

**NORTH HERTS DISTRICT COUNCIL CODE OF CONDUCT
FOR COUNCILLORS (AND VOTING CO-OPTees)**

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) the authority;
 - (b) the executive of the authority;
 - (c) any of the authority's or its executive's committees, sub committees joint committees, joint sub-committees, or area committees;
 - (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; 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, except and insofar as 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 North Hertfordshire District Council you shall have regard to the seven principles of public life.

<i>Selflessness</i>	Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.
<i>Integrity</i>	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.
<i>Objectivity</i>	Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.
<i>Accountability</i>	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.
<i>Openness</i>	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.
<i>Honesty</i>	Holders of public office should be truthful.
<i>Leadership</i>	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 Duties and Responsibilities

You must:

- (a) carry out 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) show respect and consideration for others;
- (c) not use bullying behaviour or harass any person; and
- (d) not 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 authority's Gifts and Hospitality Policy;
- (c) 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 of Good Practice for Members.

4. Interests

Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

- 4.1 You have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest if you, or your spouse or civil partner, have a pecuniary interest as defined by regulations made by the Secretary of State. The description of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests published by DCLG in their Guide for Councillors "Openness and Transparency on Personal Interests" is attached in Appendix A. Interests or your spouse or civil partner are included to ensure that the public can have confidence that councillors are putting the public interest first and not benefiting the financial affairs of themselves or their spouse or civil partner from which the councillor would stand to gain. For this purpose your spouse or civil partner includes any person with whom you are living as husband or wife, or as if they were your civil partner.
- 4.2 You must:
 - (a) within 28 days of taking office as a member or co-opted member, notify the Monitoring Officer of any Disclosable Pecuniary Interest as defined by regulations made by the Secretary of State, where the pecuniary interest is yours, your spouse's or civil partner's, or is the pecuniary interest of somebody with whom you are living with as a husband or wife, or as if you were civil partners.
 - (b) ensure that your register of interests is kept up to date and notify the Monitoring Officer in writing within 28 days of becoming aware of any change in respect of your Disclosable Pecuniary Interests.
- 4.3 Any interests notified to the Monitoring Officer will be included in the register of interests. A copy of the register will be available for public inspection and will be published on the authority's website.
- 4.4 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 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 enabling the matter to be dealt with otherwise than by yourself).

Declarable Interests

4.5 You have a Declarable Interest in an item of business of the Council where:

(a) a decision in relation to that business might reasonably be regarded as affecting the well-being or financial standing of you or a member of your family or your employer or a person or body with whom you have a close association to a greater extent than it would affect the majority of the Council Tax payers, ratepayers or inhabitants of the ward for which you have been elected or otherwise of the Council's administrative area; or

(b) it relates to or is likely to affect any of the interests listed in the Appendix to this Code in respect of a member of your family (other than covered in the legislation) or your employer or a person or body with whom you have a close association; or

(c) the 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; or

(d) the interests of any person or body from whom you have received a gift or hospitality with an estimated value of at least £50 (or such other figure set in the Council's Gifts and Hospitality Policy). You need not disclose this interest if it was registered more than 6 years before the date of the meeting; or

(e) it relates to or is likely to affect any body of which you are a member or in a position of general control or management which:

(i) you are appointed or nominated to by the authority; or

(ii) exercises functions of a public nature; or

(iii) is directed to charitable purposes; or

(iv) as its principal purposes includes the influence of public opinion or policy (including any political party or trade union)

and that interest is not a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest.

5. Sensitive Information

5.1 A Disclosable Pecuniary Interest may not be published or made available for inspection where the nature of the interest is such that you and the 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 it is entered in the register of interests. 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.

5.2 You must, within 28 days of becoming aware of any change of circumstances which means that information excluded under paragraph 5.1 is no longer sensitive information, notify the Monitoring Officer.

6. Declaring interests at meetings

- 6.1 If you are present at a Meeting at which an item of business in which you have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest is to be considered or is being considered you must make a verbal declaration of the existence and nature of the Disclosable Pecuniary Interest at the meeting at or before the consideration of the item of business or as soon as the interest becomes apparent. If the interest is not registered and is not the subject of a pending notification you must notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest within 28 days of the Meeting
- 6.2 If you attend a meeting at which any item of business is to be considered and you are aware that you have a Declarable Interest in that item, you must make a verbal declaration of the existence and nature of that interest at or before the consideration of the item of business or as soon as the interest becomes apparent.

7. Effect of Interests on Participation at Meetings

- 7.1 If you are present at a meeting of the council and you have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest relating to any business that is or will be considered at the meeting, you must not:
- (a) participate in any discussion of the business at the meeting, or if you become aware of your Disclosable Pecuniary Interest during the meeting participate further in any discussion of the business, or
 - (b) participate in any vote or further vote taken on the matter at the meeting.
- 7.2 The prohibitions at paragraph 7.1 apply to any form of participation, including speaking as a member of the public. In certain circumstances you can request a dispensation from these prohibitions from the Monitoring Officer.
- 7.3 If you are present at a meeting of the council and you have a Declarable Interest relating to any business 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 you must not participate in the discussion or vote on the item, although you may speak as a member of the public.
- 7.4 If you have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest, or a Declarable Interest which is so significant that you must not participate, you must leave the room or chamber where the meeting is being held unless you have received a dispensation from the Monitoring Officer.
- 7.5 If you are leaving the room or chamber in accordance with paragraph 7.4 you may listen to any speeches from the public but must leave prior to the item being presented or in any other case, whenever it becomes apparent that that business is being considered at that meeting.

TERMS

Description of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (from *DCLG Guide for Councillors "Openness and Transparency on Personal Interests" March 2013*)

If you have any of the following pecuniary interests, they are your **Disclosable Pecuniary Interests** under the new national rules. Any reference to spouse or civil partner includes any person with whom you are living as husband or wife, or as if they were your civil partner.

Employment, office, trade, profession or vocation

Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit or gain, which you, or your spouse or civil partner, undertakes.

Other payments received

Any payment or provision of any other financial benefit (other than from your council or authority) made or provided within the relevant period in respect of any expenses incurred by you in carrying out duties as a member, or towards your election expenses. This includes any payment or financial benefit from a trade union within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992. The relevant period is the 12 months ending on the day when you tell the monitoring officer about your Disclosable Pecuniary Interests following your election or re-election, or when you became aware you had a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest relating to a matter on which you were acting alone.

Contracts

Any contract which is made between you, or your spouse or your civil partner (or a body in which you, or your spouse or your civil partner, has a beneficial interest) and your council or authority –

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

Land

Any beneficial interest in land which you, or your spouse or your civil partner, have and which is within the area of your council or authority.

Licences

Any licence (alone or jointly with others) which you, or your spouse or your civil partner, holds to occupy land in the area of your council or authority for a month or longer.

Corporate tenancies

Any tenancy where (to your knowledge) –

- the landlord is your council or authority; and
- the tenant is a body in which you, or your spouse or your civil partner, has a beneficial interest.

Securities

Any beneficial interest which you, or your spouse or your civil partner has in securities of a body where –

(a) that body (to your knowledge) has a place of business or land in the area of your council or 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 you, or your spouse or your civil partner, has a beneficial interest exceeds one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that class.