

Recommendations to the Council

Audit and Standards Committee

Proposed adoption of new Code of Conduct for Members

The Audit and Standards Committee have recently considered a new Model Code of Conduct for members as produced by the Local Government Association (LGA), with a view to its adoption by this Council. The full report and Appendices are shown as Attachment 1.

This Council's comments to the LGA during the consultation stage are shown in italic/shaded text in the Model Code attached as Appendix 1.

Overall, the new Code is seen as an improvement on Staffordshire's current Code primarily because:

- It applies to the behaviour of members when acting/claiming to act/giving the impression of acting in their capacity as a Councillor and/or representative of their council, or when publicly referring to their role of Councillor or using knowledge that could only be obtained by being a councillor
- It gives clear and concise explanations of each undertaking and the expectations on members
- It clearly states that the whole Code applies to member's actions and behaviour on Social Media

The Audit and Standards Committee particularly discussed:

1. The proposed introduction of the requirement to declare (general) pecuniary interests

This is detailed in paragraphs 7 and 8 of Appendix B to the attached Code. The requirement is to declare interests which either directly relate to or affect the financial interest or well being of relatives and close associates. The Audit and Standards Committee felt that it was unrealistic to expect members to have such detailed knowledge of the personal affairs of so many individuals and therefore recommend that the requirement be limited to *declaring the general (pecuniary) interests of relatives and associates where the interest is known of by the member.*

2. Gifts and Hospitality

The County Councils' current £25 threshold for declaring Gifts and Hospitality was generally agreed to be too low. After discussion, the Audit and Standards Committee voted to recommend the adoption of a £50 threshold, as proposed in the Model Code (paragraph 10 of Appendix 1).

Recommended -That:

(a) approval be given to the adoption of the LGA Model Code of Conduct for members with an amendment to the requirement to declare general (pecuniary) interest of relatives and close associates to refer to those *interests known to the member*; the Code to be effective immediately after the next Staffordshire County Council elections (6 May 2021 or any re-arranged date)

(b) the threshold for the declaration of Gifts and Hospitality be confirmed as £50.

(c) the existing Internal Resolution Procedure and Sanctions be applied to the new Code.

(d) the Director for Corporate Services (Monitoring Officer) be authorised to make the necessary amendments to the Constitution.