

HIGHAM PARISH COUNCIL

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR MEMBERS

1. Introduction

1.1 Trust and confidence in public office-holders and institutions are important for the functioning of local authorities. This is particularly true in the case of elected office-holders. The Council has therefore adopted this Code of Conduct to promote and maintain high standards of conduct in public life. It is each Councillor's responsibility to comply with the provisions of this Code.

1.2 The Code of Conduct applies to all elected Councillors, voting co-opted members and appointed members.

2. When does the Code of Conduct apply?

2.1 In this Code "meeting" means any meeting of

- (a) Higham Parish Council ("the Authority");
- (b) any of the Authority's committees, sub committees joint committees, joint sub-committees, or area committees (including working parties); or
- (d) informal meetings with other Members and/or Officers relating to the discharge of the Authority's functions.

2.2 The Code of Conduct applies—

- (a) whenever you conduct the business, or are present at a meeting, of the Authority; or
- (b) whenever you act, claim to act or give the impression you are acting in the role of Member to which you were elected or appointed; or
- (c) whenever you act, claim to act or give the impression you are acting as a representative of the Authority (including representation on outside bodies); or
- (d) at all times and in any capacity, in respect of conduct identified in paragraphs 3.4(a) and 3.5; or
- (e) in respect of any criminal offence for which you have been convicted during your term of office.

2.3 Where you are elected, appointed or nominated by the authority to serve on any other authority or body you must, when acting for that other authority or body, comply with the code of conduct of that other authority or body.

2.4 Where you are elected, appointed or nominated by the authority to serve on any other body which does not have a code relating to the conduct of its members, you must, when acting for that other body, comply with this code of conduct, unless it conflicts with any other lawful obligations to which that other body may be subject.

3. Rules of Conduct

3.1 As a Member of Higham Parish Council you shall have regard to the Seven Principles of Public Life.

Selflessness

Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.

Integrity

Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.

Objectivity

Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.

Accountability

Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

Openness

Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.

Honesty

Holders of public office should be truthful.

Leadership

Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

These general principles are the underlying principles behind the rules of conduct set out below.

3.2 In fulfilling your Duties and Responsibilities

You must not:

- (a) breach your duties and responsibilities with due regard to the principle that there should be equality of opportunity for all people, regardless of their gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, age or religion;
- (b) disrespect others;
- (c) bully or harass any person; or
- (d) do anything which compromises, or which is likely to compromise, the impartiality of those who work for, or on behalf of, the Authority.

3.3 Information

You must not:

- (a) disclose confidential information or information which should reasonably be regarded as being of a confidential nature, without the express consent of a person authorised to give such consent, or unless required by law to do so;
- (b) prevent any person from gaining access to information to which that person is entitled by law

3.4 Conduct

You must:

- (a) not conduct yourself in a manner which could reasonably be regarded as bringing your office or the Authority into disrepute;
- (b) not make vexatious, malicious or frivolous complaints against other members or anyone who works for, or on behalf of, the Authority.
- (c) comply with any request of the authority's Monitoring Officer or Section 151 Officer, in connection with an investigation conducted in accordance with their respective statutory powers.

3.5 Use of your Position

You must not:

- (a) in your official capacity or otherwise, use or attempt to use your position improperly to confer on or secure for yourself, or any other person, an advantage or create or avoid for yourself, or any other person, a disadvantage;
- (b) use, or authorise others to use, the resources of the Authority—
 - (i) imprudently;
 - (ii) in breach of the Authority's requirements;
 - (iii) unlawfully;
 - (iv) other than in a manner which is calculated to facilitate, or to be conducive to, the discharge of the functions of the Authority or of the office to which you have been elected or appointed;
 - (v) improperly for political purposes; or
 - (vi) improperly for private purposes.

3.6 Decision Making

You must:

(a) when participating in meetings or reaching decisions regarding the business of the Authority, do so on the basis of the merits of the circumstances involved and in the public interest having regard to any relevant advice provided by the Authority's officers,

in particular by:

- (i) the Authority's head of paid service;
- (ii) the Authority's s.151 Officer/ Chief Finance Officer;
- (iii) the Authority's Monitoring Officer/ Chief Legal Officer;

(b) give reasons for all decisions in accordance with any statutory requirements and any reasonable additional requirements imposed by the authority.

3.7 Compliance with the Law and the Authority's Rules and Policies

You must:

(a) observe the law and the Authority's rules governing the claiming of expenses and allowances in connection with your duties as a member;

(b) comply with the provisions of the Bribery Act 2010 or similar;

(c) comply with the Authority's Gifts and Hospitality Policy;

(d) comply with any other policy (or part of policy) which sets out required conduct from Members, for example the Member/Officer Working Protocol and Planning Code for Members, or similar.

PART 2

MEMBERS' INTERESTS

4. Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

4.1 You have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in any business of your authority if it is of a description set out in 4.2 below and is either:

(a) an interest of yours,
or that of a Relevant Person being:

(b) an interest of your spouse,

(c) an interest of your civil partner, or

(d) an interest of a person you are living with as a spouse or civil partner,
and in the case of paragraphs 4.1(b) – (d) you are aware that the Relevant Person has the interest.

4.2 "Disclosable Pecuniary Interests" are defined by ***The Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012*** and are any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit or gain.

Sponsorship

Any payment or provision of any other financial benefit (other than from the relevant Authority) made or provided within the relevant period in respect of any expenses incurred by the Member in carrying out duties as a Member, or towards the election expenses of the Member. This includes any payment or financial benefit from a trade union within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Relations

(Consolidation) Act 1992.

Contracts

Any contract which is made between the relevant person (or a body in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest) and the relevant Authority:

- (a) under which goods or services are to be provided or works are to be executed; and
- (b) which has not been fully discharged.

Land

Any beneficial interest in land which is within the area of the relevant Authority.

Licences

Any licence (alone or jointly with others) to occupy land in the area of the relevant Authority for a month or longer.

Corporate tenancies

Any tenancy where (to the Member's knowledge)—

- (a) the landlord is the relevant Authority; and
- (b) the tenant is a body in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest.

Securities

Any beneficial interest in securities of a body where:

- (a) that body (to the Member's knowledge) has a place of business or land in the area of the relevant Authority; and
- (b) either:
 - (i) the total nominal value of the securities exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body; or
 - (ii) if the share capital of that body is of more than one class, the total nominal value of the shares of any one class in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest exceeds one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that class.

5. Other Pecuniary Interests

5.1 You have a Pecuniary Interest in any business of the Authority where it relates to or is likely to affect:

- (a) any person or body who employs or has appointed you;
- (b) any contract for goods, services or works made between the Authority and you or a firm in which you are a partner, a company of which you are a remunerated director, or a person or body of the description specific in paragraphs 6.1 (a)-(b) which has been fully discharged within the last 12 months;

6. Non-Pecuniary Interests

6.1 You have a Non-Pecuniary Interest in any business of the Authority where it relates to or is likely to affect:

- (a) anybody of which you are a member or in a position of general control or management and to which you are appointed or nominated by the Authority;
- (b) anybody:
 - (i) exercising functions of a public nature;
 - (ii) directed to charitable purposes; or
 - (iii) one of whose principal purposes includes the influence of public opinion or policy (including any political party or trade union); of which you are a member or in a position of general control or management;
- (c) the interests of any person from whom you have received a gift or hospitality with an estimated value of at least £50;
- (d) a decision in relation to that business which might reasonably be regarded as affecting your wellbeing or the wellbeing of their family or friends to a greater extent than the majority of:
 - (i) (in the case of Authorities with electoral divisions or wards) other council tax payers, ratepayers or inhabitants of the electoral division or ward, as the case may be, affected by the decision; or
 - (ii) (in all other cases) other council tax payers, ratepayers or inhabitants of the Authority's area.

7. Disclosure of Interests (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests, Other Pecuniary Interests and Non-Pecuniary Interests)

7.1 Subject to sub-paragraphs 7.2 to 7.3, where you have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest, other Pecuniary Interest or Non-Pecuniary Interest in any business of the Authority and you are present at a meeting of the Authority at which the business is considered, you must disclose to that meeting the existence and nature of that interest whether or not such interest is registered on your Register of Interests or for which you have made a pending notification.

7.2 Sub-paragraph 7.1 only applies where you are aware or ought reasonably to be aware of the existence of the Relevant Person's Interest.

7.3 Where you have an interest in any business of the Authority which would be disclosable by virtue of paragraph 7.1 but by virtue of paragraph 12 (Sensitive Information) details of the interest are not registered in the Authority's published Register of Members' Interests and the interest is a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest you need not disclose the nature of the interest to the meeting.

7.4 Where you have a Pecuniary Interest in any business of the Authority and a function of the Authority may be discharged by you acting alone in relation to that business, you must ensure you notify the Authority's Monitoring Officer of the existence and nature of that interest within 28 days of becoming aware that you will be dealing with the matter even if more than 28 days before you will actually deal with the business.

7.5 Where you have an interest in any business of the Authority which would be disclosable by virtue of paragraph 7.1 and you have made an executive decision in relation to that business you must ensure that any written statement of that decision records the existence and nature of that interest. In this paragraph "executive decision" is to be construed in accordance with any regulations made by

the Secretary of State under section 22 of the Local Government Act 2000.

8. Disclosure of Interests generally

8.1 Subject to sub-paragraph 8.2 below, you have a duty to disclose any interest, as set out in paragraphs 5 and 6 above, in considering any business of the Authority, where that interest is one which a member of the public with knowledge of the relevant facts would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice your judgement of the public interest.

8.2 You do not have a disclosable interest in any business of your Authority where that business relates to the functions of your Authority in respect of:

- i. housing, where you are a tenant of your Authority provided that those functions do not relate particularly to your tenancy or lease;
- ii. school meals or school transport and travelling expenses, where you are a parent or guardian of a child in full time education, or are a parent governor of a school, unless it relates particularly to the school which the child attends;
- iii. statutory sick pay under Part XI of the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992, where you are in receipt of or, are entitled to the receipt of, such pay;
- iv. an allowance, payment or indemnity given to Members;
- v. any ceremonial honour given to Members; and
- vi. setting Council Tax or a Precept under the Local Government Finance Act 1992

9. Effect of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests on participation

(a) If you are present at a meeting of the Authority or of any committee, sub-committee, joint committee or joint sub-committee of the Authority and you have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in any matter to be considered, or being considered, at the meeting and you are aware of that Interest:

- (i) You must not participate, or participate further, in any discussion of the matter at the meeting, or participate in any vote, or further vote, taken on the matter at the meeting.
- (ii) You must withdraw from the room or chamber where the meeting considering the business is being held unless you have received a dispensation from the Authority's Monitoring Officer.

(b) If you have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in any business of the Authority you must not:

- (i) exercise executive functions in relation to that business; and
- (ii) seek improperly to influence a decision about that business

(c) If a function of the Authority may be discharged by a Member acting alone and you have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in any matter to be dealt with or being dealt with in the course of discharging that function you may not take any steps or any further steps in relation to the matter (except for the purpose of enable the matter to be dealt with otherwise than by yourself).

10. Effect of Other Pecuniary or Non-Pecuniary Interests on participation

10.1 If you have a pecuniary interest (other than a disclosable pecuniary interest) or a non-pecuniary interest in any business of your Authority which a Member of the public with knowledge of the relevant facts would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice your judgement of the public interest and you are present at a meeting of the authority at which such business is to be considered or is being considered you must:

(a) Disclose the existence and nature of the interest in accordance with paragraph 7.1 (but subject to paragraph 12)

(b) Withdraw from the room or chamber where the meeting considering the business is being held, immediately after making your representations or in any other case when the business is under consideration, unless you have obtained a dispensation from your authority's Monitoring Officer.

PART 3

REGISTER OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Registration of Members' Interests

11.1 Subject to paragraph 12, you must, within 28 days of:

(a) this Code being adopted by or applied to your authority; or

(b) your election, re-election or appointment or re-appointment to office (where that is later), or co-option onto the authority, register in your authority's register of members' interests (maintained by the Monitoring Officer under Section 29(1) of the Localism Act 2011) details of:

(i) disclosable pecuniary interests as referred to in paragraph 4 that you, your spouse, civil partner or person with whom you live as if they were your spouse or civil partner in so far as you are aware of their interests at that time.

11.2 Subject to paragraph 12, you must, within 28 days of becoming aware of any new Disclosable Pecuniary Interest as referred to in paragraph 4 that you, your spouses, civil partner or person with whom you live as if they were your spouse or civil partner or change to any interest registered under paragraph 4 above by providing written notification to your authority's Monitoring Officer.

12. Sensitive Information

12.1 Where you have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest referred to in paragraph 4 or other Pecuniary Interest referred to in paragraph 5, and the nature of the interest is such that you and your authority's Monitoring Officer consider that disclosure of details of the interest could lead to you or a person connected with you being subject to violence or intimidation if the interest is entered in the authority's register then copies of the register available for inspection and any published version of the register should not include details of the interest but may state that you have an interest details of which are withheld under s32(2) of the Localism Act 2011 and/or this paragraph.

12.2 You must, within 28 days of becoming aware of any change of circumstances, which means that information excluded under paragraph 18.1 is no longer sensitive information, notify your authority's Monitoring Officer.

12.3 In this Code "sensitive information" means information whose availability for inspection by the public creates, or is likely to create, a serious risk that you or a person who lives with you may be subject to violence or intimidation.