

AGENDA 1, Enc i) Council Roles

Legally Required Roles

Chair

Pursuant to section 15 (2) of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council must elect a Chair at the Annual Meeting of the Council in May. The Chair is responsible for ensuring that effective and lawful decisions are taken at meetings of the Council and, assisted by the Executive Officer, guides activities by managing the meetings of the Full Council.

The Council is not lawfully constituted without a Chair, and this must be the first item on the agenda at the Annual Meeting of the Council. All councillors have one vote, with the Chair having a casting vote in the event of a tie.

Proper Officer

The Executive Officer is the proper officer of the Council and is responsible for advising the Council on governance, ethical, and procedural matters. The Executive Officer also acts as the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO), managing the Council's finances and ensuring proper financial records are kept. This appointment is a legal requirement for all Town and Parish Councils.

Responsible Financial Officer (RFO)

In accordance with Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972, every local authority must appoint an officer to be responsible for the proper administration of its financial affairs. At a Town Council, the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) fulfils this statutory role. The RFO ensures the Council's finances are managed lawfully and prudently, maintaining accurate financial records, preparing budgets, monitoring income and expenditure, and advising the Council on financial strategy and risk. The RFO is responsible for producing statutory financial reports, including the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR), and ensuring compliance with relevant financial regulations, internal controls, and audit requirements. While the RFO may also be the Proper Officer, the roles are distinct in their legal responsibilities.

Other Roles

Civic Head and a Deputy Civic Head

Ashington Town Council does not adopt the Town Mayor model, legally entitled to the Chair of a Town Council by Section 245 (6) of the Local Government Act 1972. Instead, the Council appoints a Civic Head and a Deputy Civic Head at the Annual Meeting. The Civic Head is expected to attend civic and ceremonial functions that require a civic presence but has no decision-making authority.

Vice-Chair

The appointment of a Vice-Chair is not a legal requirement, but Ashington Town Council chooses to appoint one at the Annual Meeting. The Vice-Chair's role is to take up the position of Chair in the absence of the Chair. However, if the Chair is absent from a meeting and no Vice-Chair has been appointed, the Council can appoint one of the councillors present at that meeting to chair the proceedings. This temporary appointment would only be valid for that specific meeting.

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Chair of Standing Committees

The Council must appoint a Chair for each of its standing committees to preside over meetings, ensuring they are conducted in an orderly and lawful manner. This requirement is consistent with good governance principles and is supported by the Local Government Act 1972, particularly Schedule 12, which governs the proceedings of local authority meetings.

The appointed Chair has the authority to exercise a casting vote if necessary and plays a key role in steering the business of the committee in line with Council policy and legal requirements.

It is important to note that all councillors have equal voting rights at Council meetings, with the exception of the Chair's casting vote in the event of a tie.