

STANDARDS COMMITTEE



Report subject	Local Government Association - Model Code of Conduct for Councillors
Meeting date	20 April 2021
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	<p>The Local Government Association has produced a New Model Code of Conduct for Councillors which is appended to this report at Appendix 1.</p> <p>The Standards Committee is responsible for monitoring the Code of Conduct and for making recommendations to Full Council on any changes to the Code.</p> <p>The Committee received details of the Model Code at the last meeting but delayed recommending the adoption pending viewing other interested parties and to await the outcome of the Government's consideration of the Committee for Standards in Public Life recommendations.</p>
Recommendations	<p>It is RECOMMENDED that:</p> <p>The Local Government Association Model Councillor Code of Conduct, as set out in Appendix 1 to this report, be adopted.</p>
Reason for recommendations	The adoption of the Model Code will support councillors in maintaining high standards of conduct and provide consistency with neighbouring councils and other public bodies.
Portfolio Holder(s):	Not applicable
Corporate Director	Graham Farrant (Chief Executive)
Report Authors	Susan Zeiss (Service Director for Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer) Richard Jones (Head of Democratic Services)
Wards	Not applicable
Classification	For Recommendation

Background

1. All Councils are required to have a local Member Code of Conduct and the existing Code was adopted by the Shadow Authority on 21 February 2019. The Code was to be reviewed in 2020/21 but the Covid Pandemic prevented this review taking place.
2. The Committee on Standards in Public Life undertook a comprehensive review of local government ethical standards and published a report in January 2019. The Committee made 26 formal recommendations to the Prime Minister and 15 Best Practice recommendations. A number of the recommendations required legislative changes to be implemented but this has been delayed.
3. The Model Code was presented to the previous meeting of the committee in January 2021, however, it was not proposed to adopt the Model at that time pending the outcome of the Government's consideration of the recommendations. Unfortunately, the recommendations have yet to be considered.
4. The Committee also requested that the expectations of other interested parties and partners be sought to ensure, where possible, that a consistent approach can be explored.
5. Dorset Council has advised that it has adopted the Model Code without modification. Furthermore, Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service has also adopted the Model Code. The Chief Executive of Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils has further advised that there was general consensus amongst parish and town councils for a consistent approach, including those within the BCP Council area.
6. As reported at the last meeting, the LGA has sought to address issues arising through more communication taking place remotely and online between councillors and residents, particularly through social media which is welcomed. It has further acknowledged there may be more overt expression of emotions associated with the additional pressures brought about by the current pandemic environment. However, abuse, threatening and intimidatory communications continue to be unacceptable, and the Model Code seeks to address this.
7. The Model Code applies when a Councillor acts or gives the impression that they are acting, as a Councillor. This applies to all forms of communication and interaction, including social media.
8. The Model Code continues to be in-line with the seven principles of public life, namely, selflessness; integrity; objectivity; accountability; openness; honesty; and leadership.

Options

9. The Committee have a number of options at this stage, including:-
 - (a) Recommend to Full Council the adoption of the Local Government Association Model Councillor Code of Conduct;
 - (b) Recommend to Full Council the adoption of the Local Government Association Model Councillor Code of Conduct with potential amendments;
 - (c) Reject the Local Government Association Model Councillor Code of Conduct and resolve to continue with the existing Code of Conduct; or

- (d) Resolve to delay further the adoption of the Model Code pending the outcome of the Government's consideration of the Committee for Standards in Public Life recommendations.
10. In light of the adoption of neighbouring and partner councils and services in Dorset and the welcomed consistency expressed by the Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils, the Model Councillor Code of Conduct is recommended for adoption.

Summary of financial implications

11. There are no financial implications arising from the report.

Summary of legal implications

12. A Councillor Code of Conduct is required by Section 27 of the Localism Act 2011. The adoption of the new Model Code is in accordance with those provisions.

Summary of human resources implications

13. There are no human resources implications arising from this report.

Summary of sustainability impact

14. There are no sustainability implications arising from this report.

Summary of public health implications

15. There are no public health implications arising from this report.

Summary of equality implications

16. There are no equality implications arising from this report.

Summary of risk assessment

17. The adoption of a new Code of Conduct would provide clarity on a number of issues and provide clear expectations of councillors regarding their conduct.

Background papers

Published works

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Local Government Association – Model Councillor Code of Conduct