

# **Report to the September 2024 Meeting on the Dissolution of Leader and Deputy Leader Roles**

## **Purpose**

This report outlines the decision, as communicated by members following the Labour Group meeting in July 2024, that members no longer support the group meeting arrangements and the roles of Leader and Deputy Leader, following resignation, should not be reappointed. It seeks formal approval for this decision and provides clarification on how this change impacts Council operations and Cllrs' responsibilities. Additionally, it affirms that this decision does not affect Cllrs' political affiliations or party memberships.

## **Background**

In July 2024, following the Labour Group meeting held on Thursday 25th July, a decision was communicated that group meetings in advance of the Council's formal decision-making process at Council meetings was no longer supported. That the resignation of the Leader was received, and subsequently without a group meeting arrangement to roles of both Leader and Deputy Leader would be redundant. As the Executive Officer, it is my responsibility to ensure that the Council continues to function effectively and lawfully, in compliance with the Local Government Act 1972 and the Council's Standing Orders.

Operating without these roles, and without the group meeting arrangement aligns with the standard practice across the majority of Town Councils in the UK. This change reinforces the principle that Cllrs hold equal responsibility in the decision-making process, and operations will continue with the same adherence to rules, processes, and democratic principles.

## **Political Affiliation and Membership**

Importantly, the removal of a group meeting arrangement has no impact on Cllrs' individual political affiliations or membership in any political party. Cllrs remain free to align with political groups and maintain their political identities.

## **Legal and Procedural Framework**

Ashington Town Council remains governed by the Local Government Act 1972, its Standing Orders, and the Councillors' Code of Conduct, ensuring that the Council operates transparently and in the best interest of the public. The Nolan Principles of Public Life will continue to guide all Cllrs in fulfilling their duties.

Meetings will proceed as normal, with the Chair of each meeting continuing to hold a casting vote in the event of a tie, which remains the only distinction in authority. All Cllrs retain equal opportunities to propose agenda items and participate in discussions, ensuring inclusivity and collaborative decision-making.

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### **Impact on Council Operations**

The removal of a group meeting arrangement and designated Leader and Deputy Leader should not hinder the efficient functioning of Ashington Town Council. Indeed, many councils successfully operate under this model, where the Clerk works closely with the Chair of the meeting to set the agenda. Any Cllr, however, may request to include items for discussion, maintaining flexibility and ensuring diverse views are represented.

Council debates will continue to take place in accordance with statutory expectations. Discussions on all Council matters will occur during official meetings that are open to the public, except for confidential items.

### **Support for Councillors**

Council officers remain available to support all Cllrs in the decision-making process. As is current practice, agendas and supporting documents will be provided at least three working days before meetings, with Ashington Town Council continuing its commitment to distribute materials a full week in advance.

### **Conclusion**

Should the Council formally approve to dissolve the roles of Leader and Deputy Leader, there will be a requirement to alter the standing orders of the Council to reflect this. To ensure clarity and legal compliance, it is necessary to formalise the removal of these roles from the Standing Orders and reassign any roles or responsibilities that were previously attached to these positions.