

ASHFIELD DISTRICT COUNCIL



Ashfield

Council Offices,
Urban Road,
Kirkby in Ashfield
Nottingham
NG17 8DA

Agenda

Standards and Personnel Appeals Committee

Date: **Monday, 25th July, 2016**

Time: **6.30 pm**

Venue: **Committee Room, Council Offices, Urban Road, Kirkby-in-Ashfield**

For any further information please contact:

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01623 457318

STANDARDS AND PERSONNEL APPEALS COMMITTEE

Membership

Chairman:

Councillor Lauren Mitchell

Councillors:

Amanda Brown
Jackie James
Lachlan Morrison
Helen Smith

Steve Carroll
Cathy Mason
Phil Rostance
Jason Zadrozny

FILMING/AUDIO RECORDING NOTICE

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SUMMONS

You are hereby requested to attend a meeting of the Standards and Personnel Appeals Committee to be held at the time/place and on the date mentioned above for the purpose of transacting the business set out below.



R. Mitchell
Chief Executive

AGENDA

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- 1. To Receive Apologies for Absence**
- 2. Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary and non-Disclosable Pecuniary / Other interests**
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Agenda Item 3

STANDARDS AND PERSONNEL APPEALS COMMITTEE

Meeting held in the Committee Room, Council Offices, Urban Road, Kirkby-in-Ashfield,

on Monday, 14th March, 2016 at 6.30 pm

Present: Councillor Lachlan Morrison in the Chair;

Councillors Jim Aspinall, Amanda Brown,
Catherine Mason, Philip Rostance and
Christine Quinn-Wilcox.

Apologies for Absence: Councillor Jackie James.

Officers Present: Beth Brown, Ruth Dennis, Alan Maher.

In Attendance: Councillor Robert Sears-Piccavey and Councillor
Paul Roberts.

SP.23 To receive apologies for absence, if any.

Councillor Helen Smith.

SP.24 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary and Non Disclosable Pecuniary / Other Interests.

There were no declarations of interest made.

SP.25 To Receive and Approve as a Correct Record, the Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 11 January 2016.

The minutes of the Committee meeting held on 11 January 2016 were approved as a true record.

SP.26 Annual Review.

The Committee was reminded that the Local Government Association had carried out an ethical governance review in 2014. The main conclusion of this review was that relationships and standards of behaviour between some Members and Officers had become unacceptable. The Association had made ten recommendations to help improve matters. The report explained what action had been taken on each of them since the last update to the Committee, in July 2015. In particular, the report pointed out that regular meetings of the group leaders now take place. These had been formalised as the 'Cross Party Update Meeting', with agreed terms of reference. These meetings were intended to provide an opportunity for the leaders to discuss

and monitor the ethical conduct of their group members.

The report included a statistical analysis of the complaints which had been received and how they had changed over time. This showed that in overall terms the number of complaints had gone down. Most of the recent complaints were from the public about elected Members. A few were from Councillors complaining about other Councillors. Recently, none had been submitted by Officers complaining about Members. It was noted that most complaints between Members tend to be about 'respect' issues.

The Committee discussed the report. Members generally welcomed the long term reduction in the number of complaints and the fact that they currently do not involve officers. The meeting was reminded that under the Member-Officer protocol any complaints which Members have about Officers are referred in the first instance to the Chief Executive and investigated under the Council's disciplinary policy.

The Committee also discussed what action can be taken when complaints are found to be justified. Members recognised that since the nationally determined changes to the way in which the standards system works, local authorities no longer have an array of sanctions which they can impose on Members who do not behave appropriately, or fail to receive appropriate training etc. The Committee recognised that although it was no longer possible to suspend Members it is possible to publicly name them through a censure sanction, which the Council has used.

The meeting also heard about what progress had been made on training. They were reminded that mandatory training on the Code of Conduct had taken place, which most Members had attended. A follow-up session for those few Members who had been unable to attend would be arranged. The Committee was also reminded that it had agreed that training on 'Safeguarding' issues should now be mandatory for all Members. In this context a training session had been held in February, with a further session planned for those who had been unable to attend.

The Committee was reminded that a recruitment exercise was carried out in the autumn to appoint two Co-opted Members. This exercise had not proved successful and so was in the process of being re-run.

At the conclusion of the discussion, Members considered what further action they wished to take and especially what further information that they would like to receive.

RESOLVED

- (a) That the Committee notes the updated position in respect of the recommendations of the Local Government Association as a result of their ethical governance review and any outstanding issues;
- (b) That the Committee receives annually information on both the number and type of complaints received about elected Members and their attendance at training sessions;

- (c) That as part of the review of the Members Allowances Scheme, the Independent Review Panel should be asked to look at whether attendance at training sessions and appropriate standards of behaviour can be linked to the allowances scheme.

Reasons

To enable the Committee to monitor the implementation of the LGA's recommendations and the impact of the changes. To carry out its role in monitoring ethical governance.

SP.27 Quarterly Complaints Monitoring Report

The report to Committee provided information on complaints of alleged Member misconduct and the progress which had been made in assessing them. In particular, it explained that no new complaints had been received since the last update, in January 2016. Members were reminded that the two complaints under investigation were nearing completion and that the 4 other complaints had been assessed in early March. The Committee discussed the report. As part of this discussion, they noted the reasons for delays, which were often outside of the Council's control.

RESOLVED

That the Committee note the updated position in respect of the Members' Code of Conduct complaints for the period 1 January 2016 to 4 March 2016.

Reasons

To reflect good practice.

SP.28 Annual Review of the Whistle Blowing Policy.

The Committee then considered a report which set out how the Council's 'Whistleblowing Policy' had operated over the last twelve months. Briefly, it explained that only one incidence of whistleblowing had been brought to the attention of the Monitoring Officer during this period. This complaint related to the accuracy of time keeping and leave taking. Members were also reminded that the policy had been comprehensively updated in July 2015. However, some further technical changes would now be required in order to reflect the Council's participation in the Central Midlands Audit Partnership, which the Committee was asked to formally approve.

RESOLVED

- (a) That the Committee notes the review of the Whistleblowing Policy and how it has operated over the last twelve months;
- (b) That the Committee approves the revised policy annexed to the report.

Reasons

To ensure that the Committee is adequately informed to enable it to monitor

the operation of the Whistleblowing Policy. To ensure that the policy remains fit for purpose.

SP.29 Politically Restricted Posts.

The Monitoring Officer explained that the trade unions had raised no objections to the proposed list of politically restricted posts. As a consequence, the Committee was asked to now agree it as the definitive list. Members discussed the report and agreed to the proposal.

RESOLVED

That the Committee approves the list of Politically Restricted Posts, in accordance with the requirements of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and associated regulations, as appended to the report.

Reasons

To comply with the requirements of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and associated regulations.

The meeting closed at 7.40 pm

Chairman.

Agenda Item 4

REPORT TO: STANDARDS AND PERSONNEL APPEALS COMMITTEE
DATE: 25 JULY 2016

HEADING: STANDARDS AND PERSONNEL APPEALS COMMITTEE – WORK PLAN – 2016-2017

PORTFOLIO HOLDER: N/A

KEY DECISION: NO **SUBJECT TO CALL-IN:** NO

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report asks Members of the Committee to consider and approve the attached Work Plan for the Committee for the next municipal year.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

The Committee is requested to consider and approve the Standards and Personnel Appeals Committee Work Plan for 2016-2017.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

To reflect good practice.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED (with reasons why not adopted)

The Committee may consider adding or deleting work items and may consider if the timeframe for completion of tasks needs amending.

5. BACKGROUND

The draft work plan for the Standards and Personnel Appeals Committee for the municipal year 2016-2017 is attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

The Committee is asked to consider the draft plan for approval.

6. IMPLICATIONS

Corporate Plan:

The Council will strive to ensure effective community leadership, through good governance, transparency, accountability and appropriate behaviours.

Legal:

There are no significant legal issues associated with the approval of the work plan. Legal issues in relation to specific pieces of work will be considered at that time.

Financial:

There are no financial implications associated with approving the work plan. Any financial issues in relation to specific pieces of work will be considered at that time.

Health and Well-Being / Environmental Management and Sustainability:

There are no Health and Well-Being or Environmental Management and Sustainability implications associated with this report.

Human Resources:

There are no HR implications associated with this report.

Diversity/Equality:

There are no Diversity/Equality implications associated with this report.

Community Safety:

There are no Community Safety implications associated with this monitoring report.

Other Implications:

None.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

REPORT AUTHOR AND CONTACT OFFICER

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ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE (GOVERNANCE)
& MONITORING OFFICER
01623 457009
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Standards and Personnel Appeals Committee Work Plan – 2016/2017

| Proposed Work Item | Timeframe |
|---|--|
| <p>1. Quarterly Complaint Update</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A report to committee to keep it updated in respect of new and ongoing complaints made relating to the conduct of Members. | <p>July 2016 October 2016 December 2016 March 2017</p> |
| <p>2. Members with External Roles which Might Conflict with their Councillor Role</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore the potential to incorporate guidance and/or requirements into the Code of Conduct for Members who have external roles which might conflict with their Councillor role. | <p>July 2016</p> |
| <p>3. Update Regarding Implementation of LGA Recommendations and assessment of the impact.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Including an update regarding the Appointment of Co-optees and Retention of Independent Persons | <p>October 2016 March 2017</p> |
| <p>4. Member Development Strategy and Programme</p> | <p>October 2016</p> |
| <p>5. DBS Checks for Councillors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To consider best practice To consider recommending an approach and policy to Council | <p>October 2016</p> |
| <p>6. Secret Societies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore the potential to incorporate a requirement to declare membership of secret societies into the Members' Code of Conduct. Draft for approval suggested wording for inclusion in the Code of Conduct if it is legally possible to include such a requirement for recommendation to Council. | <p>December 2016</p> |

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>7. Members' Allowances – Performance Related Element of the Basic Allowance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of policy for approval by Council | <p>December 2016 March 2017 (If required)</p> |
| <p>8. Whistleblowing Policy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual report to consider amendments (if required) to the policy and to monitor the application of the policy | <p>March 2017</p> |
| <p>9. Annual Review</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report to consider the work of the Committee over the year compared to the Work Programme and to consider new actions. | <p>March 2017</p> |
| <p>10. Constitution Review</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration of proposed amendments to the Constitution for recommendation to Council | <p>March 2017</p> |

Agenda Item 5

REPORT TO: STANDARDS AND PERSONNEL APPEALS COMMITTEE **DATE:** 25 July 2016

HEADING: QUARTERLY COMPLAINTS MONITORING REPORT

PORTFOLIO HOLDER: N/A

KEY DECISION: NO **SUBJECT TO CALL-IN:** NO

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report provides an update in respect of Members' Code of Conduct complaints.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

The Committee is requested to note the updated position in respect of Members' Code of Conduct complaints as set out in the Appendix for the period commencing on xx 2016 and ending on 15 July 2016.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

To reflect good practice.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED (with reasons why not adopted)

No alternative options are considered appropriate.

5. BACKGROUND

This report outlines in the Appendix the number of complaints of alleged Member misconduct outstanding and a summary overview of the status of new and ongoing complaints.

One complaint is due to be considered at a hearing, which is to be arranged shortly. The other complaint which was investigated has been concluded and a finding of no breach has been made.

Four complaints have been assessed as not requiring any further action.

There have been two new complaints received since an update was last provided to the Committee in March 2016 which require assessment. There is a link between the two complaints and alternative approaches are being considered before a final assessment is made.

I have been contacted by members of the public regarding three potential claims. I provided advice and guidance in relation to the process for lodging a complaint and requested specific information. To date, no formal complaints have been received in relation to these initial approaches.

6. IMPLICATIONS

Corporate Plan:

The Council will strive to ensure effective community leadership, through good governance, transparency, accountability and appropriate behaviours.

Legal:

There are no legal implications associated with this monitoring report.

Financial:

There are no financial implications associated with this monitoring report.

Health and Well-Being / Environmental Management and Sustainability:

There are no Health and Well-Being or Environmental Management and Sustainability implications associated with this monitoring report.

Human Resources:

There are no HR implications associated with this monitoring report.

Diversity/Equality:

There are no Diversity/Equality implications associated with this monitoring report.

Community Safety:

There are no Community Safety implications associated with this monitoring report.

Other Implications:

None.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

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QUARTERLY UPDATE OF COMPLAINTS FROM 1 MARCH 2016 TO 15 JULY 2016

| REFERENCE | DATE COMPLAINT RECEIVED BY MONITORING OFFICER | COMPLAINANT TYPE | COMPLAINT ABOUT A DISTRICT OR PARISH COUNCILLOR | ALLEGED BREACH | LOCAL ASSESSMENT DECISION (MONITORING OFFICER IN CONSULTATION WITH INDEPENDENT PERSON) | DATE OF ASSESSMENT DECISION |
|-------------|---|---------------------|---|---|--|-----------------------------|
| ADAC2014-03 | 20 March 2014 | District Councillor | District Councillor | 2.1 Respect 2.2 Contrary to high standards of conduct 2.7 Disrepute | Referred for investigation. The draft report was sent to relevant parties for their comments by 4 January 2016. No comments were received by the deadline. The final report was issued and has been considered by the Monitoring Officer and the Independent Person. The matter is to be referred for a hearing; arrangements for the hearing are being made. | 16 February 2015 |
| ADC2015-02 | 4 March 2015 | Public | District Councillor | Breach of requirements to | Referred for investigation. | 29 May 2015 |

| | | | | | | |
|------------|------------------|--------|---------------------|---|---|---------------|
| | | | | <p>declare interests 2.7 Disrepute 3 – acting in a manner to gain benefit Pre-determination</p> | <p>The final report was issued finding no breach of the Code of Conduct. The finding has been accepted by the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Independent Person. The matter is closed.</p> | |
| ADC2015-09 | 14 December 2015 | Public | District Councillor | <p>2.1 Respect 2.2 Contrary to high standards of conduct.</p> | <p>Considered by the Monitoring Officer and Independent Person. It was decided to take no further action.</p> | 4 March 2016 |
| ADC2015-10 | 14 December 2015 | Public | District Councillor | <p>2.1 Respect 2.2 Contrary to high standards of conduct.</p> | <p>Considered by the Monitoring Officer and Independent Person on 4 March 2016. Further information was required before a decision could be made which was obtained on 6 April 2016 and then discussed with the Independent Person. It was decided to take no further action.</p> | 11 April 2016 |

| | | | | | | |
|------------|--|---------------------|---------------------|---|--|--------------|
| ADC2015-11 | Initial information received 18 December 2015 Further information received on 20 January 2016 | Public | District Councillor | 2.1 Respect 2.2 Contrary to high standards of conduct. | Considered by the Monitoring Officer and Independent Person. It was decided to take no further action. | 4 March 2016 |
| ADC2015-12 | Initial information received 18 December 2015 Further information received on 20 January 2016 | Public | District Councillor | 2.1 Respect 2.2 Contrary to high standards of conduct. | Considered by the Monitoring Officer and Independent Person. It was decided to take no further action. | 4 March 2016 |
| ADC2016-01 | 6 April 2016 | District Councillor | District Councillor | 2.1 Respect 2.2 Contrary to high standards of conduct. 2.3 Bullying | Considering alternative options prior to assessment. | |

| | | | | | | |
|------------|-------------|---------------------|---------------------|---|---|--|
| ADC2016-02 | 25 May 2016 | District Councillor | District Councillor | 2.1 Respect 2.2 Contrary to high standards of conduct. 2.3 Bullying | Considering alternative options prior to assessment | |
|------------|-------------|---------------------|---------------------|---|---|--|

Agenda Item 6

REPORT TO: STANDARDS AND PERSONNEL (APPEALS) COMMITTEE **DATE:** 25 JULY 2016

HEADING: MEMBERS WITH OTHER ROLES WHICH MIGHT CONFLICT WITH THEIR ROLE AS A COUNCILLOR

PORTFOLIO HOLDER:

KEY DECISION: NO **SUBJECT TO CALL-IN:** NO

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The aim of this discussion paper is to highlight the importance of ensuring that Members are aware of any potential conflicts caused by other external roles or interests when carrying out their role as a District Councillor. This includes dual-hatted Members and employment interests that may cause some sensitivities when considering business of the Council. This report aims to highlight some potential areas that may require further discussion and consideration.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

Committee is requested to:

- consider the information in the report;
- discuss how it wishes to proceed on this topic – it may be considered good practice to issue guidance to all Members of the Council.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

Members have highlighted the issue of conflicts of interest, dual hatted Members and outside employment interests that may create some sensitivities as part of the Committee's work planning discussions. It is the role of the Standards and Personnel Appeals Committee to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Members and Officers; one way the Committee does this is by monitoring, reviewing and developing protocols and guidance for Members on how they can best meet the expected standards of behaviour.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED (with reasons why not adopted)

To be considered as part of this discussion paper.

5. INTRODUCTION

As a public figure, an Elected Member's role, may, at times, overlap with their personal and/or professional life and interests. When performing a public role, Elected Members should act solely in terms of the public interest and **not** act in a manner to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, family, friends, employer or in relation to their outside business interests.

The Seven Principles of Public Life

The Council's Code of Conduct incorporates The Seven Principles of Public Life – often called the “Nolan Principles”. The Seven Principles of Public Life are set out below:

Selflessness

Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends.

Integrity

Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might seek to influence them in the performance of their official duties.

Objectivity

In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.

Accountability

Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.

Openness

Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.

Honesty

Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.

Leadership

Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.

Dual-Hatted Members

It is recognised that some Councillors also represent other tiers of local government such as County or Parish Councils. Whilst the Code of Conduct does not automatically prevent Members from considering the same issue at more than one tier of local government and they may not have a disclosable pecuniary interest requiring them to not take part in any decision-making related to that issue, they may be conflicted because of actual or perceived predetermination or bias.

Dual Hatted Members must abide by the code of conduct that applies to the authority whose business they are carrying out at the time. So for example, if you are an Ashfield District Councillor and also a Nottinghamshire County Councillor, you will be bound by Ashfield District Council's Code of Conduct when carrying out District Council business.

If Members represent the District Council on any other body (an outside body appointed to by the Council), they must comply with the Ashfield District Council's Code of Conduct – except where it conflicts with any other legal obligations by which the other body is bound. Members should seek legal advice if they consider that the provisions of the Council's Code of Conduct conflict with other legal obligations. These circumstances will not arise very often.

Access to Information

The Code of Conduct also specifies that Members should not disclose information given to them in confidence by anyone, or information acquired by them which they believe, or ought reasonably to be aware, is of a confidential nature, except where:

- *“you have the consent of a person authorised to give it;*
- *you are required by law to do so;*
- *the disclosure is made to a third party for the purpose of obtaining professional legal advice provided that the third party agrees not to disclose the information to any other person; or*
- *the disclosure is:*
 - (i) reasonable and in the public interest; and*
 - (ii) made in good faith and in compliance with the reasonable requirements of the Authority; and*
 - (iii) you have consulted the Monitoring Officer prior to its release.”*

Detailed guidance regarding access to information is set out at paragraph 12 of the Member/Officer Protocol.

Members have the ability to ask for information pursuant to their legal rights to information. This right extends to such information, explanation and advice as they may reasonably need in order to assist them in discharging their role as a Member of the Council. This can range from a request for general information about some aspect of the Council's activities to a request for specific information on behalf of a constituent. Such approaches should normally be directed to the service or unit manager or Service Director. In cases of doubt, Members should approach the Monitoring Officer for assistance.

In terms of the legal rights of Members to inspect Council documents, these are covered partly by statute and partly by the common law.

Appendices C and D to the Member/Officer Protocol gives detailed guidance on the rights of Members to obtain information (attached to this report). The guidance note set out in Appendix C maps the hierarchy of rights of Members to information, but should be read in combination with the contents of the Constitution, most particularly the Access to Information Procedure Rules which cover the statutory obligations of the Authority in terms of information and its relationship with the decision-making process.

Council information provided to a Member is subject to the protections afforded by the Data Protection Act 1998 and must only be used by the Member for the purpose for which it was provided, ie in connection with the proper performance of the Member's duties as a Member of the Council. Therefore, for example, early drafts of Committee reports / briefing papers are not suitable for public disclosure and should not be used other than for the purpose for which they were supplied.

Failure to observe this obligation or disclosure of confidential information may amount to a breach of the Code of Conduct. Failure to safeguard and protect the confidentiality of personal information within the meaning of the Data Protection Act 1998 may result in prosecution of the Council and/or any individual Officer or Member by the Information Commissioner and the imposition of significant monetary penalties.

Any Member request for personal information or personal data about an individual employee (rather than a general group of employees as a whole) should only be supplied where there is a demonstrable need for that Member to have the information at that level of detail in order to carry out their duties as a Member of the Council. Any such requests should be referred to and considered by the HR manager who may, if necessary, refer the request to the Monitoring Officer.

Employment / Outside Interests

Members who are employed in a field that may give rise to the perception that a reasonable member of the public with knowledge of the relevant facts, would believe that their ability to judge the public interest would be impaired, should be cautious and ensure that they follow the Code of Conduct and the law relating to predetermination and bias carefully.

The Code of Conduct and the law relating to predetermination is not intended to prevent Members from campaigning or lobbying on specific issues, however, if a Member's employment or outside interests could give the perception that their judgment may be prejudiced, or that sensitive or confidential information may be at risk, Members should take additional care to ensure they are following the Code of Conduct or legal position explicitly. Such positions may arise for those who work in fields whereby their employer is involved in regulatory applications (such as planning or licensing) or their employer has significant interest and contact with Council matters directly (such as those Members working for political offices). In such cases, advice from the Monitoring Officer should be sought.

Next Steps

Members are asked to consider how they would like to take this forward. The Council already has a clear Code of Conduct and Member/Officer Protocol that all Members are obligated to abide by. The Committee may wish to give consideration to any further clarification or guidance for all members deemed appropriate on this topic.

6. IMPLICATIONS

Corporate Plan:

Consideration of this topic contributes towards our commitment to:

- Place and Communities
- Organisational Improvement

The Council will strive to ensure effective community leadership, through good governance, transparency, accountability and appropriate behaviours.

Legal:

Under the Localism Act 2011, the Council is required to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Members and Co-opted Members of the Authority. Failure to have and maintain high ethical standards can have significant reputational consequences.

Financial:

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Health and Well-Being / Environmental Management and Sustainability:

There are no Health and Well-Being / Environmental Management and Sustainability implications contained in this report.

Human Resources:

There are no human resource implications arising from this report.

Diversity/Equality:

There are no equality/diversity issues relating to this report.

Community Safety:

There are no community Safety implications contained in this report.

Other Implications:

None

REPORT AUTHOR AND CONTACT OFFICER

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APPENDIX C MEMBERS' ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Introduction

1. The rights of access to information by Members is a complex mix of legislation available to Members and the public alike, legislation specific to local government and “common law rights” given to Members by the Courts. This Guidance endeavours to provide some guidelines for Members through this “maze”. Members may also seek advice from the Principal Solicitor or Monitoring Officer.
2. For general rights of access available to the public, please see the Access to Information Procedure Rules as set out in the Council’s Constitution.

What is the Hierarchy of Rights?

3. The law relevant to access to information by Members includes the following:
 - 3.1 **The Freedom of Information Act 2000.** This makes non-personal information freely available to all, with only limited exceptions.
 - 3.2 **The Data Protection Act 1998.** This relates to personal information, and generally makes this non-disclosable except in certain circumstances.

3.3 Local Government Legislation

- Access to Information provisions of the **Local Government Act 1972.** This gives the public access to Committee Minutes and Agenda, and to background material relevant to those documents.
 - **Local Government (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) Regulations 2012)** ensures that Members are entitled to material relevant to public/private meetings of the Leader and Cabinet (and decision making by individual portfolio holders). However, these rights do not apply to draft documents, to the advice of a political advisor or to most exempt / confidential information (unless such information is needed for the work of the Scrutiny Committee).
- 3.4 **Common Law Rights** (derived from Court judgements) give Members the right to inspect Council documents insofar as this is reasonably necessary to enable a Member to perform his/her duties as a Member — this is known as the “need to know” basis.
 - 3.5 Members do not have any right to “a roving commission” through Council documents — mere curiosity is not sufficient.

4. Navigating the Hierarchy of Rights Freedom of Information Act 2000

- 4.1 In broad terms, if the information being sought by a Member is non-personal, then the Freedom of Information Act 2000 allows access to most Council documentation. The first port of call for information under the Freedom of Information Act is the Council’s Publication Scheme. This is located on the Council’s website and sets out most of the Council’s published material. This information can be accessed and used without any further reference to the Council. The remainder of this note assumes that the information being sought by a Member is not available under the Publication Scheme.

- 4.2 In certain circumstances, access to documentation via the Freedom of Information Act may be exempt, although most of the exemptions are subject to a “public interest test”. So, for example, releasing commercially sensitive information to a member of the public is not likely to be in the public interest. Whereas (subject to the usual rules of confidentiality), it is likely to be in the public interest to release such information to a Member.
- 4.3 Examples of exemptions under the Freedom of Information Act are:
- Work in progress (draft reports, for example) need not be disclosed.
 - Information subject to a data-sharing Protocol should not be released until all organisations have each agreed to disclosure. This is to ensure that crime and disorder and fraud investigations, for example, are not prejudiced.
 - Commercially sensitive information.
 - Where, in the opinion of a designated officer (the Monitoring Officer) disclosure of information would or would be likely to inhibit the free and frank provision of advice, the free and frank exchange of views for the purposes of deliberation, or would otherwise prejudice or would be likely otherwise to prejudice the effective conduct of public affairs. This exemption is also subject to the public interest test.
- 4.4 If the rights outlined above are not sufficient to provide a Member with the information he/she needs, then it is necessary to look to other provisions set out below.

Data Protection Act 1998

- 5.1 If the information sought by a Member relates to an identified living individual, then the Data Protection Act applies.
- 5.2 There are 2 classes of Data Protection — “normal” personal information and “sensitive personal information”. Sensitive personal information includes:
- Racial or Ethnic Origin
 - Religious beliefs
 - Trade Union membership
 - Physical or Mental health
 - Actual or alleged criminal offences and criminal records
 - Sexual life
 - Political opinions.
- 5.3. Where “normal” personal information is involved, unless additional consent has been granted by the individual concerned, information about an individual can only be used for the purposes for which that information was obtained.
- 5.4 Members have the same rights as Council employees to access personal information and the Member must have a need to know and not just be curious.

- 5.5 The Council has a duty to ensure that personal information disclosed to Members using the above procedures is used strictly for the purposes for which it is disclosed and that Members will keep the information secure and confidential (and then disposed of in a similarly careful manner).
- 5.6 Members must observe the Code of Conduct and all the provisions of the Constitution. Officers will automatically assume that Members will treat personal information in accordance with the previous paragraph.
- 5.7 Where “sensitive” personal information is involved (see paragraph 5.2 above) then more rigorous procedures are necessary:
- Either explicit consent of the person concerned must be obtained; or
 - If this is not practicable, Members must complete a form under the Data Protection (Processing of Sensitive Personal Data) (Elected Representatives) Order 2002.
- 5.8 If the rights outlined above are not sufficient to provide a Member with the information s/he needs, then it is necessary to look other provisions below:

Access to Information Provisions of the Local Government Act 1972/Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) Regulations 2012

- 6.1 Where a Member cannot obtain the disclosure of information under the Freedom of Information Act then the information may still become available to Members at a later date via Committee agenda, and the right to see background material associated with such an agenda. Once a matter has reached the stage where it is before a Council/Committee/Cabinet, then members of that Council/Committee/Cabinet would have a “need to know” all relevant information; and other Members would be able to use the usual Access to Information provisions. However, the above rights do not apply to draft documents, to the advice of a political advisor or to most categories of exempt/confidential information (unless the Scrutiny Committees require such exempt / confidential information as part of actions/decisions it is scrutinising).

General

- 7.1 Material from the Legal Section (where the Legal Section is providing legal advice to one of its in-house clients at the Council) may be non-disclosable due to legal professional privilege.
- 7.2 Information supplied under the Data Protection Act 1998 must not be used or disclosed for political purposes.
- 7.3 Requests for information under the control of Officers should normally be made to the relevant Service Manager/Service Director.
- 7.4 Requests for information under the control of the Leader and Cabinet should normally be made to the Leader and/or the relevant Portfolio Holder.
- 7.5. Members must not put undue pressure on Officers to release information to which the Member is not entitled to have access.

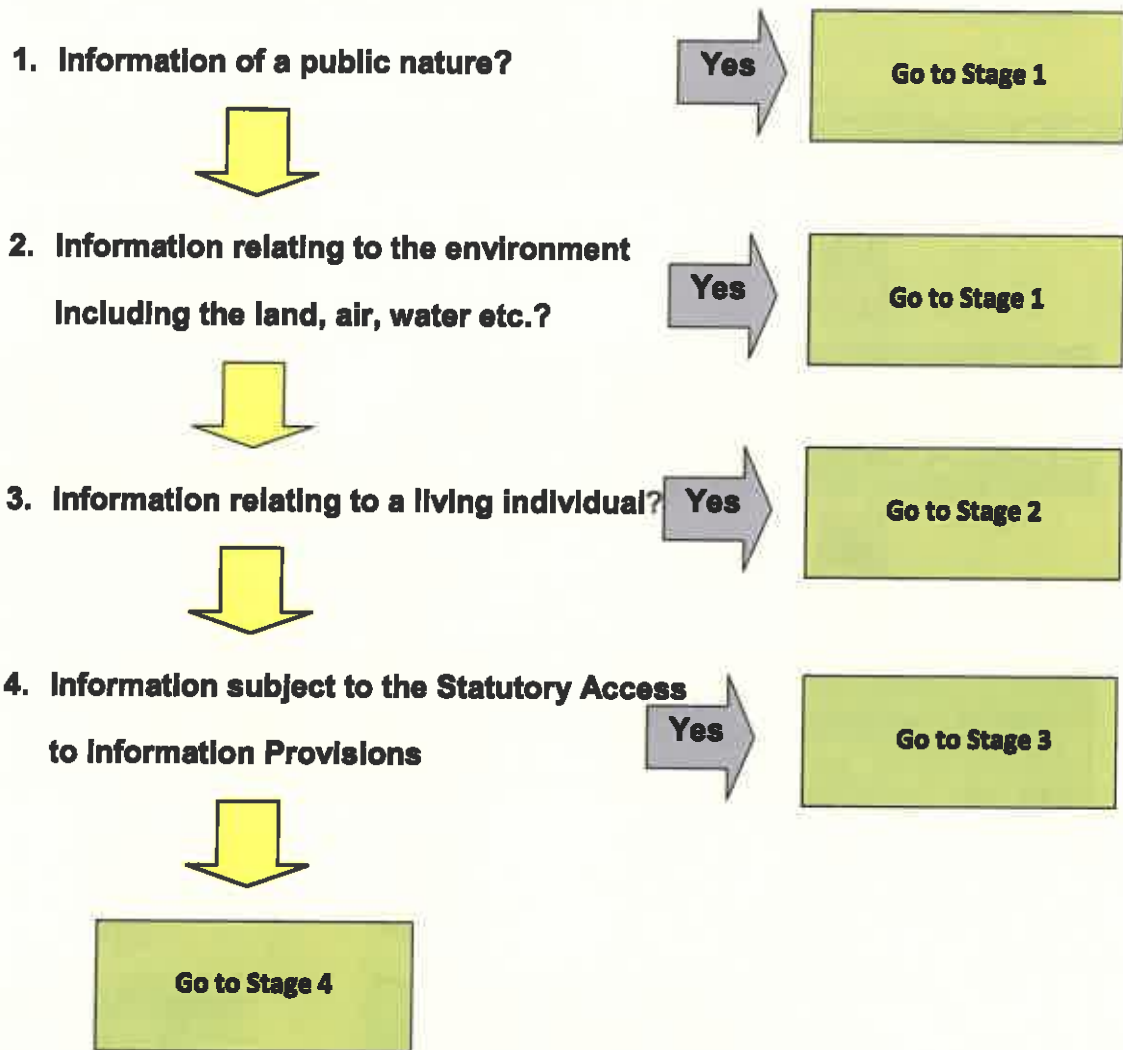
- 7.6 Should a Section Manager or Service Director need advice as to whether information can be released to a Member s/he should contact the Principal Solicitor or Monitoring Officer.
- 7.7 The additional access to information rights given to Members are to allow them to do their jobs as Members. Confidential or exempt information should only be used in appropriate circumstances, in accordance with the proper performance of their duties as Members. Information should only be passed between Members if both Members can demonstrate a “need to know”.
- 7.8 Any complaints by a Member about the non-disclosure of information should be made in writing to the Monitoring Officer whose decision shall be final as far as the Council is concerned. However, if the Member remains dissatisfied, the Member may be able to refer the matter to the Information Commissioner.

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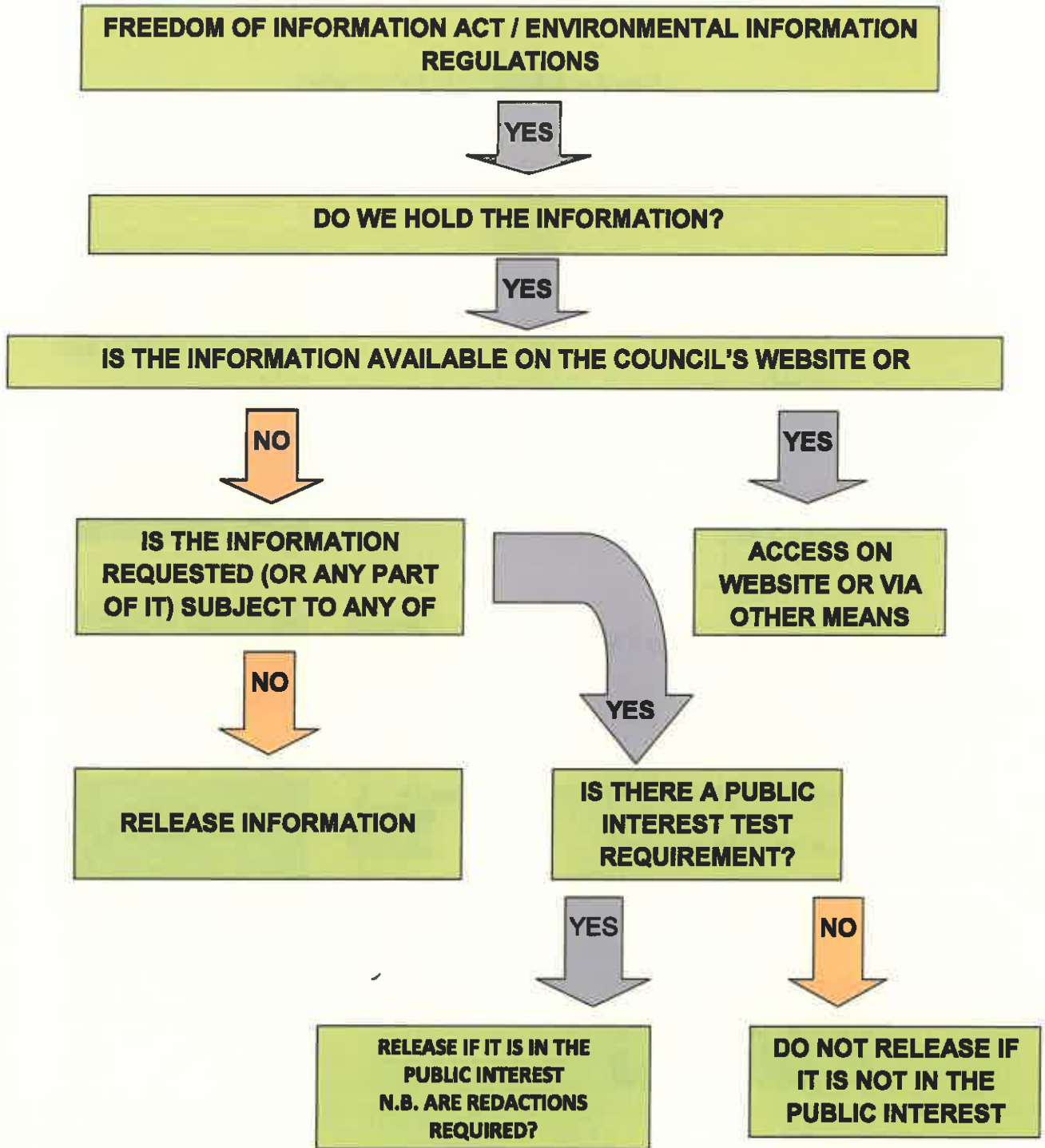
APPENDIX D

Members Access to Information

What information are you requesting?



Stage 1

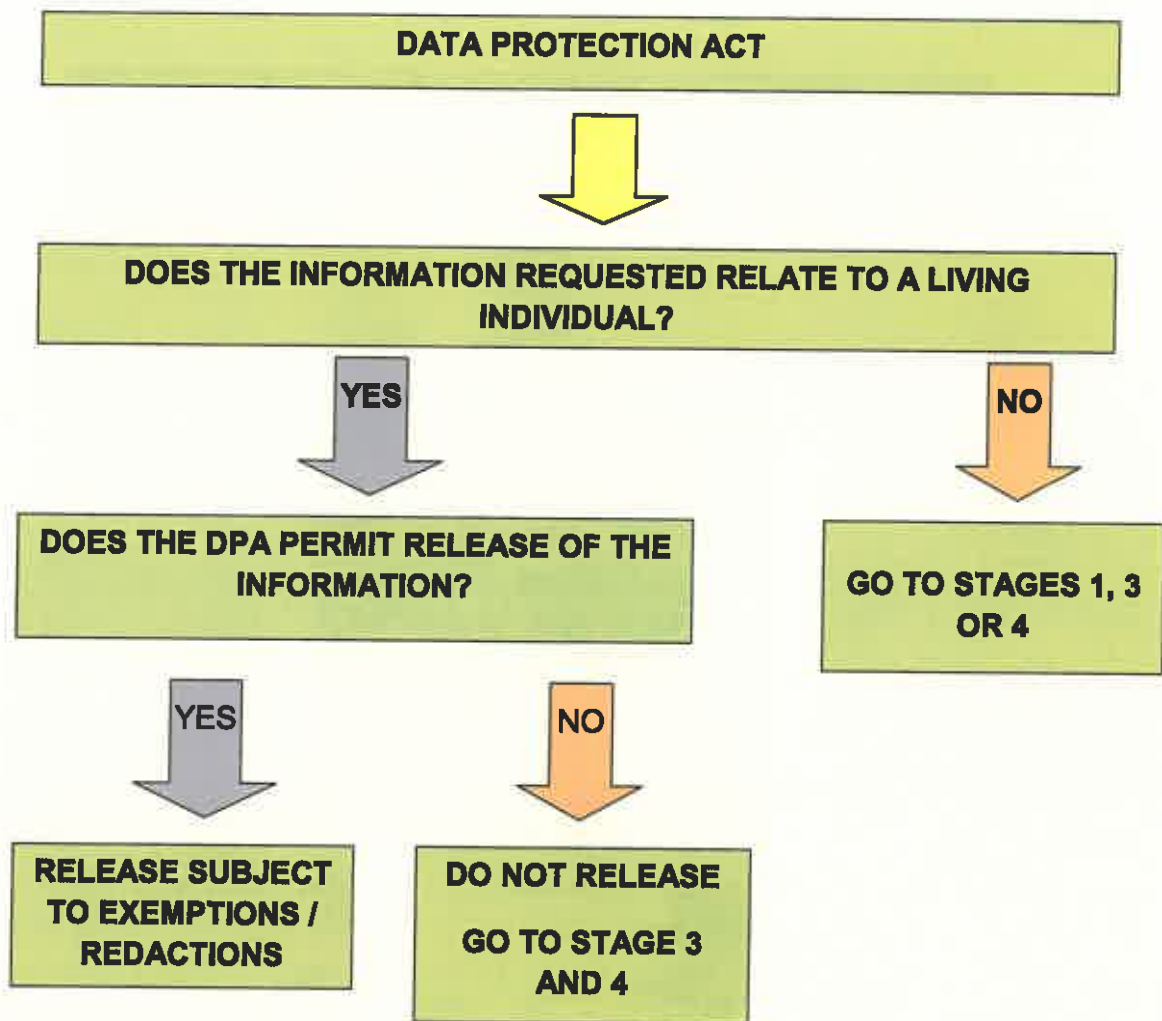


Key Exemptions (there are further exemptions)

- Defence (s26)
- The economy (s29)
- Law enforcement (s31)
- Audit Functions (s33)
- Commercial Interests (s43)
- Legal professional privilege (s42)

Stage 2

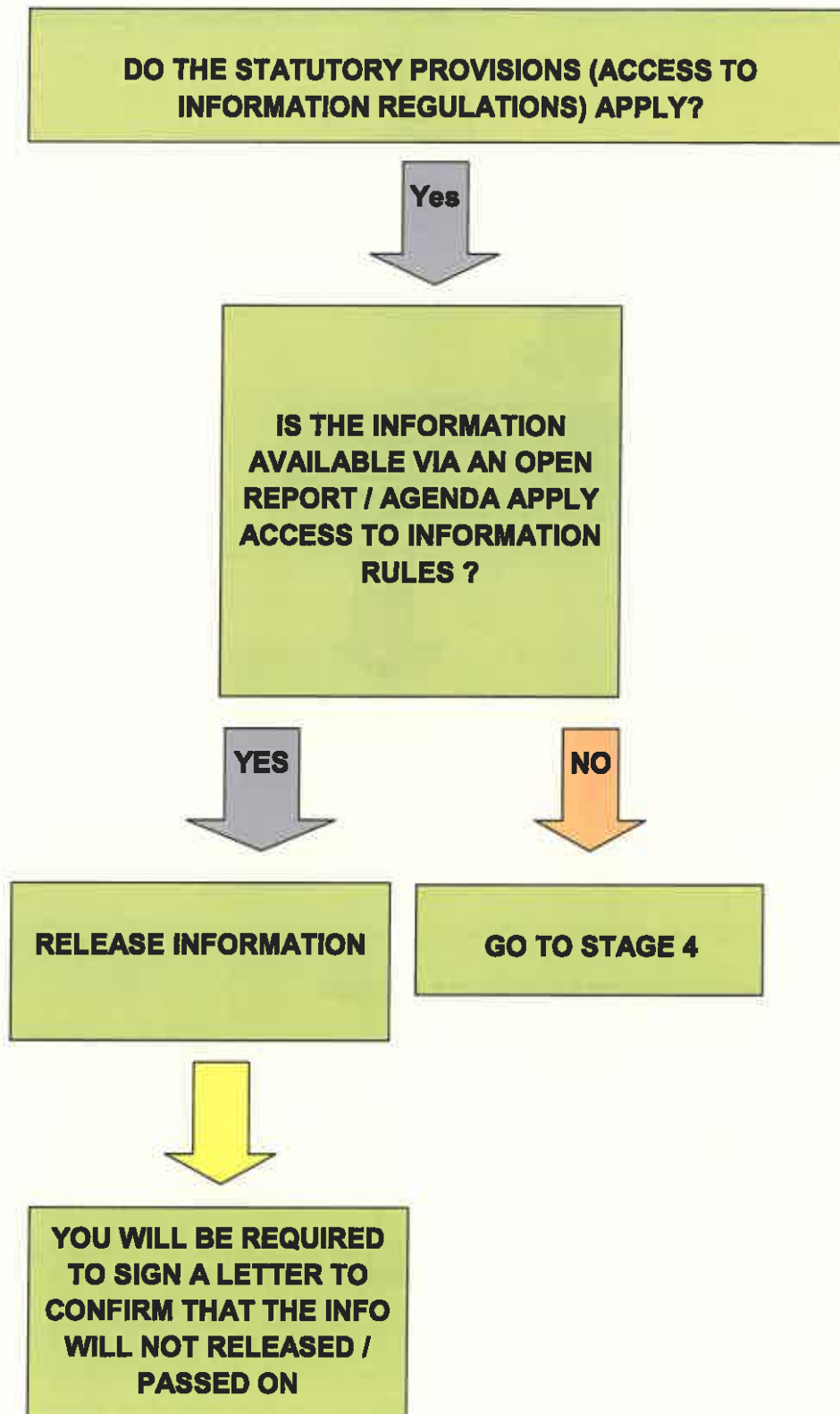
6-29



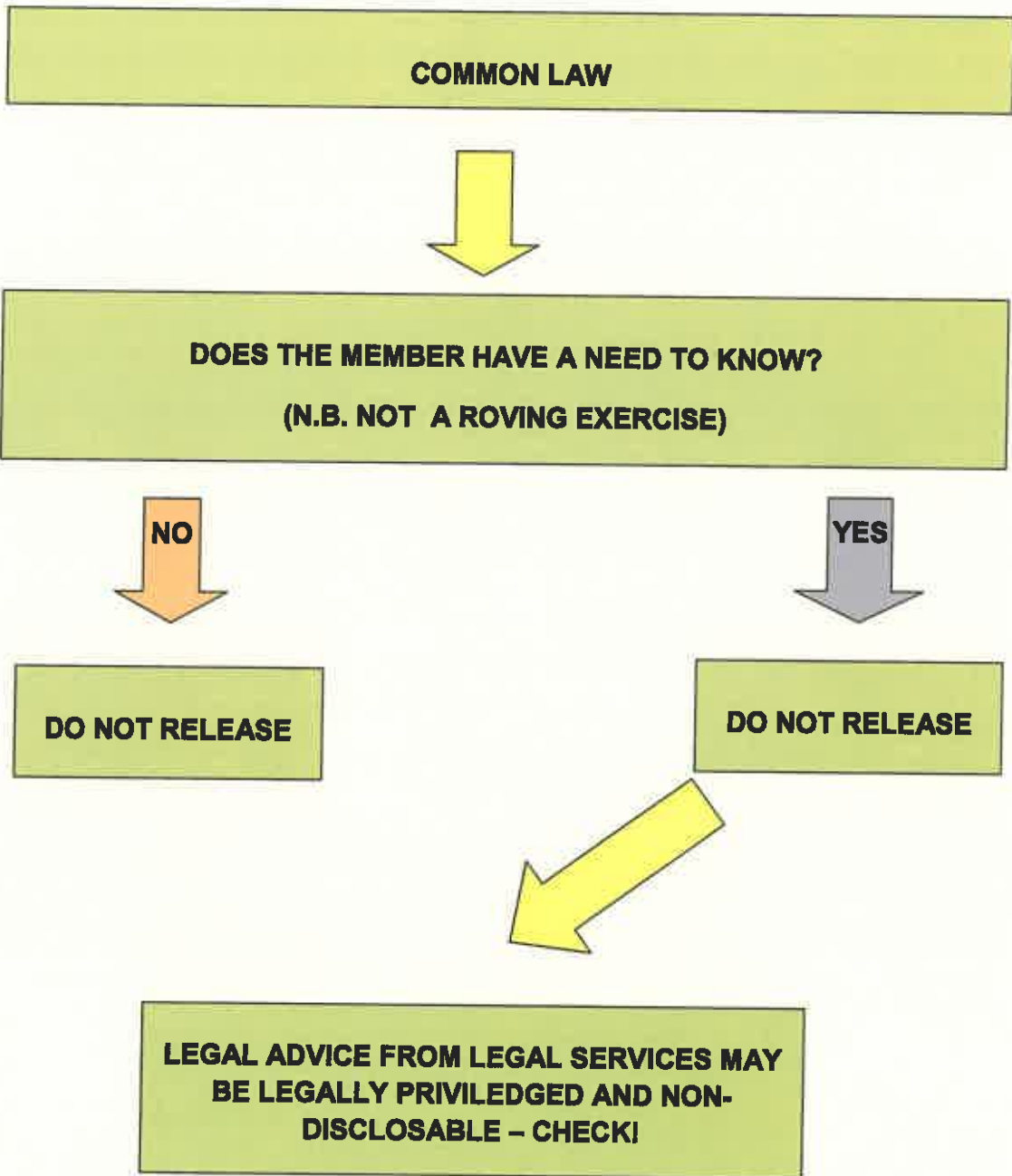
Key DPA permitted reasons for disclosure include:

- Prevention of Crime and disorder
- Taxation
- Regulatory activity
- Publicly available information
- Disclosures required by law
- Legal advice and prospective proceedings

STAGE 3



STAGE 4



N.B. Members must only use information for the purpose for which it was obtained. It is provided in confidence and subject to the Data Protection Act provisions and therefore should not be disclosed to others.

