

Collective Responsibility

General Principles

1.26

Collective responsibility implies that the policy of individual Ministers must be consistent with the policy of the Council of Ministers as a whole. Once Council's policy on any particular matter is decided, each Minister is expected to support it and share responsibility for it. If a Minister cannot agree with his colleagues on a matter of general policy or on a single major issue, he should consider whether he should remain a member of Council.

1.27 Collective responsibility has the following features:

(1) A Minister may speak against any proposal in the Council of Ministers, but he must subsequently either support the policy decided upon or resign.

(2) Where the policy of a particular Minister is being challenged, it is the Council of Ministers as a whole which is being challenged. Thus, the defeat of a Minister on a major issue represents a defeat for Council.

(3) Every Minister must be prepared to support all Council of Ministers' decisions both **inside** and **outside** Tynwald, the House of Keys and Legislative Council

(4) Collective Responsibility does **not** apply to a Minister's responsibility for his personal mistakes.

(5) Any major shift of policy proposed by a Minister must be cleared by the Council of Ministers before it is announced.

Exceptions

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There are circumstances, as follows, under which Ministers have freedom to speak publicly against policies and decisions of the Council of Ministers or without reference to Council:

(1) **Matters of conscience:** There will inevitably be issues where Ministers will be guided by a fundamental religious or moral belief [rather than political ideology]. Such issues are readily identifiable whether they arise in a Tynwald motion or in a Bill. Ministers will always have the right to a free vote on such issues.

(2) **A declared position:** A Minister brings with him to the Council of Ministers a set of views and opinions uniquely his own. These may, in some cases, include a strongly held and publicly declared position on a particular subject. It would be unrealistic to expect such a Minister to change his position on that subject for the sake of Council's solidarity. Equally, however, it would be unacceptable for that Minister to "crusade" in support of his declared position in the knowledge that the Council of Ministers does not share his view.

(3) **Constituency matters:** Issues may arise where there is a strong and specific constituency interest which conflicts with a Council decision. In these circumstances, a Minister from that constituency must have the right to

represent that interest if he so wishes. Where this is so, the Minister concerned must make his position clear to the Council of Ministers. Provided, as a courtesy, a Minister gives advance warning to any other Minister, he may ask a written question on a constituency matter provided the question is framed in an appropriate way.

(4) **Inconsequential matters:** Collective responsibility applies to Council policies and decisions. Where small matters of detail arise, where there can be room for disagreement without those policies or decisions being called into question, Ministers will have the freedom to express themselves. Ordinarily such matters will not come before the Council of Ministers anyway.

(5) **Unresolved issues:** Issues will be raised from time to time which the Council of Ministers has not considered or on which Council has not taken a decision. Until a Council position is established, Ministers will be free to express themselves. However, such issues are likely to emerge on the agenda for Tynwald or one of the Branches and an opportunity will arise for the matter to be discussed in Council before debate in public. Ministers should therefore, as a general rule, where possible, seek to refrain from comment until after Council has considered the matter.

1.29 A personal or political dislike of a Council of Ministers' decision is not in itself a sufficient justification for an exemption from collective responsibility. In cases where a Minister feels personally or politically unhappy with a particular policy or Council decision, the proper forum for discussion of the matter is the Council of Ministers. If the Minister is unable to persuade Council to accept his thinking after full and frank discussion, he must accept the decision reached by Council. Any subsequent public dissent must be regarded as an unacceptable indulgence.