by using another means of communication that is available to you.
- Use this guide alongside the ipool module
- Make sure your staff know which councillors are relevant to their service or their geographical areas.
- Talk to your staff individually about what sort of contact they have with councillors and how they can use this guide and the tools to improve their service to our elected members.
- Build the "Think Councillor" principles into Performance Development Reviews and help your staff to develop their skills in "Thinking Councillor" and responding to our councillors' needs.

## 4. If you are an officer

### **You should:**

- Ensure that our councillors are provided with relevant and timely information, having regard to the [protocol on member/officer relations](#), as well as data protection and any other statutory provision relating to confidentiality and confidential material.
- Inform the local councillor of any service-related issue which is likely to affect or be of interest to an electoral ward. It is extremely important that you do this before the matter is made public.
- Understand that whilst you may come into contact with county or parish councillors in your job, it is important that Fylde Borough Councillors are given first consideration to avoid any surprises.
- Make sure you know which councillors need to know about the work you do and talk to your manager about the best way to do this.
- Think about which councillors need to 'know' first e.g. leader, committee chair, ward councillor, and think about the best way of doing it.
- Complete the governance ipool module.
- Discuss with the team how to improve our service to councillors and to support their role.
- Ensure you treat all members with equal respect and provide advice and support to members in a politically impartial manner in accordance with the Member/Officer protocol.

## 5. Useful tools

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### **Get to know your councillors**

You should familiarise yourself with the councillors that comprise Fylde Council by reviewing the Directory of Fylde Borough Councillors, their wards and areas of responsibility.

<b>Protocol on member/officer relations</b>	You should familiarise yourself with the protocol on member/officer relations. It is a document for all officers and provides a guide to good working relationships between officers and councillors, to define the respective roles of members and officers and provide some principles governing conduct.
<b>iPool module</b>	This module will build your knowledge of the council's governance structure, the role of members, members with special responsibilities and who they are and provide a resume of the Member/Officer protocol.
<b>1-1 briefings on 'important to know' issues for our councillors</b>	There are a number of reasons why our councillors should be briefed. For example, if they are attending an outside meeting and need some background information, there is an issue which affects a particular electoral ward or if they ask you to provide information about your service. If you receive such a request you are advised to talk it through with your manager who will support you in this.
<b>Report writing and supporting council and committees</b>	Make sure you are familiar with the Council's Report Writing Guide and if you need any additional guidance contact Ian Curtis, Head of Governance. Also familiarise yourself with the closing dates of meetings and make sure you circulate your reports well in advance of this, sharing a draft copy with the respective Chairman/Lead Member.
<b>Member briefings</b>	If appropriate, consider hosting a member briefing. These can be used to brief councillors on different services, policy developments, latest initiatives, progress and achievements.
<b>Working with parish and town councils</b>	Parish and Town Councils are the level of government where decisions are made or influenced at the most local level and it is therefore important that we keep them informed and consult with them about important decisions. There are District-Parish Liaison Meetings scheduled throughout the year and if there is something you wish to share or consult on, please liaise with your Head of Service in the first instance.