

1

To share findings from survey, focus group and interviews

Staff survey responses

Councillor survey responses

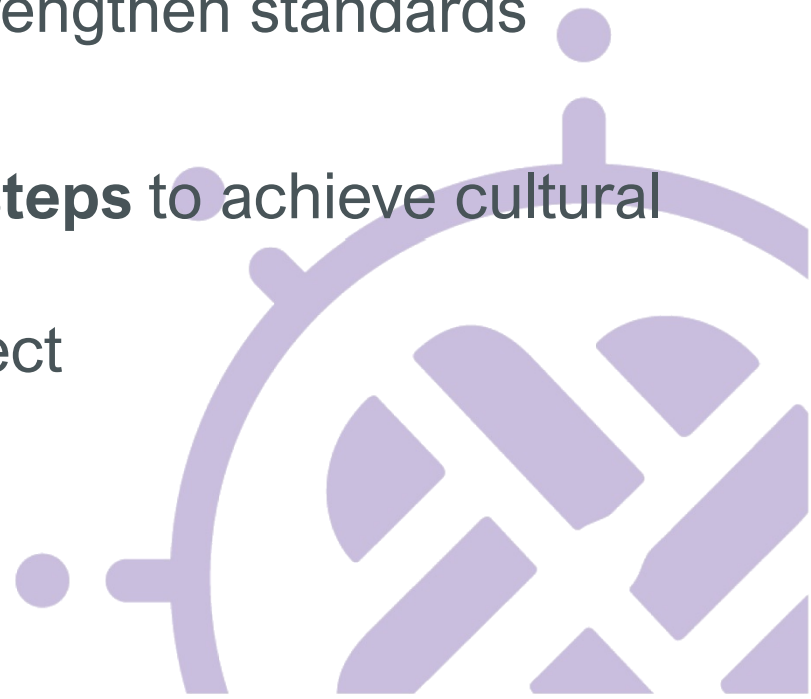
Outcomes from group and individual interviews

Proposed reforms to strengthen standards

2

To discuss and agree next steps to achieve cultural and behavioural change

Ownership of the project



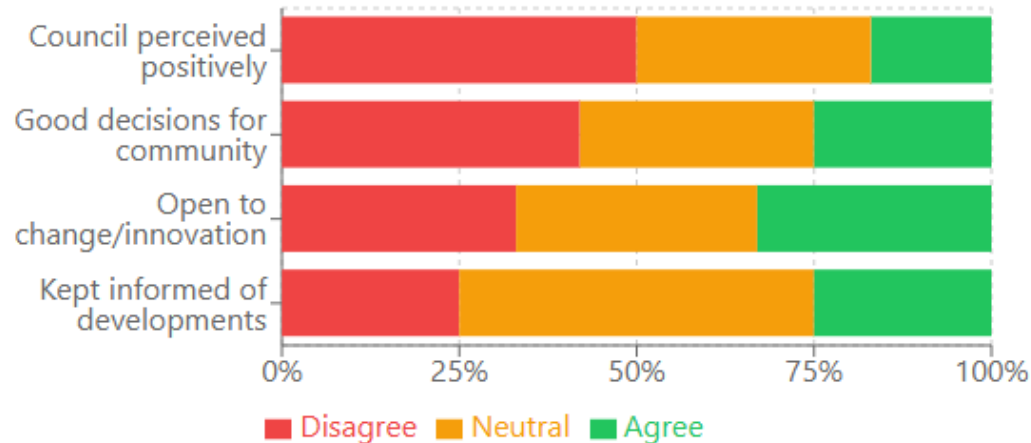
Summary of staff responses

13 responses

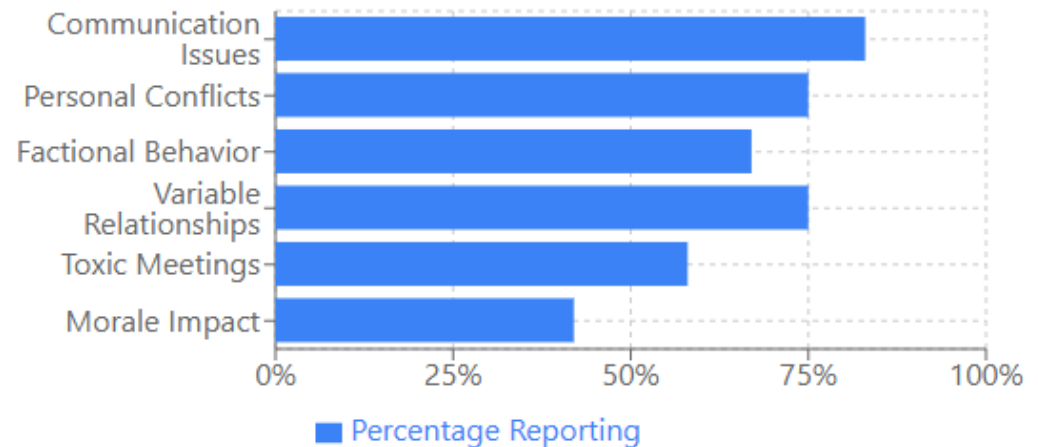


Summary of staff survey results

Council Perception & Decision Making



Primary Themes - Issue Prevalence



Councillor communication

- 58% disagree/strongly disagree that councillors communicate appropriately with each other
- 25% disagree/strongly disagree that councillors communicate appropriately with staff
- 42% disagree that councillor debates are conducted respectfully

Officer/councillor relationships

- 33% agree their role is valued by councillors
- 42% disagree they feel supported by councillors
- 33% report negative impact on morale from councillor interactions

Toxic meeting atmosphere mentioned by 58% of respondents

Morale impacts cited by 42% of staff

Variable relationships reported by 75% of respondents

42% disagree/strongly disagree they feel proud to be part of the council

Comments

There has been a lot of back stabbing and clash of egos

Communication is poor in the council chamber and in other formats... members are often rude to each other

This is not a good working environment for staff and it seriously affects morale

The majority of member/staff relationships are effective. Unfortunately, there is a small group of people who cause the problems



Positive feedback

Pride in
council
work
despite
challenges

Belief in
potential for
improvement

Recognition
of good
intentions
and
appreciation
for
supportive
councillors

Optimism
about future
projects

Suggested improvements from staff

- Better training in professionalism, dignity at work, civility and respect
- Anonymous grievance system
- Enhanced accountability measures
- More formal structures for communication
- Team building opportunities between councillors and officers

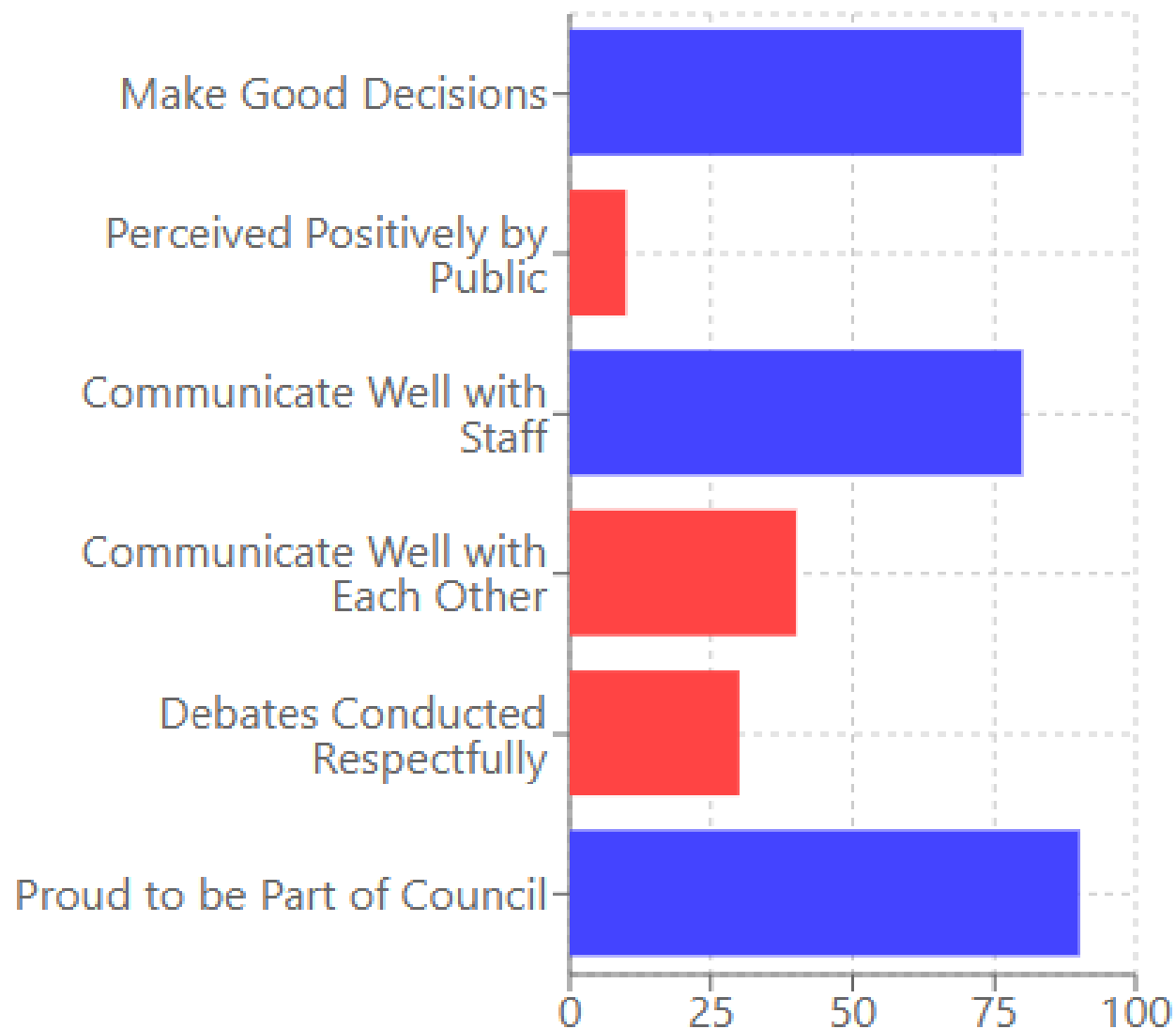


Summary of councillor responses

10 responses



Key satisfaction metrics



Comments

Faith in the council has been eroded by the continual bickering and poor behaviour among councillors

I cannot see relationships getting better - too much water under the bridge

Internal division and historical conflict

Some believe 'freedom of speech' justifies communication that others might regard as inappropriate

People who behave disrespectfully in meetings need to be challenged

Communication challenges

Some feel they are different because they have always lived in our town and are therefore the 'true' representatives

The council is not respected here as there are too many 'blowins'

Local vs newcomer tension

The governance arrangements are not fit for purpose

Every councillor needs to sign up to the code of conduct and to treat everyone respectfully

Dignity, respect and professionalism

Key themes

The statistics and themes from the survey responses paint a picture of a council that is financially stable and proud of its community work, but struggling with internal relationships, communication, and governance issues


Internal Division

Historical conflicts and personal disagreements affecting council effectiveness

A horizontal progress bar with a blue segment representing approximately 80% completion.

Communication Issues

Challenges with respectful debate and appropriate communication

A horizontal progress bar with a blue segment representing approximately 75% completion.


Local vs Newcomer Tension

Division between long-term residents and newer council members

A horizontal progress bar with a blue segment representing approximately 65% completion.

Financial Strength

Strong financial position and ability to support community initiatives

A horizontal progress bar with a blue segment representing approximately 90% completion.

Governance Needs

Requirements for improved structure and professional development

A horizontal progress bar with a blue segment representing approximately 70% completion.

Summary of group and individual interviews

Decision-making

- Lack of transparency for some SLT decisions/actions
- Are councillors making the decisions?
- Voting reflects personal allegiances rather than community benefit

Reputation

- History and personal dislikes are shared publicly
- Social media used to undermine council decisions
- No cohesion or collective support for council decisions

Governance and meetings

- Lack of discipline in meetings (overtalking, side comments, rude and disrespectful communication)
- Ineffective meeting management

Process

- Contacting staff directly without processing work requests appropriately
- SLT putting own views and influence on reports which the council should be discussing

Strengthening local authority standards

Proposed reforms



Why it is needed

- Existing system lacks consistent enforcement
- Limited sanctions available for misconduct
- Inconsistent standards across councils
- Ineffective sanctions for serious breaches
- No formal requirements for standards committees
- Limited protection for those affected by misconduct
- Difficulty completing investigations when members resign



Proposed reforms

Mandatory code

New minimum prescribed code covering:

- Discrimination and harassment
- Social media conduct
- Public representation
- Resource usage

Authorities can add local provisions
Clear baseline for ethical behaviour

Standards committees reform

Mandatory formal committees
Independent Person requirement
Enhanced transparency
Consistent procedures
Published investigation outcomes

New sanctions framework

Suspension powers up to 6 months
Allowance withholding options
Premises and facilities bans
Interim suspension during investigations
5-year disqualification for repeat offenders

Enhanced transparency

Published investigation summaries
Mandatory case completion
Protected complainant identities
Public record of breaches
Clear documentation requirements

Project proposals – next steps

Foundation

25 Feb 2025

2-hour feedback session:

- Presentation of findings
- Activity to highlight behavioural and cultural challenges
- Agreement of acceptable behavioural expectations
- Next steps

Skills development

Four x 2-hour training workshops:

- **Communication** (emotional intelligence, constructive challenge, listening skills, professional boundaries, psychological safety, assertiveness)
- **Governance** (process, meeting management and protocol, objectivity etc)

Individual support

Some hours available for one-to-one coaching:

- Individual sessions to allow for deeper engagement
- Focus on strengthening individual skills eg, in positive challenge and conflict management

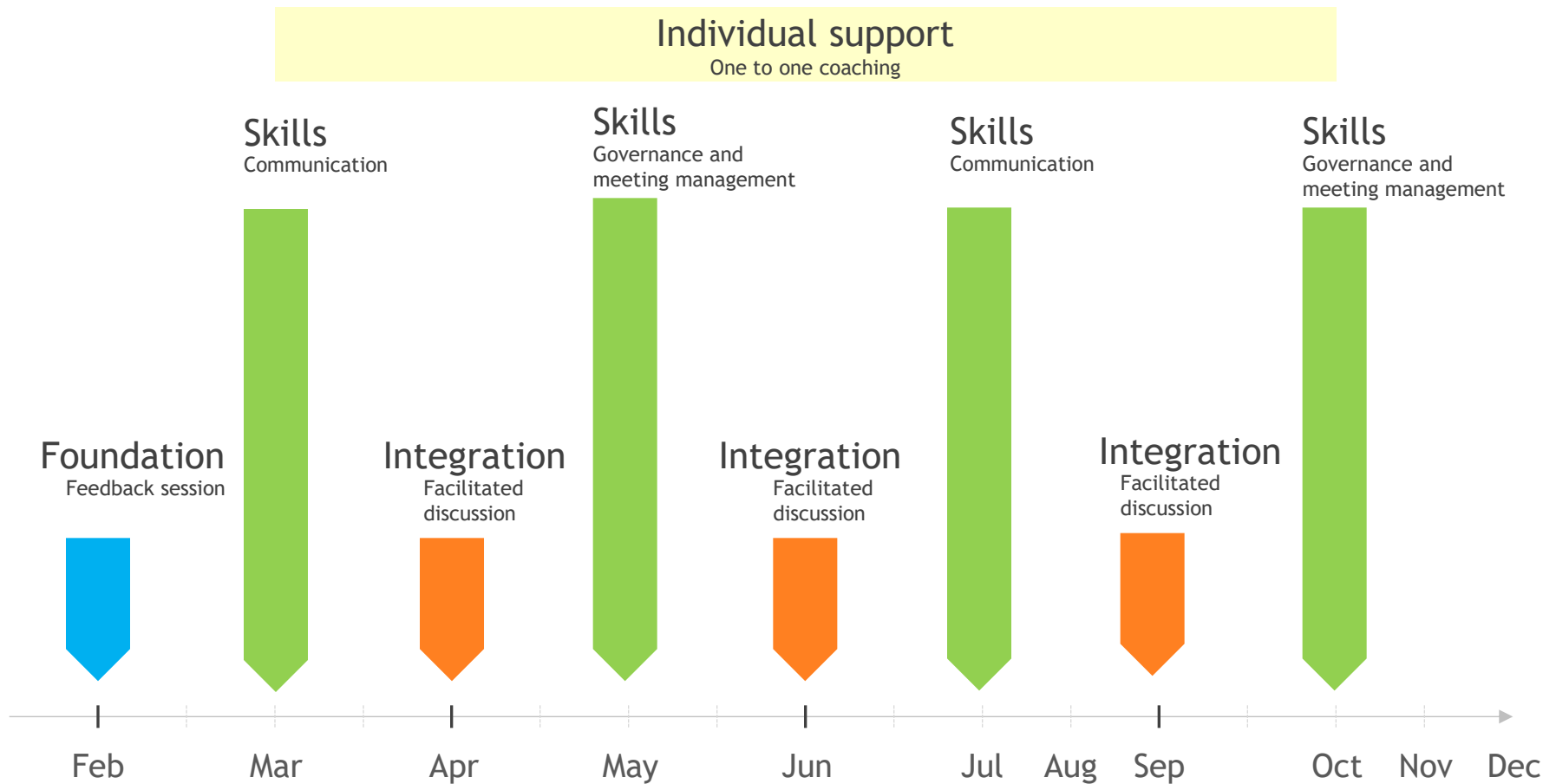
Integration and practice

Three x 2-hour facilitated discussion:

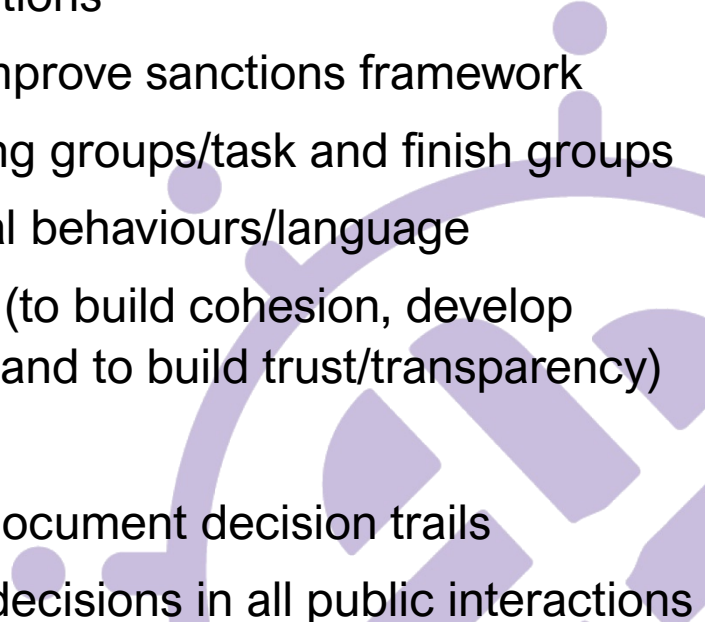
- Discussion topic
- Address issues raised since last session
- Identify concrete next steps
- Clear ownership of actions and timelines

What works best for you? The proposed structure is flexible eg would you prefer an officer/councillor away day to focus on some of these areas rather than shorter sessions?

Project summary – proposed timeline



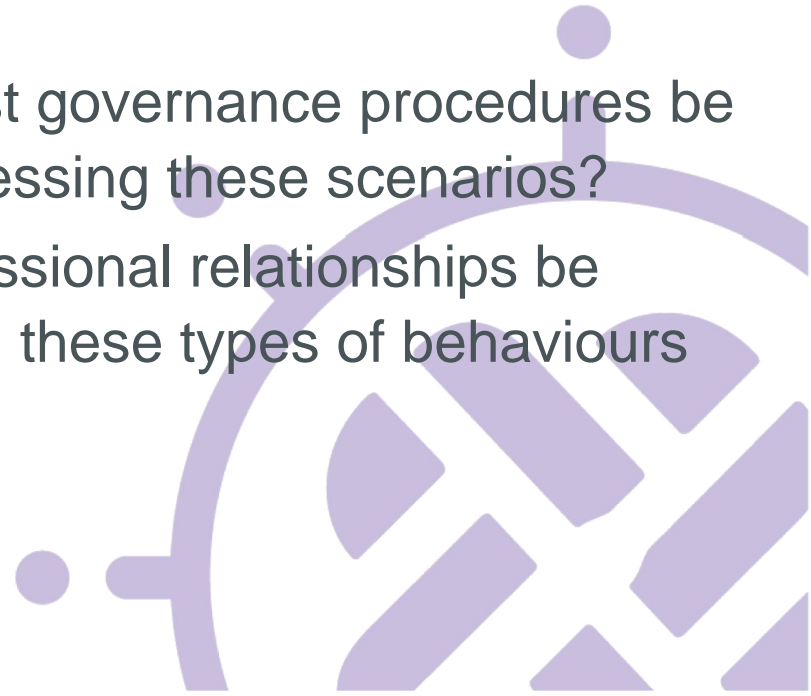
Additional suggestions you may want to consider to achieve cultural and behavioural change

1. Additional councillor development – what additional training is required eg:
 - Personal resilience and wellbeing
 - The council as an employer (HR)
 - Digital leadership and remote/hybrid approaches
 2. Positive leadership examples (be role models) to improve public perception
 3. Councillor mentoring/buddy scheme (using external mentors)
 4. Grievance procedure and protected routes for raising concerns
 5. Agreement of acceptable behavioural expectations
 6. Standards panel to address behaviours and improve sanctions framework
 7. Build on collective cooperation through working groups/task and finish groups
 8. Shared agreement to challenge unprofessional behaviours/language
 9. Joint councillor and officer briefings/meetings (to build cohesion, develop understanding of officer roles and constraints and to build trust/transparency)
 10. Early warning system for emerging issues
 11. Clear protocols for information requests and document decision trails
 12. Support the democratic process and council decisions in all public interactions
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Activity: Standards in practice



- Discuss one of the scenarios
 - What specific behaviours are problematic?
 - What impact does this have on the democratic process?
 - What clear behavioural boundaries should be in place?
 - How can robust governance procedures be helpful in addressing these scenarios?
 - How can professional relationships be achieved when these types of behaviours are displayed?



Meeting conduct

During a contentious meeting, a councillor repeatedly interrupts other members, makes personal remarks and suggests their ward deserves priority over others

Officer relationships

A councillor learns that officers are preparing a report about a sensitive local issue. They arrange private meetings with junior officers, suggesting they should put forward a particular recommendation. They imply the officer has “baby brain” having returned from maternity leave but that they “still look very attractive”

Committee influence

During a scrutiny committee, several councillors appear to have coordinated their questions in advance. They dismiss officer explanations and suggest incompetence, appearing to work toward a predetermined conclusion

Decision influence

Before a key vote, several councillors meet privately with developers and fail to declare these meetings. They then advocate strongly for the development without disclosing their prior contact

Social media

A councillor regularly uses social media to criticise officers’ recommendations before meetings, sharing partial information and encouraging residents to lobby other councillors. They also make disparaging comments about other councillors’ voting records

Budget pressure

A councillor, frustrated with a funding decision, repeatedly emails finance officers demanding alternative calculations. They hint at raising concerns about officer competence in public meetings if the numbers aren’t “corrected” to their satisfaction

<p>Meeting conduct</p> <p>During a contentious meeting, a councillor repeatedly interrupts other members, makes personal remarks and suggests their ward deserves priority over others</p>	<p>Clear processes speed up meetings and lead to better decisions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-meeting briefings between Chair and Vice-Chair to agree management of difficult items • Standard item templates requiring declaration of informal meetings/lobbying • Time out protocol for heated discussions • Rotation of seats in council chamber to break up factions • Provide training for Chairs to manage meetings effectively
<p>Officer relationships</p> <p>A councillor learns that officers are preparing a report about a sensitive local issue. They arrange private meetings with junior officers, suggesting they should put forward a particular recommendation. They imply the officer has “baby brain” having returned from maternity leave but that they “still look very attractive”</p>	<p>Proper channels lead to better, faster outcomes and protect both officers and members.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structure protocol for member enquiries (preventing direct pressure on junior staff) • Regular informal officer/member forums to build understanding • Clear documentation of advice given to ensure consistency and transparency • Designated senior officer contact for sensitive issues • Standards panel to explore inappropriateness of comments
<p>Decision influence</p> <p>Before a key vote, several councillors meet privately with developers and fail to declare these meetings. They then advocate strongly for the development without disclosing their prior contact</p>	<p>Transparency builds public trust.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared calendar of member meetings with external stakeholders • Standard format for recording informal discussions • Pre-meetings for major discussions • Public register of lobbying contacts
<p>Social media</p> <p>A councillor regularly uses social media to criticise officers’ recommendations before meetings, sharing partial information and encouraging residents to lobby other councillors. They also make disparaging comments about other councillors’ voting records</p>	<p>Engaging digitally is an important skill and should be encouraged.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop guidelines for commenting on upcoming decisions • Agree rules about sharing confidential and/or partial information • Provide training in social media and other digital skills • Devise a quick response protocol for dealing with misleading information
<p>Committee influence</p> <p>During a scrutiny committee, several councillors appear to have coordinated their questions in advance. They dismiss officer explanations and suggest incompetence, appearing to work toward a predetermined conclusion</p>	<p>Scrutiny protocols are essential for good governance.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introducing structured questioning frameworks and an evidence-based approach to conclusions • Provide chairing skills training • Provide support to officers presenting to committees • Have a clear escalation route for officers facing unfair criticism
<p>Budget pressure</p> <p>A councillor, frustrated with a funding decision, repeatedly emails finance officers demanding alternative calculations. They hint at raising concerns about officer competence in public meetings if the numbers aren’t “corrected” to their satisfaction</p>	<p>Structured protocol for enquiries and sensitive issues.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Logging financial queries centrally using a standard template • Provide briefings on clear boundaries for member involvement • Assign a senior officer to oversee financial queries and responses • Have in place a clear reporting route for pressure attempts

So, next steps

Two things;

1. What are you collectively going to do
2. What direction do you want SWC to go in for you based upon the project proposals

