

# Hounslow Borough Liberal Democrats Council Group

## Standing Orders

Agreed: Monday 8 May 2006

### I AIMS

The aims of the Liberal Democrat Group on Hounslow Borough Council shall be:

- a) To advance collectively the aims and objectives of Liberal Democracy within Hounslow Borough Council through the expression of a co-ordinated and cohesive viewpoint and action.
- b) To secure the implementation of Liberal Democrat policies and principles applied to local needs.
- c) To increase the effectiveness of members as representatives of their constituents.
- d) To work with Liberal Democrats on other Councils and within the Borough on the fulfillment of local needs, the development of policy and the election of candidates.

### 2 MEMBERSHIP

A) Full voting membership of the group is open to:

- i) All Councillors elected to Hounslow Borough Council as Liberal Democrats (under the terms of the 1998 Registration of Political Parties Act if elected after 1999) with the support of the Local Party.
- ii) Other Councillors who apply to join, who are accepted by a majority of the Group, and who are accepted as members of the Liberal Democrats by the Local Party. Both conditions must apply.

B) Non-voting membership is open to:

- i) One or more representatives of each Local Party within the Council's area. The Group may invite other members of the Local Parties, either for a particular item, a meeting or indefinitely.
- ii) Duly approved and/or selected prospective candidates for the Council.
- iii) Prospective Parliamentary or Assembly Candidates or MPs, MEPs or elected members of National and Regional Assemblies and Parliaments from within the Hounslow Borough Council area.

C) All members of the Group are recommended to join the ALDC.

D) Any member who has doubts about his/her future commitment to the Liberal Democrat Group should discuss the matter with the leader or other members at a Group Meeting. In addition the local Party/Ward should be consulted. A decision to resign from the Group should be notified to the Group Leader and to the Group Members before the appropriate Council Officer is informed or any public statement made.

E) All Group Members shall ensure that they do not fall into arrears with Council Tax or Council House rent 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 of the circumstances at the earliest opportunity. *Councillors who are in arrears with Council Tax or Council House rents are restricted from voting on certain matters.*

F) A member shall be excluded from the Group if s/he has persistently conducted himself or herself in a manner seriously in conflict with the provisions of Paragraph 1 (Aims) or Paragraph 7 (Group Loyalty) of these Standing Orders. These provisions are subject to Paragraph 9 (Disciplinary Procedure) of these Standing Orders. A motion to exclude a councillor from the group must be passed by a two-thirds majority of the voting membership (as defined in 2A above) of the group present when the motion is debated. The motion must appear as a notified agenda item for the meeting. The councillor concerned has a right to attend and address the meeting and may be accompanied by another person (who must be a party member) as advisor if they desire.

G) A Group Member charged by the police with a Criminal Offence shall automatically be suspended without prejudice from Group membership. If subsequently acquitted or the charges are dropped they shall be automatically reinstated. A group member found guilty of a criminal offence which does not disqualify them from council membership may be reinstated if a simple majority of the group present vote in favour of their re-admission on a notified agenda item.

H) Where a member is under investigation by a Standards Board/Committee the group should take action as they feel appropriate following the disciplinary procedure in Section 9.

### 3 OFFICERS

The Group at the Annual Meeting shall elect

A) A **Leader**

B) A **Deputy Group Leader**

C) A **Group Chairperson**

D) A **Group Secretary**

E) A **Treasurer**

F) A **Press Secretary**

G) A **Group Whip(s)/Political Secretary(ies)**

H) Members to be nominated to Council as **Executive members** (where appropriate)

I) Members to be nominated to Council as members of **Scrutiny Committees** (where appropriate), who shall not be elected under paragraph 3(H)

J) **Group Spokespersons:**

**i. for controlling groups with Executive members with portfolios:**

one member shall be elected to each portfolio established by the Executive, or which are held by the Liberal Democrat Group. These members will be called Executive members, and will be the Spokespersons for that portfolio unless the portfolio's are held elsewhere. Each portfolio holder will normally have a Deputy who will also be elected. The portfolio holders will act as co-ordinators for any team or working group established in that

portfolio area by the Group, and will report on the activities of his/her portfolio at every Group Meeting. Portfolio holders will also be responsible for all internal communications about their area of responsibility.

The Spokesperson should normally convene meetings of the Group's Councillors on that Committee before each Committee meeting and shall act as co-ordinator for the Committee Group, regularly reporting on the committee's decisions or proposals to the whole Group.

**ii. additional spokespersons for controlling groups:**

one member of each Council Committee (excluding the Executive) shall be elected as Spokesperson for that Committee (and, where appropriate, the Group's nominee for Committee Chair). Spokespersons for Scrutiny Committees are not whipped, but should consider their actions in the light of Paragraphs 1 and 7 of these Standing Orders. A Deputy or Vice will also be elected. The Spokesperson should normally convene meetings of the Group's councillors on that Committee before each Committee meeting and shall act as co-ordinator for the Committee Group, regularly reporting on the committee's decisions or proposals to the whole group.

**iii. for opposition groups with Executive members:**

one member of each Council Committee (including the Executive) shall be elected as Spokesperson for that committee (and when the Group is in a position of power or influence shall be the Group's nominee for Committee Chair). A Deputy or Vice will also be elected. Spokespersons for Scrutiny Committees are not whipped. In addition, the Group may choose to elect "shadow" portfolio spokespersons (either from the Executive members or from the Scrutiny Committee spokespersons). The Spokesperson should normally convene meetings of the Group's councillors on that Committee before each Committee meeting and shall act as co-ordinator for the Committee Group, regularly reporting on the committee's decisions or proposals to the whole group.

**iv. for opposition groups with no Executive members where scrutiny areas and Executive portfolios match:**

the members elected as spokesperson for each Scrutiny Committee will be deemed to be the Group's shadow spokesperson on the relevant portfolio. If the Group is small in number the Group must decide what its priorities are and how best to meet them - sometimes it may not be necessary to have spokespersons for everything. As an alternative Group spokespeople can be elected by and from the Group as a whole.

**v. for opposition groups with no Executive members where scrutiny areas and Executive portfolios do not match:**

the members elected as spokespersons for each Scrutiny Committee will be deemed to be the Group's shadow spokespersons on the most relevant portfolio covered by their committee. Where more than one portfolio is covered by a Scrutiny Committee, shadow spokespeople for that Scrutiny Committee will be elected by the group from either the Group's members on that committee or, in cases where there are not enough members, from the Group as a whole. Where the number of Scrutiny Committees is greater than the number of portfolios, the shadow spokesperson for each portfolio will be elected by the group from the spokespersons for the Scrutiny Committees.

**All Officers** shall be regarded as retired from office if they submit a letter of resignation to the Group Secretary, or if, after seven days' notice has been given, and by a simple majority of the whole voting membership, a vote of no confidence has been carried. In any case they shall be subject to annual appointment.

## 4 DUTIES OF OFFICERS

*Duties will evolve as appropriate and vary to suit skills and time of individuals. We will have detailed job descriptions for each role as appropriate. A broadly-based leadership team with several active participants is both a strength and Liberal Democrat in principle, but co-ordination and communication are essential.*

- a) **The Group Leader** will be responsible for the general co-ordination of Liberal Democrat initiatives and Group activity. The 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 Group Leader (or Deputy Leader) will act as Group representative on the Borough party Executive.
- b) **The Deputy Leader** will undertake all the duties of the Leader in the absence of the Leader.
- c) **The Group Chair** will chair all group meetings and will co-ordinate group social activities.
- d) **The Secretary** will be responsible for Group cohesion and organisation and for liaison with the other political parties. S/he 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 as set out in Para 5 below. The Secretary will also be responsible for recording the presence of non-Councillors at Group meetings.
- e) **The Treasurer** will be responsible for any monies held by the Group. S/he will collect group subscriptions to be fixed at the Annual Meeting of the Group, will reimburse Officers' out of pocket expenses, and make other payments as may be approved by the Group. He/she will also be responsible for ensuring compliance with any legislation affected the funding of political parties.
- f) **The Press Secretary** is responsible for ensuring that Liberal Democrat initiatives are properly publicised, as well as Group responses on topical matters. Copies of press statements of significance to the Group as a whole shall be kept by the Press Secretary. Members must give him/her and/or the Group Leader a copy of such releases before issue.
- g) **The Group Whip(s)** shall be responsible for ensuring that the agreed voting intentions of the Group are communicated to individual councillors. 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.

## 5 ELECTION OF OFFICERS

- A) All officers and group spokespersons 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. Nominations must be submitted in writing to the Group Secretary 14 days before the Annual Meeting. A list of valid nominations will then be circulated to all members not less than 7 days before the Annual Group Meeting.
- 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 Secretary shall circulate an amended timetable to all councillors and selected candidates at the Group meeting preceding the Annual Elections. In this case the close of nominations shall be not less than 48 hours before the meeting.
- C) 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 Vote applications must be received 14 days before the elections and postal vote papers will be despatched not later than 7 days before the Annual Group Meeting. Where the shortened timetable set out in section 5B) is in operation postal votes will not be available.
- D) A Returning Officer from outside the Group Membership will be appointed to count the votes. Where there are more than two candidates for a position, voting will be by the Single

Transferable Vote method. The re-opening of nominations will only take place at the Annual Meeting if there are no valid nominations on the table.

In the event of a tied vote, when there are only two candidates, lots will be drawn to achieve a result.

The Returning Officer shall be responsible for the interpretation of these Election rules and his/her decision will be final. The Returning Officer should be a Liberal Democrat of good standing from outside the Borough.

## 6 GROUP MEETINGS

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.

A Quorum at any group meeting shall be one third of the voting membership of the group (or committee or portfolio team).

Agendas and any relevant papers for group meetings should be circulated 7 days in advance of the meeting; no items for decision can be taken under AOB, except in exceptional circumstances with the agreement of two thirds of the group.

### A) Annual Meeting

The Group will hold an Annual Meeting prior to the Annual Meeting of the Council:

- i) To elect Group Officers
- ii) 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).
- iii) To determine the membership subscription for the ensuing year.

### B) Ordinary Meetings

- i) 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.
- ii) 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. *New political arrangements, whereby some members are on Executives, some on Scrutiny Committees and some on no committees at all, make this more relevant than ever before.*
- iii) 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.
- iv) The Group will prepare for Liberal Democrat initiatives at future meetings of Committees or Council.
- v) The Group will meet at least once during every three months to discuss Group strategy, policies and business.

### C) Special Meetings

Special Group Meetings may be called by not less than one third of the voting group membership (or two members - which ever 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.

#### D) Declarations of Interest

The Group will operate the National Code of Local Government Conduct, in respect of all formal Group Meetings, particularly in regard to the declaration of pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests of members.

Members (both voting and non-voting) declaring a pecuniary interest in a matter should leave the room during its discussion at group meetings.

## 7 GROUP LOYALTY

#### A) **Members are expected to publicly support all Group decisions, except where those decisions are exempted under Paragraph 8(E) 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. 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.
- 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 and the relevant Local/Ward Party's views.

B) **If a member is unable to support the Group** on any matter falling within the above three categories, s/he should inform the Group Secretary or Group Leader as appropriate in advance. This information should be cascaded fully to the Group.

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) Members are expected to discuss with the Group any suggestions for **Notices of Motion** 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:

1. Planning committees or the Executive Committee if and when it acts as the Planning Committee;
2. Licensing committees;
3. Standards committees;
4. Scrutiny committees; and
5. Other committees with a quasi-judicial function

Members of Scrutiny Committees are expected to consider their actions in the light of Paragraph 7(A) and the Group's Aims (Para 1).

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.

## 8 ATTENDANCE AT COUNCIL AND COMMITTEE MEETINGS

All members are expected to attend full Council Meetings.

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.

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.

## 9 DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURE

If a member of the Group breaks these Standing Orders or brings the Liberal Democrat Party ("the Party") into disrepute by their words or actions the following procedures will apply. Where the member is accused of serious misconduct or behaviour serious enough to warrant expulsion from the party then it may be appropriate to move straight to step 2 or 3.

**Step 1:** The Group Leader, Group Chair and Chief Whip (or, in the event that the Group Leader, the Group Chair or Chief Whip are unavailable or the subject of the disciplinary procedure, their Deputies as appropriate) will meet with the member to discuss their actions and possible reasons for them. After investigations they shall make a factual report of their findings to the Group and they or any two group members may propose that one of the following actions be taken at the subsequent meeting:

- Find no fault
- Issue a verbal warning (minuted in writing) or
- Issue a written warning

Any decision must be passed by a majority of group members present.

**Step 2:** If either a verbal or a written warning has been given as set out in Step 1 above and the action recurs within four years from the date of the warning or is considered so serious that expulsion from the Group or the Party is being considered, then the matter will be referred to a panel consisting of the Group Leader, the Group Chair and the Chief Whip together with two members of the Local Party Executive from the Constituency containing the ward represented by the Councillor. When the Group Leader or the Group Chair are the subject of the disciplinary procedure then the Deputy Group Leader or Deputy Group Chair shall act in his or her place. This panel may hear from witnesses and must allow the member to make representations in person and to be accompanied by another person (who must be a member of the party) as advisor if they require. After investigations they shall make a factual report of their findings to the Group and they or any two group members may propose that one of the following actions be taken at the subsequent meeting:

- Find no fault, or

- Issue a written warning, and/or
- Require compliance with a stated contract of behaviour the breaching of which will result in the immediate reconvening of the panel to recommend further action, or
- Suspend the member from the Group for a stated period not exceeding one year from the start of the suspension, or
- Exclude the member from the Group in which case the procedure set out in Clause 2(F) of these Standing Orders shall apply

**Step 3:** If the action persistently recurs or is considered so serious as to warrant expulsion from the Party the matter will be referred to the appropriate constituency executive to be dealt with in accordance with the Constitution of the Liberal Democrats.

## 10 REGISTER OF INTERESTS

A Register of Interests of all voting Group Members updated annually shall be kept by the Group Secretary - this will go beyond the statutory requirements and include membership of social and other organisations.

## 11 GROUP FINANCES

Each voting member of the Group will be requested to pay to the Treasurer an annual subscription - the amount to be agreed at the Group's Annual Meeting. The Group will hold a bank account, the signatories of which will be any two officers from the Group Leader, Deputy Leader, Treasurer or Secretary and must include either the Group Leader or Deputy Leader.

The Treasurer will present annual accounts to the Group at its Annual Meeting and updates at every ordinary Group Meeting.

## 12 NEWSLETTERS/FOCUS LEAFLETS

All Liberal Democrat councillors are expected to keep in touch with their local residents by means of newsletters. Newsletters should be issued regularly outside election periods and copies of all newsletters should be sent to the Group Secretary who shall maintain a file available to all group members.

## 13 ELECTION PREPARATIONS

The Group shall make arrangements to act in conjunction with the local Party/ies in the approval and selection of candidates for Hounslow Borough Council elections and by-elections and in the preparation of a manifesto for the Hounslow Borough Council elections.

## 14 AMENDMENTS TO STANDING ORDERS

Amendments and additions to these Standing Orders can only be made at Group Meetings and by a two thirds majority of the voting membership present. Notice of amendments must be received in writing by all Group members a minimum of seven days before consideration by the Group.

## **15 INTERPRETATION OF THESE STANDING ORDERS**

On items where these Standing Orders are silent the provisions of the Federal Liberal Democrat Constitution shall apply. In case of dispute then a Regional Officer shall be asked to interpret these standing orders and his/her decision shall be final.

Printed and published by Hounslow Borough Liberal Democrats Council Group, with thanks to ALDC for use of their model constitution.