



Liberal Democrat Group

STANDING ORDERS

(based on ALDC model group standing orders
as last updated October 2020)

Adopted 7 May 2022

East Cambridgeshire District Council Liberal Democrat Group Standing Orders

1. AIMS

- a) The aims of East Cambridgeshire District Council Liberal Democrat Group (referred to as 'the Group') shall be:
 - i) To advance collectively the aims and objectives of the Liberal Democrats within East Cambridgeshire District Council (referred to as 'the Council') through the expression of a co-ordinated and cohesive viewpoint and action.
 - ii) To secure the implementation of Liberal Democrat policies and principles applied to local needs.
 - iii) To increase the effectiveness of members as representatives of their constituents.
 - iv) To work with Liberal Democrats on other councils and with North East Cambridgeshire and South East Cambridgeshire local parties (referred to as 'the Local Party') on the fulfilment of local needs, the development of policy and the selection and election of candidates for public office.

2. MEMBERSHIP OF THE COUNCIL GROUP

- a) Full voting members of the council group are:
 - i) Members of the Liberal Democrats elected to the Council after having successfully been through an approval process adopted by the relevant local party (ies) and been sanctioned as a Liberal Democrat candidate by a Delegated Nominating Officer.
 - ii) Any other councillor who has subsequent to their election to the Council been accepted as a member of the Liberal Democrats and who has been accepted in to the council group by a majority of its existing members in a vote. They must have also been successfully approved according to the procedure adopted down by the relevant local party (ies) either prior to joining the group or within a period of ten weeks after it.
- b) Non-voting membership of the group is open to:
 - i) **One or more** [we need to make a decision here!] representatives of the Local Party within the geographical area covered by the Council.
 - ii) All approved **and/or** [we need to make a decision here!] selected prospective candidates for the Council.
 - iii) All selected Prospective Parliamentary Candidates, Prospective European Parliamentary Candidates and prospective candidates for any national or regional bodies and for Police and Crime Commissioners; that cover any part of the area of the Council.
 - iv) Members of other principal local authorities representing wards or divisions wholly or partly within the area of the Council.

Membership of the Group is dependent on maintaining party membership. If membership lapses, the member must renew their membership within the three months period, but may not vote in internal elections or group votes until party membership is renewed. Once the lapse period has expired, Group membership is automatically lost.

- c) The Group will take out group membership of the Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors (ALDC) for all its members.

3. OFFICERS AND GROUP SPOKESPERSONS

The Group at the Annual Meeting shall elect the following officers:

- a) Group Leader
- b) Deputy Group Leader
- c) Group Chair
- d) Group Secretary
- e) Group Treasurer
- f) Group Whip
- g) Members to be nominated for positions at the Annual Meeting of East Cambridgeshire District Council:
 - i) Council Deputy Leader and Executive Members, or when in Opposition for members of the Shadow Executive or Group Spokespersons.
 - ii) Candidates for Chairs of council committees, scrutiny committees and any quasi-judicial committees.
 - iii) Nominations to serve on outside bodies and joint authorities.

4. DUTIES OF OFFICERS

- a) The Group Leader will be responsible for the general co-ordination of Liberal Democrat initiatives and Group activity. The Group Leader will be the spokesperson for the Group where necessary and the Group's nominee for Council Leader. The Leader will be the Group's spokesperson on the Executive Committee of the Council if the Group has members on that Committee. The Leader will be responsible for ensuring that all members receive an annual development and performance review. The Leader will ensure that Liberal Democrat initiatives are properly publicised, as well as Group responses on topical matters and that copies of press statements of significance the Group as a whole shall be circulated to all Group members.
- b) The Deputy Group Leader will undertake all the duties of the Group Leader in the absence of the Group Leader, and undertake such tasks as are agreed with the Group Leader.
- c) The Group Chair will chair all group meetings and will co-ordinate group social activities.
- d) The Group Secretary will be responsible for Group cohesion. They will be responsible for calling Group meetings, preparing and circulating minutes and agendas and other administrative duties connected with the Group, including the conduct of Group elections. The Secretary will also be responsible for recording the presence of non-councillors at Group meetings.
- e) The Group Treasurer will be responsible for any monies held by the Group. They will ensure collection of group subscriptions at the rate agreed by the Local Party and will reimburse Officers' out of pocket expenses and make other payments as may be approved by the Group. They will also be responsible for ensuring compliance with any legislation affecting the funding of political parties.

- f) The Group Whip(s) shall be responsible for ensuring that the agreed voting intentions of the Group are communicated to individual councillors and for liaison with the other political Groups. They will also be responsible for reviewing attendance at Full Council and committee meetings by councillors and presenting a report to the annual Group meeting on councillors' attendance records. The Whip(s) shall monitor and report to the Group on the submission of public service contracts (reports) in a timely manner by group members.

5. GROUP ELECTIONS

- a) All officers and group spokespersons outlined in Section 3 shall be subject to annual election at the Group's Annual Meeting. The Group Secretary will circulate a list of positions to all Group members 21 days before the Annual Meeting, either in paper form or by email. The Group Secretary will, in consultation with the Group Chair, agree an external returning officer to conduct the election. The returning officer shall be a member of the Liberal Democrats but shall be disinterested in the Group elections.

Nominations must be submitted in writing to the Returning Officer 14 days before the Annual Meeting. A list of valid nominations will then be circulated to all Group members not less than seven days before the Annual Meeting, either in paper form or by email, as decided by the Returning Officer.

- b) Where the annual Council elections occur so close to the Annual Council meeting to make this timetable impractical a shorter timetable will operate. In this case the Group Secretary shall circulate an amended timetable to all councillors and selected candidates at the Group meeting preceding the annual elections, either in paper form or by email. In this case the close of nominations shall be not less than 48 hours before the meeting.
- c) The vote may be conducted by electronic means, using a process adopted by the Returning Officer.
- d) Postal or proxy votes can be requested (in writing) from the Returning Officer, other votes must be cast in person by secret ballot at the Annual Meeting. Postal and proxy vote applications must be received 14 days before the elections and postal vote papers will be dispatched not later than seven days before the Annual Group Meeting. Where the shortened timetable set out in section 5b is in operation, or where voting is electronic, postal votes will not be available.

- e) Where there are more than two candidates for a position, voting will be by the Single Transferable Vote method.
- f) For Groups in control (or a Shadow Executive, when not in control) the Executive spokespeople will be elected post by post by the alternative vote system.
- g) The re-opening of nominations will only take place at the Annual Meeting if there are no valid nominations submitted by the deadline in section 5a or 5b, as appropriate.
- h) In the event of a tied vote, when there are only two candidates, lots will be drawn to achieve a result. In a multi-post election, there will be a count back process using the standard Electoral Reform Society rules.
- i) The Returning Officer shall be responsible for the interpretation of these Election rules and their decision will be final.
- j) The Group Leader must abide by the result of any Group election when nominating their Executive. They must also submit their own resignation to the Council from any post they hold by virtue of being Group Leader if a new Group Leader is elected in a Group Election.
- k) If a vacancy occurs for any officer or group spokesperson outlined in Section 3 at any time of the year outside of the annual elections, the vacancy shall be filled through a by-election held following the same timetable outlined in section 5b.

6. GROUP MEETINGS

- a) Members are expected to attend all whole Group meetings and meetings of the committee or portfolio team that they are members of. If they are unable to attend they should inform the Group Secretary or relevant Spokesperson.
- b) A quorum at any group meeting shall be one third of the voting membership of the group (or committee or portfolio team).
- c) Agendas and any relevant papers for group meetings should be circulated seven days in advance of the meeting, either on paper or by email. No items for decision can be taken under Any Other Business, except in exceptional circumstances with the agreement of two thirds of the group.
- d) Annual Meeting: the Group will hold an Annual Meeting prior to the Annual Meeting of the Council:
 - a) To elect Group Officers
 - b) To decide on Committee places (including Executive members and portfolio holders where appropriate), Committee spokespersons (and shadow portfolio spokespersons where appropriate) and representation on outside bodies (with elections as detailed above if necessary).
- e) Ordinary Meetings:
 - a) The Group will meet at least once prior to every meeting of the Council to discuss the agenda for the Council Meeting and other business brought forward by Group Members.
 - b) The Group will ask Committee Spokespersons/Chairs (including, where appropriate, members of the Executive and the spokesperson or Chair of the Executive Committee) and/or shadow portfolio spokespersons and/or portfolio holders to report on and answer questions concerning their committees, portfolios and/or areas of scrutiny and will make arrangements for questions/statements/speeches by Liberal Democrat group members in individual debates.

- c) The Group will ensure that members present a united public face on matters of concern to Liberal Democrat policy and principles in so far as may be compatible with individual conscience.
 - d) The Group will prepare for Liberal Democrat initiatives at future meetings of Committees or Council.
 - e) The Group will meet at least once during every three months to discuss Group strategy, policies and business.
- f) Special Meetings: Special Group Meetings may be called by not less than one third of the voting group membership (or two members, whichever is larger) who shall submit a duly signed request to the Group Secretary, or at the request of a majority of Officers of the Group. Such a meeting must be held within 14 days of the Group Secretary's receipt of the request. Seven days' notice of the meeting must be given to the rest of the Group.
- g) Motions to the Group: Members may submit motions to the Group for discussion. Such motions must be proposed and seconded by voting members of the Group and must be submitted 14 days before the meeting at which they are to be discussed. No motion, not motion similar to one already discussed, may be submitted within six months of a previous decision.
- h) Notices of no confidence shall be subject to section 6f, save that the count must be secret and counted by an external Returning Officer. No motion of no confidence may be taken within six months of the annual group election.
- i) Declarations of Interest:
- a) The Group will operate to the appropriate national and/or local code of conduct, in respect of all formal Group Meetings, particularly in regard to the declaration of pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests of members.
 - b) Members (both voting and non-voting) declaring a disclosable pecuniary interest in a matter should leave the room during its discussion at group meetings.

- c) Members should inform the Group Leader and Group Whip of any problems or concerns that arise over their declaration of interests.

7. RESPECT FOR OTHERS AND DISCIPLINARY ISSUES

- a) All Group members must comply with the following:
 - i. You must treat others with respect and must not bully, harass or intimidate any party member, member of party staff, member of parliamentary staff, party volunteer or member of the public. Such behaviour will be considered to be bringing the party into disrepute.
 - ii. Any member of the Group with doubts about their future commitment to the Group shall discuss the matter with the Group Leader or Group Whip. A decision to resign from the Group should be notified to the Group Leader, Whip and Group members at least 24 hours before the appropriate Council Officer is informed or any public statement made.
 - iii. All members of the Group must ensure that they do not fall into arrears with Council Tax and do not incur any other debts that may cause political embarrassment to the Group. Any councillor who finds themselves in such a position should notify the Group Leader or Whip of the circumstances at the earliest opportunity.
- b) Dealing with complaints about Group members
 - i. Any complaint about a group member concerning a criminal matter should be referred to the Police. A member of the Group charged by the Police with a criminal offence shall immediately inform the Group Leader and Group Whip. The member should be suspended from the Group without prejudice until the completion of police enquiries and any subsequent legal action. Upon completion of the Council's process, the Group may, if required, consider the case under the Group procedure (7c-d) below.
 - c) Any complaint about a Group member which has been, or should be, referred to the Council's standards procedure, should be held until the completion of that process. If appropriate, that member may be suspended by the leader from the Group without prejudice until the completion of the standards procedure. Upon completion of the Council's process, the Group may, if required, consider the case under the Group procedure (7c-d) below.
 - d) Any complaint about a Group members which has been, or should be, referred to the party's standards procedure, should be held until the

completion of that process. Upon completion of the Council's process, the Group may, if required, consider the case under the Group procedure (7c-d) below.

- e) Any complaints of bullying or harassment of a non-member of the Group by a member will be referred to the party's standards procedures. Complaints of bullying or harassment wholly within the Group may be considered under the Group procedure below, but the complainant will retain the right to appeal to the party's standards procedure if they are not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation and resulting group resolution.
- f) Any other complaint about a Group member that is wholly within the Group, will be dealt with under the Group procedure (7c-d) below.

Where a member of the Group has failed to comply with the rules outlined in these Standing Orders, the Group shall take action under the Group procedure (7c-d) below.

- c) If a complaint cannot be resolved informally by the Group officers, or where the complaint is deemed to have the potential to bring the party in to disrepute, three members including the Group Leader or the Group Whip, a member/s nominated by a) the relevant Local Party(ies) and b) the Group shall meet with the member of the Group against whom the complaint was made to discuss their actions. If the group is smaller than 5 members, the Local Party may be requested to provide up to 2 of the panel members. They may undertake any further investigations they deem necessary.
- d) The findings of any investigation carried out under section 7c shall be reported to the members of the Group and appear as an agenda item at a Group Meeting. At that meeting, any two members of the Group may propose one of the following actions is taken:
 - a) No fault is found
 - b) A warning will be issued and minuted
 - c) The member shall be suspended from the Group for a period to be defined
 - d) The member shall be excluded from the Group

The member of the Group concerned shall have the right to address the Group before any vote takes place.

A vote of the Group members shall take place to decide which course of action should be taken. The decision shall then be recorded in the minutes and notified to the secretary of the relevant Local and Regional Parties.

Notes on how the complaint was investigated and resolved should be made and retained by the Group Whip / Group Secretary.

e) Suspension of members

- i. The Group Leader may suspend a member under clauses 12b i and ii. Such suspension shall last until completion of the relevant processes, upon which the Group shall consider the suspension under clause 12d.
- ii. The Group Leader may suspend a member who the Leader believes has brought the party and Group into disrepute. Such suspension shall last until completion of the relevant processes, upon which the Group shall consider the suspension under clause 7d, unless overturned by a two-thirds majority of members voting at the next Group meeting.
- iii. Where the other officers of the Group unanimously believe that the Group Leader has brought the party and the Group into disrepute, they may call an emergency Group meeting with 72 hours' notice. Suspension of the Leader may only take place if a majority of all Group members (present or not) vote to confirm suspension.

8. GROUP LOYALTY

- a) Members are expected to publicly support all Group decisions, except where those decisions are exempted under section 8b below. Decisions are of three types.
 - i) Members are expected to support Group decisions on “organisational matters” such as the appointment of members to Committees, nominations of members as Chairs, Vice-Chairs of Committees (including the appointment of Mayor, Chair of Council, Deputy Mayor) and appointments to outside bodies.
 - ii) On matters of policy fully discussed and agreed by the Group, members are asked to support the Group.
 - iii) Members are asked to support Liberal Democrat Councillors on local ward matters that have little or no impact politically on other areas of the Council. Before raising matters in a Committee relating to an area without Liberal Democrat councillors, members are asked to find out the nearest Liberal Democrat councillor’s views, or failing that, the relevant Local/Branch Party’s views.
- b) If a member is unable to support the Group on any matter falling within the above three categories, they should inform the Group Secretary or Committee Spokesperson or Group Leader, or Group Whip or ward councillor as appropriate in advance. The Group recognises the impossibility of preventing any individual members opposing the group on matters of deeply held conviction or conscience, but members are required in these circumstances to inform the Group Leader or Group Whip in advance and asked to refrain from speaking or voting against the Group position.
- c) Group members who fail to attend a Group meeting, and who do not make their intentions known on matters discussed at the Group Meeting, are expected to abide by Group decisions. It is not sufficient to abstain from voting in these circumstances.

- d) All Notices of Motions for the council should be agreed by the group before submitting them. In an emergency, consultation with the Group Leader is sufficient.
- e) Members of the following committees will not be whipped into obeying a Group line:
 - i) Committees when they are dealing with planning matters.
 - ii) Licensing committees and panels;
 - iii) Standards committees;
 - iv) Scrutiny committees. Members of Scrutiny Committees are expected to consider their actions in the light of Paragraph 8a and the Group's Aims (Section 1); and
 - v) Other committees with a quasi-judicial function.
- f) Group Members (both voting and non-voting) shall respect the confidentiality of any politically or personally sensitive information they receive from other members of the Group or from Council Officers. In particular all Group agendas, minutes and reports shall be treated as confidential. This confidentiality provision shall not apply to any information that is already in the public domain, where the person from whom the information came has given express permission for disclosure or where the information would be available under any Freedom of Information legislation in force at the time.

9. ATTENDANCE AT COUNCIL AND COMMITTEE MEETINGS

- a) All members are expected to attend full Council Meetings.
- b) Any member who cannot attend a Council Meeting must inform the Group Secretary or Group Whip before the meeting. Any member who cannot attend a Committee meeting must inform the Committee spokesperson beforehand, with reasonable notice.
- c) Members are expected to attend the whole of the Council or Committee meeting and if they have to unavoidably leave early or arrive late they should inform the Group Leader/Committee Spokesperson in advance of the meeting. Members should not leave early without the express permission of the Leader or Committee spokesperson.

10. GROUP FINANCES

- a) All members of the Group must make a financial contribution towards Liberal Democrat campaigning at the rate and frequency set in the councillor contribution policy adopted by the Local Party (ies) covering the council area. Where giving a contribution would cause financial hardship to a Group Member, a reduced rate can be agreed according to the procedure agreed with the Local Party(ies)/Group Leader in line with the policy adopted by the Local Party(ies).
- b) Any member of the Group in arrears with the financial contribution set out in section 10a may not vote in any Group Election and is not eligible to restand as a candidate for internal group elections. Such arrears must be reported by the Group Treasurer to an approval panel the member goes before for election to a public office as a Liberal Democrat.
- c) The Group will follow electoral law, ALDC guidelines and the English Party Constitution in regards to its funds. If the Group holds its own bank account, the signatories must be any two from three of the Group Leader, Deputy Leader, Treasurer or Secretary. If the Group has insufficient members to have multiple signatories then the Local Party Chair or Treasurer should also be a signatory. [We need to make a decision here!]
- d) The Group Treasurer will present annual accounts to the Group at its Annual Meeting and with updates at every ordinary Group Meeting.

11. REPRESENTING THE COMMUNITY AND CAMPAIGNING

- a) All members of the Group must keep in touch with the residents of their ward or division by means of newsletters/Focus leaflets regularly, and by digital communications. Newsletters should be issued regularly outside election periods and copies retained and available on request to any member of the Group.
- b) Members of the group are expected to keep the public and press informed of their activities by issuing regular press releases on their activities. Press releases should be issued via, and be done in agreement with, the group leader.

12. TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

- a) Members of the Group shall receive an annual appraisal of performance and training needs from the Group.
- b) Members of the Group will agree political development objectives for the year with Group officers and the Local Party.
- c) Members of the Group will agree a personal training and development plan for the year ahead with Group officers.
- d) Members of the Group will comply with any Councillor Contract or Agreement signed by the Local Party(ies) at each round of elections.

The Group shall co-operate with any approval and selection process set down by the Local Party(ies) for elections to the Council, including re-approval at the end of a term of office.

13. AMENDMENTS TO STANDING ORDERS

- a) Any amendments and additions to these Standing Orders can only be made at Group Meeting and by a two thirds majority of the voting membership being present.
- b) Notice of amendments must be received in writing by all Group members a minimum of 14 days before consideration by the Group.
- c) Any amendments to the standing orders must be agreed by the relevant regional party according to their procedures.
- d) Suspension of these standing orders may only occur if a plurality of voting members are present and two thirds of those present and more than a half of all voting members support the suspension. Any suspension, and the decisions made thereunder, will be reported to the regional party within 14 days.

14. INTERPRETATION OF THESE STANDING ORDERS

Officers of the Group shall ensure that it complies with procedures outlined in the constitution of the Liberal Democrats in England to ensure it remains a recognised council group

On items where these Standing Orders are silent the provisions of the State or Federal Liberal Democrat constitution shall apply. In case of dispute then the regional or state party shall be asked to interpret these standing orders and their decision shall be final.