

Congleton Town Council

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR MEMBERS

Member Code of Conduct

1. Congleton Town Council has adopted the Cheshire East Council Code of Conduct to promote and maintain high standards of conduct and underpin public confidence in the authority and its Members and co-opted Members (referred to collectively in this Code as “Members”).
2. The Code has been adopted under the Localism Act 2011 and is based on the following core principles of public life:
 - 2.1 Selflessness
 - 2.2 Integrity
 - 2.3 Objectivity
 - 2.4 Accountability
 - 2.5 Openness
 - 2.6 Honesty
 - 2.7 Leadership
3. The Code sets out general obligations about the standards of conduct expected of Members and co-opted Members of the authority, together with provisions about registering and declaring interests.

General obligations

4. Whenever you are acting as a Member or co-opted Member of this authority you must act in accordance with the following obligations:

Selflessness

- 4.1 You must act solely in the public interest and must never use or attempt to use your position improperly to confer an advantage or disadvantage on any person or act to gain financial or other material benefits for yourself, your family, friends or close associates.

Integrity

- 4.2 You must not place yourself under a financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might seek to influence you in the performance of your official duties.

Objectivity

4.3 When carrying out your public duties you must make all choices, such as making public appointments, awarding contracts or recommending individuals for rewards or benefits, on merit.

4.4 You should remain objective, listen to the interests of all parties appropriately and impartially and take all relevant information, including advice from the authority's officers, into consideration.

4.5 You should exercise independent judgement. Although you may take account of the views of others (including a political group), you should reach your own conclusions on the issues before you and act in accordance with those conclusions.

Accountability

4.6 You are accountable to the public for your decisions and you must co-operate fully with whatever scrutiny is appropriate to your office, including appropriate scrutiny by local residents.

Openness

4.7 You must be open and transparent where possible about your decisions and actions and the decisions and actions of your authority. You should be prepared to give reasons for those decisions and actions.

Honesty

4.8 You must declare any personal, pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests that relate to your public duties and must take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest, including registering and declaring interests as set out in Part 2 below.

4.9 You must only use or authorise the use of the authority's resources in accordance with the authority's requirements. You must, when using or authorising the use of such resources, ensure that they are used for proper purposes only. Resources must not be used improperly for political purposes (including party political purposes) and you must have regard to any applicable Local Authority Code of Publicity in force from time to time.

Leadership

4.10 You must promote and support high standards of conduct when serving as Member of the authority, by leadership and example, championing the interests of the community.

4.11 You should uphold the law and, on all occasions, act in accordance with the trust that the public is entitled to place in you.

Respect for Others

4.12 You must treat others with courtesy. You should engage with colleagues and staff in a manner that underpins mutual respect and courtesy, essential to good local government.

4.13 You must not:

- (i) do anything which may cause your authority to breach any equality laws
- (ii) compromise or attempt to compromise the impartiality of anyone who works for, or on behalf of, the authority
- (iii) bully ⁽¹⁾ any person, including other Councillors, officers of the authority or members of the public
- (iv) intimidate or attempt to intimidate any person who is or is likely to be a complainant, a witness, or involved in the administration of any investigation or proceedings in relation to an allegation that a Member (including yourself) has failed to comply with his or her authority's code of conduct.

Information

4.14 You must not disclose information given to you in confidence by anyone, or information acquired by you which you believe, or ought reasonably to be aware, is of a confidential nature, except where: ⁽²⁾

- (i) you have the written consent of a person authorised to give it
- (ii) you are required by law to do so
- (iii) the disclosure is made to a professional third party for the purpose of obtaining professional advice provided that the third party agrees not to disclose the information to any other person, or
- (iv) the disclosure is reasonable, in the public interest; and made in good faith and in compliance with the reasonable requirements of the authority.

4.15 You must not prevent another person from gaining access to information to which that person is entitled by law.

Gifts and Hospitality

4.16 You must within 28 days of receipt, notify the Monitoring Officer in writing of any gift, benefit or hospitality with a value in excess of £100 which you have accepted as a Member from any person or body other than the Authority. The Monitoring Officer will place your notification on a public register of gifts and hospitality.

Registering and Declaring Interests

Registering and Declaring Interests – General Requirements

5 You must, within 28 days of:

5.1 the adoption of this Code

5.2 taking office as a Member

5.3 becoming aware of any new interest not already registered

5.4 becoming aware of any change to any interest already registered
notify the monitoring officer in writing of any disclosable pecuniary interest, or other type of interest as defined by this Code.

6. If you become aware of any such interest not already registered (or the subject of pending notification) during the course of any meeting of the authority at which you are in attendance then you must disclose the interest to meeting, take the action required by the Code depending on the nature of the interest and notify the monitoring officer of the interest in accordance with the provisions of this Code.

Sensitive Interests

7. A 'sensitive interest' is described in the Localism Act 2011 as an interest the nature of which is such that the Member and the authority's monitoring officer consider that disclosure of the details of the interest could lead to the Member or a person connected with the Member being subject to violence or intimidation.
8. Where you consider that you have a sensitive interest, and the monitoring officer agrees, that part of the register recording that interest will be will not be published or made available for public inspection. A declaration of interests must still be made at a meeting where relevant, but the sensitive information need not be disclosed.

Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

9. A disclosable pecuniary interest is defined by statute and is subject to change from time to time.
10. Unless dispensation has been granted, if you are present at any meeting of the authority and you have a disclosable pecuniary interest in any matter to be considered or being considered at the meeting, you must leave the meeting while any discussion or voting on that matter takes place. You may not participate in any discussion of the matter at the meeting and you may not participate in any vote taken on the matter at the meeting.
11. You must not discharge or participate in the discharge of any function related to any matter in which you have a disclosable pecuniary interest.
12. Failure to comply with these requirements of the Code may amount to a criminal offence.

Other Interests – Personal Interests

13. In addition to disclosable pecuniary interests referred to above, you must also declare personal interests.
14. You have a personal interest in any business of the authority where the business of the authority relates to or is likely to affect any body of which you are a member or in a position of general control or management and to which you are appointed or nominated by your authority.
15. You will also have a personal interest in any business of the authority where the business of the authority relates to or is likely to affect any body exercising functions of a public nature, which is directed to charitable purposes or whose principle purposes includes influencing public opinion or policy where you are a member of that body or in a position of general control or management.
16. The Audit and Governance Committee may, from time to time, prescribe certain bodies the membership of which amounts to a personal interest.
17. You will also have a personal interest in any business of the authority where a decision in relation to that business might reasonably be regarded as affecting your wellbeing or financial position or the wellbeing or financial position of a relevant person to a greater extent than the majority of other Council tax payers, ratepayers, or inhabitants of the electoral division or ward, as the case may be, affected by the decision.
18. For the purposes of this Code, a relevant person is:
 - 18.1 a member of your family or any person with whom you have a close association, or
 - 18.2 any person or body who employs or has appointed such persons, any firm in which they are a partner, or any company of which they are directors, or
 - 18.3 any person or body in whom such persons have a beneficial interest and a class of securities exceeding the nominal value of £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body.
19. Unless your personal interest also amounts to a prejudicial interest, a disclosable pecuniary interest or pre-determination, you may remain in the meeting and take part in the debate and vote.

Other Interests – Prejudicial Interests

20. You will have a prejudicial interest if you have a personal interest in any business of the authority and where that personal 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 and where that business:
 - 20.1 affects your financial position or the financial position of a relevant person or body described in paragraph 14 or 15 above, or
 - 20.2 relates to the determination of any approval, consent, licence, permission or registration in relation to you or any relevant person or body described in paragraph 14 or 15 above.

21. Where you have a prejudicial interest, you may not participate in any discussion of the matter at the meeting or in any vote taken on the matter at the meeting. You are also required to leave the room where the meeting is taking place during the discussion and vote. However you may attend the meeting and make representations, answer questions or give evidence provided that the public are also allowed to attend the meeting for the same purpose and you leave the meeting immediately after having done so.

Pre-Determination and Bias

22. Separately from considerations as to personal, prejudicial or disclosable pecuniary interests, Members must be mindful of falling foul of the general obligations of this code by taking part in decisions where they are biased or have pre-determined the matter in question.
23. Simply put, a Member will be biased or will have pre-determined a matter if they have approached a matter with a closed mind. That is to say if they have made up their mind which way they will decide a matter before all of the relevant considerations are presented and debated in the appropriate decision making forum.
24. Previous actions or statements of a Member will not be taken by themselves as proof of predetermination. A Member may be predisposed to a certain point of view, however notwithstanding any predisposition, Members need to be careful to ensure they approach and, insofar as is possible, are seen to approach decisions with an open mind.
25. Particular scenarios to be mindful of are where a Member, in some other role, is seen to be a promoter or advocate for a proposal which later comes before them for decision. A risk arises when there has been significant personal involvement in preparing or advocating the proposal such that a Member may become or may be perceived by the public as being no longer able to approach the decision with an open mind.
26. If you feel that you have pre-determined a matter you should say so. You should not speak or vote on the proposal. You may, however, make representations on the proposal if a member of the public also has the right to do so. You are not legally obliged to withdraw from the meeting for the remainder of the debate and vote but in most circumstances doing so will counter any suggestion that you influenced the remaining Members by your continued presence. If you do not withdraw, as a minimum you must withdraw to the public area of the meeting room for the whole of the consideration of the matter, whether or not you are also exercising your right to speak.
27. If in any doubt you should seek advice from the Monitoring Officer.

Further Information

28. The Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Chairman of the Audit and Governance Committee, will publicise from time to time arrangements for dealing with complaints made against Members that their conduct has breached the requirements of this code. The Monitoring Officer will publicise from time to time a Monitoring Officer Protocol reflecting current trends in Member Conduct matters in order to provide guidance on how emerging or common issues will be approached.

Dispensations

29. The Audit and Governance Committee may grant you a dispensation, but only in limited circumstances, to enable you to participate and vote on a matter in which you have a prejudicial or disclosable pecuniary interest.

30. A list of matters to which a dispensation has been granted to all Members is available.

1. "Bullying" may be characterised as offensive, intimidating, malicious, insulting or humiliating behaviour and includes "cyber bullying". It may happen once or be part of a pattern of behaviour. It can be contrasted with the legitimate challenges a member may make in challenging policy or scrutinising performance. You may challenge others as to why they hold their views but must take care to raise issues in the appropriate forum and in an appropriate way. Ideas and policies may be robustly criticised but individuals should not be subject to unreasonable or excessive personal attack.

2. It is your responsibility to ensure that any judgement you make in relying on any exception will stand up to rigorous objective scrutiny. In the case of any doubt advice should be sought from the Monitoring Officer or an independent qualified legal advisor.

Extract from the Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012

- The following categories are Disclosable Pecuniary Interests
- “M” denotes the relevant Elected Member
- The regulations apply if the disclosable pecuniary interest is yours, your spouse’s or civil partner’s or is the pecuniary interest of somebody with whom you are living as a husband or wife or as if you were civil partners

<i>Subject</i>	<i>Prescribed description</i>
Employment, office, trade, profession or vocation Sponsorship	Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit or gain. 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 M in carrying out duties as a Member, or towards the election expenses of M. This includes any payment or financial benefit from a trade union within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992(1).
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.

List of suggested dispensations (Note: this differs from the previous list granted by Cheshire East Council)

- (a) housing, where you are a tenant of your authority provided that those functions do not relate particularly to your tenancy or lease;
- (b) 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;
- (c) 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;
- (d) an allowance, payment or indemnity given to Members;
- (e) any ceremonial honour given to Members;

(f) setting Council Tax or precept under the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (or any subsequent legislation);

(g) setting a Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme or Local scheme for the payment of business rates (including eligibility for rebates and reductions) for the purposes of the Local Government Finance Act 2012 (or any subsequent legislation)

(h) an interest arising from your membership of another council; and

- (i) To the extent that it may amount to a prejudicial or disclosable pecuniary interest, any allowance or other remuneration received from the Council in respect of Council duties or directorships of Council owned ASDVs.

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 M'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 M'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.