



RINGWOOD TOWN COUNCIL

PROTOCOL FOR APPOINTMENT OF STUDENT ADVISORS IN ASSOCIATION WITH RINGWOOD SCHOOL

1. The Town Council believes it should embrace all sections of the community in its decision-making processes. To achieve this it has already implemented extensive consultation arrangements that involve the public on specific schemes and through questionnaires. In addition it has public participation arrangements that enable the public to speak on general issues prior to each meeting and during meetings on Agenda items. However these arrangements tend to provide an opportunity for the public to attend meetings or be involved on single issues and not on the overall decision-making processes of the Council. It is rare for young people to take advantage of the opportunities provided under these arrangements.
2. Councillors have also noted that for a variety of reasons, membership of the Council tends to comprise of the older generation. It appears that family and career requirements make it difficult for younger generations to give the level of commitment necessary to properly fulfil the role of a Town Councillor. This often means that the views of those young children and teenagers living at home are not put directly to the Council.
3. Notwithstanding the extensive networking by existing Councillors within the town and the community and the existing public involvement arrangements, Town Councillors recognise that as their own children have grown up, it becomes more and more difficult for them to be aware of the needs, requirements and aspirations of the younger generation. This can lead to claims of the Council being “out of touch” and not providing the services required.
4. The Town Council therefore looked at a number of options which would bring young people’s views into debates on a continuing basis prior to decisions being taken.
5. The easiest solution would have been to appoint a Youth Council serviced by the Town Council or indeed separately but comprising solely of young people. At best, this could only have been an advisory committee and would make recommendations to the Council. Its members would not, therefore, have been able to make direct presentations to Councillors or as a matter of course be present when final decisions are taken. The need to carry out further formal consultation before decisions are made would mean lengthening the decision-making process and the extra meetings would have required additional resource input from the Council and divert funding from service provision.
6. As an alternative the Council looked at co-opting young people as persons with a special interest to each of the Council’s committees. However, this was rejected on two counts. Firstly, if any of the students are under 18 they would be disqualified from being a Member since under the provisions of Sections 101 and 102 and also Section 79 of the Local Government Act 1972, persons under the age of 18 are not eligible for

membership of the Town Council. Secondly, persons co-opted to membership of a committee, as opposed to those co-opted to Council as a full member of the Council as a result of a casual vacancy, are not entitled to vote at decision-making committees of the Council. Therefore, any students over the age of 18 and co-opted to a decision-making committee would not be able to vote on any issue coming before that meeting. The Council believes that it would be difficult to persuade young people that having been co-opted to a committee they would not have equal rights with Councillors. Co-option with no right to vote would undermine the general principles of trying to involve young people in the Council's affairs. The Council believes it would certainly de-motivate the young people and therefore was not a route that it wished to follow.

7. Having rejected advisory Committees made up of young people and co-option to existing Committees the Council looked at other options. Its culture provides for officers to advise Councillors and Committee before decisions are taken. Decisions are not taken without regard to Officers advice. Councillors rely heavily on Officers, at all levels and others to give advice appropriate to their knowledge and experience.
8. For the past two years the Town Council has been working with students of Ringwood (Secondary) School on an ad hoc basis on accreditation for Fairtrade status and the Market Town Healthcheck for preparation of a Town Plan. The students role in these exercises was to give a young persons perspective on the issues. Councillors had been impressed with the level of knowledge, commitment and enthusiasm shown by the students on that work. It therefore became a sensible and natural progression for the Council to consider formalising the existing arrangement throughout the Council's decision making structures.
9. After careful thought about the issues, the Council decided that as there is no age bar or other restrictions affecting its ability to appoint advisors, this role would be more appropriate. It is specifically designed to enable young people to represent the views of the younger generation and provide their professional and knowledgeable input in exactly the same manner as Council officers. Importantly this arrangement will enable students to be present at the meetings at which decisions are taken, the timeframe for decision-making is not extended and there is little or no additional resource requirement placed upon the Town Council.
10. Some Councillors needed re-assurance that the roles were advisory, not decision making. Equally for existing staff it was important to define the role as one of putting a young person's viewpoint rather than the pure professional view provided by existing officers.
11. In order to implement its proposals the Council has decided to appoint two Student Advisors to each of its four main programme committees. The basis of the appointments are as follows:-
 - i) The appointment of the eight Student Advisors would be handled on behalf of the Town Council by Ringwood (Secondary) School (Ringwood School). Students apply for the posts and the school interviews, selects and nominates Students for formal appointment by the Town Council. Generally it is expected that the Town Council will simply ratify such appointments.

- ii) In the first instance, the appointments were for the period of 1 October 2007 to 31 July 2008 i.e. the end of the academic school year. In May 2008 and following a review of the benefits obtained during the pilot period the Council agreed to the annual appointment of Student Advisors to Committees as a permanent feature of its decision making processes.
- iii) On the review in May 2008 and for the purpose of clarity the Council confirmed that there should be no age limit for the appointment of Student Advisors subject to the School recognising that those nominated should be capable of undertaking the student advisors full role.
- iv) In order to ensure a proper balance of views of residents a new requirement was introduced in May 2008 about residential qualifications of advisors. This states that at the time of appointment, at least six student advisors are resident within the town boundary and the remaining two be appointed from any students attending the school irrespective of their place of residence and also that non-resident students should only advise a Committee along with a resident.
- v) Whilst the students are appointed by Ringwood School, they will be expected to represent the views of all young people in Ringwood, including those who have not reached an age to attend Ringwood School and also those who have left the school. The students will also be required to represent the views of former students who are currently resident outside the town.
- vi) The students' role will be as advisors to the committee in the same way as any other specialist and professional is appointed to advise Members. They are encouraged to give their views in the same way as Town Council officers or any other person appointed to assist Members coming to reasoned conclusions and decisions.
- vii) As advisors the students will not always have to leave when confidential matters are discussed. However, there will be some occasions when students will be requested to leave particularly, when certain staffing and perhaps other confidential items are discussed. This is no different from the practice adopted for the Council's staff.
- viii) Student Advisors will receive copies of agenda, minutes and reports in exactly the same way as Councillors and other officers.
- ix) The students will be expected to discuss issues with other young people but they must also comply with the same confidentiality rules as applied to officers and Councillors. When the new National Code of Conduct for Officers is brought into force, this will also apply to Student Advisors.
- x) Student Advisors will be provided with a copy of the Council's Members' Handbook for their personal use.
- xi) Whilst Student Advisors will not be remunerated, the Town Council will be meeting travel costs to enable them to attend meetings.

- xii) Details of Student Advisors will be published on the Council's website. However, the Students home addresses and telephone numbers will not be disclosed without the consent of the students and their parents.
12. For ease of reference and a more detailed explanation of the process leading up to the selection of Student Advisors, the following documents are appended to this Protocol:-

Appendix 1 – Extract from Minutes of the Town Council's Policy & Finance Committee held on 17 May 2006.

Appendix 2 – Copy of the Town Clerk's report to Policy & Finance Committee held on 30 May 2007.

Appendix 3 – Extract from the Minutes of Policy & Finance Committee held on 30 May 2007.

Appendix 4 – Copy of email dated 25 July 2007 to Assistant Head Teacher, Ringwood School, setting out formal invitation to School to appoint Student Advisors.

Appendix 5 – Copy of Press Release number 14/07 issued by the Town Council on 31 July 2007.

Appendix 6 – Extract from Ringwood School's website together with a letter sent to all Year 12 and Year 13 students inviting those students to apply for posts as Student Advisors.

Appendix 7 – Extract from the autumn half-term 2007 Ringwood School News celebrating the appointment of Students.

September 2007 (updated Jan 2010)

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