

## REPORT

### Council

Meeting Date: August 11, 2025

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**FROM:** Clerk's Department

**DATE:** July 29, 2025

**SUBJECT:** Council Staff Relations Policy

**WARD:** Town-wide

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#### RECOMMENDATION:

1. That the updated Council Staff Relations Policy, attached as Appendix A, be approved.
2. That the Information flow and interactions between Members of Council and Staff Procedure be rescinded.

#### KEY FACTS:

The following are key points for consideration with respect to this report:

- A council staff relations policy is mandated under Section 270 of the *Municipal Act, 2001*.
- Established in 2019, the town's Council Staff Relations Policy has been reviewed and updated based on a scan of best practices from municipalities across Ontario.
- The revised Policy provides clearer definitions of the roles and responsibilities of elected officials and municipal staff, supporting effective governance and reinforcing the neutrality of the public service.
- Updates emphasize the importance of maintaining appropriate boundaries to prevent political interference in staff operations and to preserve the integrity of political-administrative relationships.
- The updated Policy also strengthens the framework for the Integrity Commissioner to assess and address complaints, particularly those involving conduct and incivility, by setting clearer expectations.

#### BACKGROUND:

Since its adoption in 2019, the Council Staff Relations Policy (Policy) has supported the principles of respectful governance by guiding interactions between Council Members and Staff. Serving as a foundational document to foster a respectful,

productive, and supportive working relationship that promotes effective decision-making and the efficient delivery of municipal services.

There has been growing sector-wide attention on the importance of clearly defining the roles, responsibilities, and authority of Members of Council and Staff, highlighting the need to align local policies with evolving standards around accountability, workplace respect, and staff support. This reflects an evolving governance landscape across Ontario, informed by advocacy from municipal associations and recent legislative developments, most recently, the introduction of [\*Bill 9, the Municipal Accountability Act, 2025\*](#). This legislation reinforces the Province's commitment to enhancing accountability, transparency, and respectful behaviour in municipal governance. It includes measures to strengthen the role of Integrity Commissioners, enhance codes of conduct, and support municipal staff in delivering services in increasingly complex and high-pressure environments.

The Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario (AMCTO), in its [submission](#) to the province regarding Strengthening Codes of Conduct and Integrity Commissioner Framework, has flagged the importance of aligning the Council Staff Relations Policy with existing employment-related legislation and standards (notably Section 270 of the *Municipal Act* and legislation on workplace harassment and violence). Aligning these areas can help create a more consistent and enforceable framework that better supports both Council and Staff in their respective roles.

This review is part of a broader, phased modernization of the Town's governance and accountability framework. It builds on the 2024 updates to the Council Code of Conduct and Integrity Commissioner Protocol and will be followed by updates to the Employee Code of Conduct, Accountability and Transparency Policy, and other related documents. Together, these initiatives support consistent expectations for professional conduct, role clarity, and ethical behaviour across the organization. There is a renewed focus on improving how residents, businesses, and visitors interact with Town services. A respectful, well-understood framework for Council and Staff interactions is critical to supporting this work and ensuring staff are equipped to provide high-quality, Council approved services consistently and confidently.

#### **COMMENT/OPTIONS:**

The Policy establishes principles that support respectful, productive, and supportive interactions between Council and Staff, key to delivering high-quality services to the community. It emphasizes the foundational principle of municipal governance: that elected officials are responsible for setting policy, while municipal staff are responsible for implementing that policy and managing day-to-day operations.

To support this distinction, the policy provides strengthened language around:

- The clear separation of political direction and administrative operations.
- The role of the CAO as the head of the municipal administration.
- The importance of maintaining neutrality of public service.
- Ensuring that Council direction is provided through appropriate channels and not to individual staff.

The proposed updates were informed by current municipal practices, relevant codes of conduct, Integrity Commissioner reports, and legal guidance to ensure the revised policy reflects sector best practices and continues to support Council's commitment to respectful, effective governance. The updated policy sets out a governance framework that supports clarity, accountability, and good decision-making. It also helps ensure that the Integrity Commissioner has a well-defined policy to refer to when evaluating conduct or complaints, particularly in matters where the roles of elected officials and staff may be misunderstood or challenged.

### **Guiding Principles:**

The revised Policy outlines six guiding principles that establish the foundation for a respectful, productive, and supportive working relationship between Council and staff. These principles are not only values, but practical commitments that guide communication, collaboration, and decision-making. Together, they reflect the culture of professionalism and mutual respect that the Town seeks to foster.

The first principle, **Mutual Respect and Shared Responsibility**, emphasizes the importance of maintaining a respectful, civil, and inclusive environment. Both Council and Staff share responsibility for upholding dignity in all interactions, which is essential to building and maintaining public trust. Disparaging or disrespectful comments directed at the Town, Council, staff, or individuals are unacceptable. Concerns regarding Staff performance must be addressed through confidential internal processes, while complaints about Council members should be referred to the Integrity Commissioner.

The second principle, **Clarity of Roles and Responsibilities**, highlights the importance of respecting the distinct but complementary roles of Council and Staff in serving the community. Council, as a collective body, is responsible for setting policy, representing the public interest, and providing strategic direction. Staff are tasked with managing day-to-day operations, offering professional advice, and implementing Council's decisions. A respectful and effective working relationship depends on a clear understanding of these roles and on individual Council members acting within their elected responsibilities.

The third principle, **Respectful Communication and Use of Established Channels**, reinforces the need for open, honest, and respectful communication to support effective governance. To ensure clarity and efficiency, communication should follow established channels: routine service inquiries should be directed to

ServiceOakville; non-routine policy or program questions to the appropriate Director; broader or strategic matters to the CAO or relevant Commissioner. Requests or inquiries not related to the business of the Corporation, will be directed to the Mayor's Office for response.

Adhering to these channels promotes accountability and timely responses and equips Members of Council with a clear and scalable pathway to obtain the information they need. Routing routine requests through ServiceOakville is especially important, as it enables the Town to track service demand, monitor complaints, measure performance, and build a centralized knowledge base to support future inquiries. Recognizing the varying complexity of Council inquiries, the policy encourages Members to consider the nature and scale of their requests, whether a quick point of clarification or a deeper policy analysis, so that the appropriate Staff, resources, and process are involved.

The fourth principle, **Council Provides Direction by Resolution**, affirms that Council provides direction to the administration only through formal resolutions or legislated Mayoral authority. Council is collectively responsible for setting service levels and must adhere to formal decision-making processes. The CAO, as the head of administration, is responsible for implementing Council's decisions and overseeing staff operations. This governance structure ensures clarity, accountability, and effective service delivery.

The fifth principle, **Fair and Consistent Access to Information**, supports good governance by ensuring that all Members of Council have equal access to information. This enables informed, collective decision-making and reinforces transparency and consistency in how information is shared. The CAO plays a key role in facilitating this process. Fair and consistent information-sharing builds trust, enhances collaboration, and leads to better outcomes for the community.

The final principle, **Respect for Time and Priorities**, emphasizes that mutual respect between Council and Staff is essential to good governance. Acknowledging each other's roles, workloads, and time constraints helps sustain a productive working relationship. When Council Members provide advance notice of questions, Staff can prepare more informed responses, leading to more efficient meetings and better decision-making. At the same time, individual Members must avoid directing operational work, respecting the boundaries of Staff responsibilities. This clarity supports strategic focus and enables Council and Staff to work effectively together in service of the community.

The remainder of the Council Staff Relations Policy provides structural clarity by outlining the roles and authorities of key municipal actors, as defined in the *Municipal Act*. It clearly defines the responsibilities of Council, the Head of Council, the CAO, and municipal officers and employees. Staff are responsible for

implementing Council's decisions and offering objective, professional advice to support informed decision-making. The Mayor, as Head of Council, serves as the official spokesperson for the municipality and plays a key role in addressing matters that fall outside the Town's jurisdiction. The policy also includes sections on monitoring and contraventions to support accountability, as well as a definitions section to ensure consistent understanding and application across the organization. These updates reinforce effective governance and help ensure everyone operate within their defined roles.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommend the approval of the updated Council Staff Relations Policy, attached as Appendix A to this report. The revised policy reflects best practices, recent legislative developments, and a strengthened framework to support respectful and professional interactions between Members of Council and municipal Staff. It is designed to support Staff in confidently and professionally delivering Council approved services, while also equipping Members of Council with a clear and scalable pathway to obtain the information they need.

This approach supports efficient, accurate responses without discouraging open communication. The goal is to elevate engagement, aligning Staff support with the scope of Council requests to improve outcomes for both Council and the public. Its development included extensive consultation with Senior Staff, Legal, and the Town's Integrity Commissioner, whose input was instrumental in shaping the policy's guiding principles. The Integrity Commissioner's support reinforces the policy's alignment with ethical standards and its role in fostering a respectful, accountable working environment.

## **NEXT STEPS**

To support implementation, an internal Staff job aid will be developed to uphold the policy's principles and strengthen working relationships that help Council Members serve their constituents. This practical, accessible resource will translate the policy's intent into everyday application. While the policy provides the formal framework for Council Staff interactions, the job aid will offer practice-based insights, examples, and decision-making tips to help Staff respond to Council requests with confidence and consistency.

Given the wide range of Council inquiries, from simple clarifications to complex, multi-departmental analyses, training and education are essential. The job aid will offer a structured yet flexible reference to help Staff assess request scope, select appropriate response channels, and align with policy expectations. Its goal is to build shared understanding, reduce ambiguity, and support timely, accurate communication. It will also help Staff navigate public expectations, which may not always reflect how public governance operates. As a living document, the job aid will

evolve with feedback, best practices, and future policy updates to remain a relevant and effective support tool.

**CONSIDERATIONS:**

**(A) PUBLIC**

A clear and well-communicated Council Staff Relations Policy helps build public trust by promoting transparency, accountability, and professionalism in local governance. It reassures residents that their elected officials and municipal Staff are working collaboratively and effectively to serve the community's best interests

**(B) FINANCIAL**

There are no direct financial implications associated with the approval of the revised policy. Integrity Commissioner service costs, which vary based on the volume and nature of requests for advice, education, support, and complaint investigations, are covered through the operating budget.

**(C) IMPACT ON OTHER DEPARTMENTS & USERS**

The revised Policy, developed in consultation with senior leaders, provides clarity and consistency across departments in how to engage with Members of Council. It supports a unified organizational approach, strengthens interdepartmental coordination, and empowers Staff at all levels to respond to Council requests with confidence and alignment.

**(D) COUNCIL STRATEGIC PRIORITIES**

This report supports the corporate strategic priority of accountable government and service excellence by reinforcing the Council Staff Relations Policy as a foundational document that promotes consistent expectations for professional conduct, role clarity, and ethical behaviour across the organization, and ultimately strengthening public trust.

**(E) CLIMATE CHANGE/ACTION**

This matter does not impact climate change/action.

**APPENDICES:**

Appendix A – Draft Staff Council Relations Policy

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Submitted by:

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