



CODE OF CONDUCT FOR PARISH COUNCILLORS 2024-25

THIS CODE OF CONDUCT WAS ADOPTED BY THE COUNCIL AT ITS MEETING HELD ON 5TH FEBRUARY 2024.

Statement

The role of councillor across all tiers of local government is a vital part of our country's system of democracy. It is important that as councillors we can be held accountable, and all adopt the behaviours and responsibilities associated with the role. Our conduct as an individual councillor affects the reputation of all councillors. We want the role of councillor to be one that people aspire to. We also want individuals from a range of backgrounds and circumstances to be putting themselves forward to become councillors.

As councillors, we represent local residents, work to develop better services and deliver local change. The public have high expectations of us and entrust us to represent our local area, taking decisions fairly, openly, and transparently. We have both an individual and collective responsibility to meet these expectations by maintaining high standards and demonstrating good conduct, and by challenging behaviour which falls below expectations.

Importantly, we should be able to undertake our role as a councillor without being intimidated, abused, bullied, or threatened by anyone, including the general public.

This Code has been designed to protect our democratic role, encourage good conduct, and safeguard the public's trust in local government.

Definition

For the purposes of this Code of Conduct, a "councillor" means a member of the Parish Council.

Purpose of the Code of Conduct

The purpose of this Code of Conduct is to assist you, as a councillor, in modelling the behaviour that is expected of you, to provide a personal check and balance, and to set out the type of conduct that could lead to action being taken against you. It is also to protect you, the public, fellow councillors, Parish Council officers and the reputation of local government. It sets out general principles of conduct expected of all councillors and your specific obligations in relation to standards of conduct. The use of support, training and

mediation prior to action being taken using the Code is encouraged. The fundamental aim of the Code is to create and maintain public confidence in the role of councillor and local government.

General Principles of Councillor Conduct

Everyone in public office at all levels; all who serve the public or deliver public services, including ministers, civil servants, councillors, and local authority officers; should uphold the Seven Principles of Public Life, also known as the Nolan Principles.

- I act with integrity and honesty,
- I act lawfully,
- I treat all persons fairly and with respect; and
- I lead by example and act in a way that secures public confidence in the role of councillor.

Principles:

1. **Selflessness:** Holders of public office should act solely in the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or friends.
2. **Integrity:** Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might seek to influence them in the performance of their official duties.
3. **Objectivity:** In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals or rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.
4. **Accountability:** Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.
5. **Openness:** Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.
6. **Honesty:** Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interests.
7. **Leadership:** Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.

In undertaking my role:

- I impartially exercise my responsibilities in the interests of the local community,
- I do not improperly seek to confer an advantage, or disadvantage, on any person,
- I avoid conflicts of interest,
- I exercise reasonable care and diligence; and

- I ensure that public resources are used prudently and in the public interest.

Obligations on Councillors

As a Member of Stoney Middleton Parish Council, your conduct should, in particular, address the statutory principles in the Code by:

1. Championing the needs of residents, including the whole community and, in a special way, your constituents, including those who did not vote for you, and putting their interests first.
2. Dealing with representations or enquiries from residents, members of the community and visitors fairly, appropriately, and impartially.
3. Not allowing other pressures, including the financial interests of yourself or others connected to you, to deter you from pursuing constituents' case work, the interests of Stoney Middleton Parish Council or the good governance of Stoney Middleton Parish Council in a proper manner.
4. Exercising independent judgement and not compromising your position by placing yourself under obligations to outside individuals or organisations who might seek to influence the way you perform your duties as a Member of Stoney Middleton Parish Council.
5. Listening to the interests of all parties, including relevant advice from statutory and other professional officers, taking all relevant information into consideration, remaining objective and making decisions on merit.
6. Being accountable for your decisions and co-operating when scrutinised internally and externally, including by local residents.
7. Contributing to making Stoney Middleton Parish Council's decision-making processes as open and transparent as possible to enable residents to understand the reasoning behind those decisions and to be informed when holding you and other Members to account but restricting access to information when the wider public interest or the law requires it.
8. Respecting the confidentiality of information which you receive as a member by:
 - (a) Not disclosing confidential information to third parties unless required by law to do so or where there is a clear and overriding public interest in doing so; and
 - (b) Not obstructing third parties' legal rights of access to information.
9. Behaving in accordance with all of Stoney Middleton Parish Council's legal obligations, with particular regard to:
 - (a) The Data Protection Act 2018.
 - (b) The Freedom of Information Act 2000.
 - (c) The Bribery Act 2010.
 - (d) The Equality Act 2010.

10. Having regard to the principles of Stoney Middleton Parish Council's policies, protocols, and procedures, including those relating to the use of Stoney Middleton Parish Council's resources (which must not be used improperly for political purposes including party political purposes).
11. Valuing other Members and officers and engaging with them in an appropriate manner and in a manner which underpins the mutual respect between individuals that is essential to good local government and respecting and not bullying any person.
12. Always treating people with respect, including the organisations and public you engage with and those you work alongside.
13. Providing leadership through behaving in accordance with these principles when championing the interests of the community with other organisations as well as within the Council.

Application of the Code of Conduct

This Code of Conduct applies to you as soon as you sign your declaration of acceptance of the office of councillor and continues to apply to you until you cease to be a councillor.

This Code of Conduct applies to you when you are acting in your capacity as a councillor which may include when:

- you misuse your position as a councillor.
- your actions would give the impression to a reasonable member of the public with knowledge of all the facts that you are acting as a councillor.

The Code applies to all forms of communication and interaction, including:

- at face-to-face meetings
- at online or telephone meetings
- in written communication
- in verbal communication
- in non-verbal communication
- in electronic and social media communication, posts, statements, and comments.

You are also expected to uphold high standards of conduct and show leadership at all times when acting as a councillor.

Your Monitoring Officer has statutory responsibility for the implementation of the Code of Conduct, and you are encouraged to seek advice from your Monitoring Officer on any matters that may relate to the Code of Conduct.

Standards of Councillor Conduct

This section sets out your obligations, which are the minimum standards of conduct required of you as a councillor. Should your conduct fall short of these standards, a complaint may be made against you, which may result in action being taken.

Guidance is included to help explain the reasons for the obligations and how they should be followed.

General Conduct

1. Respect

As a councillor:

1.1 I treat other councillors and members of the public with respect.

1.2 I treat Council employees, employees and representatives of partner organisations and those volunteering for the Council with respect and respect the role they play.

Respect means politeness and courtesy in behaviour, speech, and in the written word. Debate and having different views are all part of a healthy democracy. As a councillor, you can express, challenge, criticise and disagree with views, ideas, opinions, and policies in a robust but civil manner. You should not, however, subject individuals, groups of people or organisations to personal attack.

In your contact with the public, you should treat them politely and courteously. Rude and offensive behaviour lowers the public's expectations and confidence in councillors.

In return, you have a right to expect respectful behaviour from the public. If members of the public are being abusive, intimidatory or threatening you are entitled to stop any conversation or interaction in person or online and report them to the local authority, the relevant social media provider, or the police. This also applies to fellow councillors, where action could then be taken under the Councillor Code of Conduct.

2. Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination

As a councillor:

2.1 I do not bully any person

2.2 I do not harass any person

2.3 I promote equalities and do not discriminate unlawfully against any person

The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) characterises bullying as offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, an abuse or misuse of power through means that undermine, humiliate, denigrate, or injure the recipient. Bullying might be a regular pattern of behaviour or a one-off incident, happen face-to-face, on social media, in emails or phone calls, happen in the workplace or at work social events and may not always be obvious or noticed by others.

The Protection from Harassment Act 1997 defines harassment as conduct that causes alarm or distress or puts people in fear of violence and must involve such conduct on at least two occasions. It can include repeated attempts to impose unwanted

communications and contact upon a person in a manner that could be expected to cause distress or fear in any reasonable person.

Unlawful discrimination is where someone is treated unfairly because of a protected characteristic. Protected characteristics are specific aspects of a person's identity defined by the Equality Act 2010. They are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

The Equality Act 2010 places specific duties on local authorities. Councillors have a central role to play in ensuring that equality issues are integral to the Parish Council's performance and strategic aims, and that there is a strong vision and public commitment to equality across public services.

3. Confidentiality and Access to Information

As a councillor:

4.1 I do not disclose information:

- (a) given to me in confidence by anyone,**
- (b) acquired by me which I believe, or ought reasonably to be aware, is of a confidential nature, unless;**
 - (i) I have received the consent of a person authorised to give it;**
 - (ii) I am required by law to do so;**
 - (iii) the disclosure is made to a third party for the purpose of obtaining professional legal advice provided that the third party agrees not to disclose the information to any other person; or**
 - (iv) the disclosure is:**
 - 1) reasonable and in the public interest; and**
 - 2) made in good faith and in compliance with the reasonable requirements of the local authority; and**

4.2 I do not improperly use knowledge gained solely as a result of my role as a councillor for the advancement of myself, my friends, my family members, my employer, or my business interests.

4.3 I do not prevent anyone from getting information that they are entitled to by law.

Parish Councils must work openly and transparently, and their proceedings and printed materials are open to the public, except in certain legally defined circumstances. You should work on this basis, but there will be times when it is required by law that discussions, documents, and other information relating to or held by the Parish Council

must be treated in a confidential manner. Examples include personal data relating to individuals or information relating to ongoing negotiations.

4. Disrepute

As a councillor:

5.1 I do not bring my role or Parish Council into disrepute.

As a Councillor, you are trusted to make decisions on behalf of your community and your actions and behaviour are subject to greater scrutiny than that of ordinary members of the public. You should be aware that your actions might have an adverse impact on you, other councillors and/or your Parish Council and may lower the public's confidence in you or your Parish Council's ability to discharge your/its functions. For example, behaviour that is considered dishonest and/or deceitful can bring your Parish Council into disrepute.

You are able to hold Stoney Middleton Parish Council and fellow councillors to account and are able to constructively challenge and express concern about decisions and processes undertaken by the council whilst continuing to adhere to other aspects of this Code of Conduct.

5. Use of Position

As a councillor:

5.1 I do not use, or attempt to use, my position improperly to the advantage or disadvantage of myself or anyone else.

Your position as a member of the Parish Council provides you with certain opportunities, responsibilities, and privileges, and you make choices all the time that will impact others. However, you should not take advantage of these opportunities to further your own or others' private interests or to disadvantage anyone unfairly.

6. Complying with the Code of Conduct

As a councillor:

6.1 I undertake Code of Conduct training provided by my local authority.

6.2 I cooperate with any Code of Conduct investigation and/or determination.

6.3 I do not intimidate or attempt to intimidate any person who is likely to be involved with the administration of any investigation or proceedings.

6.4 I comply with any sanction imposed on me following a finding that I have breached the Code of Conduct.

It is extremely important for you as a councillor to demonstrate high standards, for you to have your actions open to scrutiny and for you not to undermine public trust in Stoney Middleton Parish Council or its governance.

Protecting your Reputation and the Reputation of the Parish Council

7. Interests

As a councillor:

9.1 I register and disclose my interests.

Section 29 of the Localism Act 2011 requires the Monitoring Officer to establish and maintain a register of interests of members of the authority.

You need to register your interests so that the public and fellow councillors know which of your interests might give rise to a conflict of interest. The register is a public document that can be consulted when (or before) an issue arises. The register also protects you by allowing you to demonstrate openness and a willingness to be held accountable. You are personally responsible for deciding whether or not you should disclose an interest in a meeting, but it can be helpful for you to know early on if others think that a potential conflict might arise. It is also important that the public know about any interest that might have to be disclosed by you or other councillors when making or taking part in decisions, so that decision making is seen by the public as open and honest. This helps to ensure that public confidence in the integrity of Parish Council is maintained. You should note that failure to register or disclose a disclosable pecuniary interest is a criminal offence under the Localism Act 2011.

8. Gifts and Hospitality

As a councillor:

8.1 I do not accept gifts or hospitality, irrespective of estimated value, which could give rise to real or substantive personal gain or a reasonable suspicion of influence on my part to show favour from persons seeking to acquire, develop or do business with the Parish Council.

In order to protect your position and the reputation of Stoney Middleton Parish Council, you should exercise caution in accepting any gifts or hospitality which are (or which you reasonably believe to be) offered to you because you are a councillor. The presumption should always be not to accept significant gifts or hospitality. However, there may be times when such a refusal may be difficult if it is seen as rudeness in which case you could accept it but must ensure it is publicly registered. However, you do not need to register gifts and hospitality which are not related to your role as a councillor, such as Christmas gifts from your friends and family. It is also important to note that it is appropriate to accept normal expenses and hospitality associated with your duties as a councillor.

DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

In accordance with Section 30(3) of the Act a pecuniary interest is a “disclosable pecuniary interest” in relation to a Member, if it is of a description specified below and either

- is an interest of the Member, or
- is an interest of the members spouse or civil partner, as in -
 - a person with whom the member is living as husband and wife, or
 - a person with whom the Member is living as if they were civil partners, and the Member is aware that the other person has the interest.

Subject	Prescribed description
Employment, office, trade, profession or vacation	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(a).
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.
Licenses	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: that body (to your knowledge) has a place of business or land in the area of the relevant authority; and either: the total nominal value of the securities exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body; or 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.