

Playing to Our Strengths

As the Council takes a more visible and proactive role in the local community, it is important that we consider carefully how we represent ourselves at meetings, events and external functions. Public representation is not simply a matter of attendance; it also reflects the Council’s preparation, understanding, credibility and willingness to engage constructively.

Where a member is asked to represent the Council in an area with which they are unfamiliar, they may not always be best placed to contribute at the level required, regardless of their commitment or good intentions. This is not a criticism of any individual. Rather, it is a reminder that effective representation depends on matching the right person to the right setting, and ensuring that members are properly supported and prepared for the responsibilities they are asked to undertake.

It would therefore be in the Council’s interest to understand more clearly the backgrounds, experience, qualifications, knowledge and interests of its members. Used appropriately, this would help the Council appoint representatives, chairs and delegates who are well suited to particular areas of work, while also encouraging collaboration and shared learning across the Council.

This approach would also help guard against a common organisational risk: that confidence can sometimes be mistaken for expertise. All members bring value, and no one can be expected to know everything. However, good governance is strengthened when confidence is balanced by knowledge, experience, preparation and a willingness to listen. Representation works best when members are encouraged to contribute where they can be most effective, while also recognising where others may be better placed to lead.

Proposal

I therefore propose that the Council consider a simple and transparent way of identifying members’ relevant skills, experience and interests, so that representation can be allocated as effectively as possible within the Council’s existing operating framework. Where representation falls under a nominated role, the post-holder should be able to consider, impartially and in the Council’s wider interest, whether they or another member may be best suited to represent the Council in a particular situation.

John Nicholson, Town & Parish Councillor for Northwood & Cowes South
Place Plan Advisory Board Representative