

Part 5

Codes and Protocols



Councillor Code of Conduct

This Code of Conduct applies to Councillors and voting co-opted Councillors. It does not apply to non-voting co-opted Councillors.

Part 1: General Provisions

1.1 You are a Councillor or co-opted Councillor of the St Albans City and District Council and hence you shall have regard to the following principles – selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.

Accordingly, when acting in your capacity as a Councillor or co-opted Councillor -

- a. You must act solely in the public interest and should never improperly confer an advantage or disadvantage on any person or act to gain financial or other material benefits for yourself, your family, a friend or close associate.
- b. 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.
- c. 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.
- d. You are accountable for your decisions to the public and you must co-operate fully with whatever scrutiny is appropriate to your office.
- e. You must be as open as possible about your decisions and actions and the decisions and actions of your authority and should be prepared to give reasons for those decisions and actions.
- f. You must declare any private interests, both pecuniary and non-pecuniary, 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 in a manner conforming with the procedures set out in Part 2 below.
- g. You must, when using or authorising the use by others of the resources of your authority, ensure that such resources are not used improperly for political purposes (including party political purposes) and you must have regard to any applicable Local Authority Code of Publicity made under the Local Government Act 1986.

- h. You must promote and support high standards of conduct when serving in your public post, in particular as characterised by the above requirements, by leadership and example.

Specific Provisions

2.1 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 for others;
- (c) not use bullying¹ 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.

2.2 You must not:

- (a) disclose confidential information or information which should reasonably be regarded as being confidential in 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.

2.3 You must not conduct yourself in a manner which could reasonably be regarded as bringing your office or the authority into disrepute.

Part 2: Interests

1 Notification of interests

(1) You must, within 28 days of—

- (a) this Code being adopted by or applied to your authority; or
- (b) your election or appointment to office (where that is later),

notify the Monitoring Officer of your disclosable pecuniary interests that are notifiable under the Localism Act 2011 and The Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interest) Regulations 2012, for inclusion in the register of interests, and

¹ As defined by the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS), “bullying may be characterised as offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, an abuse or misuse of power through means intended to undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient.”

notify the Monitoring Officer in writing of the details of your other personal interests, where they fall within the following descriptions, for inclusion in the register of interests.

(2) You have a personal interest in any business of your authority where either—

(a) it relates to or is likely to affect—

(i) 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;

(ii) any body—

(aa) exercising functions of a public nature;

(bb) directed to charitable purposes; or

(cc) one of whose principal purposes includes the influence of public opinion or policy (including any political party or trade union), of which you are a member or in a position of general control or management;

(iii) the interests of any person from whom you have received a gift or hospitality with an estimated value of at least £50.

(3) You must, within 28 days of becoming aware of any new interest or change to any interest registered under paragraph 1(2), or as a disclosable pecuniary interest notify the Monitoring Officer of the details of that new interest or change.

2 Disclosure of interests

(1) Subject to sub-paragraphs (2) to (5) below, where you have a personal interest described in paragraph 1 above or in paragraph (2) below in any business of your authority, and where you are aware or ought reasonably to be aware of the existence of the personal interest, and you attend a meeting of your authority at which the business is considered, you must disclose to that meeting the existence and nature of that interest at the commencement of that consideration, or when the interest becomes apparent.

(2) (A) You have a personal interest in any business of your authority:

(i) where a decision in relation to that business might reasonably be regarded as affecting your well-being or financial position or the well-being or financial position of a *relevant person* to a greater extent than the majority of other council tax payers, ratepayers or inhabitants of your authority's area, as the case may be, affected by the decision, or

(ii) it relates to or is likely to affect any of the interests you have registered as a disclosable pecuniary interest.

(B) In sub-paragraph (2) (A), a *relevant person* is—

(a) a member of your family or any person with whom you have a close association; or

(b) 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;

(c) any person or body in whom such persons have a beneficial interest in a class of securities exceeding the nominal value of £25,000; or

(d) any body of a type described in paragraph 1(2)(a)(i) or (ii).

(3) Where you have a personal interest in any business of your authority which relates to or is likely to affect a person described in paragraph 1(2)(a)(i) or 1(2)(a)(ii)(aa), you need only disclose to the meeting the existence and nature of that interest when you address the meeting on that business.

(4) Where you have a personal interest but, by virtue of paragraph 4, sensitive information relating to it is not registered in your authority's register of Councillors' interests, you must indicate to the meeting that you have a personal interest, but need not disclose the sensitive information to the meeting.

3 Register of interests

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 Sensitive interests

Where you consider that disclosure of the details an interest could lead to you, or a person connected with you, being subject to violence or intimidation, and the Monitoring Officer agrees, if the interest is entered on the register, copies of the register that are made available for inspection and any published version of the register, e.g. on the Council's website, will exclude details of the interest, but may state that you have an interest, the details of which are withheld.

5 Non participation in case of pecuniary interest

(1) Where you have a personal interest in any business of your authority you also have a pecuniary interest in that business where 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 and where that business—

(a) affects your financial position or the financial position of a person or body described in paragraphs 1(2) or 2(2); or

(b) relates to the determining of any approval, consent, licence, permission or registration in relation to you or any person or body described in paragraphs 1(2) or 2(2).

(2) Subject to paragraph (3) and (4), where you have a pecuniary interest in any business of your authority—

- a. You may not participate in any discussion of the matter at the meeting.
- b. You may not participate in any vote taken on the matter at the meeting.
- c. If the interest is not registered, you must disclose the interest to the meeting.
- d. 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.

(3) Where you have a pecuniary interest in any business of your authority, you may attend a meeting but only for the purpose of making representations, answering questions or giving evidence relating to the business, provided that the public are also allowed to attend the meeting for the same purpose, whether under a statutory right or otherwise.

(4) Subject to you disclosing the interest at the meeting, you may attend a meeting and vote on a matter where you have a pecuniary interest that relates to the functions of your authority in respect of—

- (i) housing, where you are a tenant of your authority provided that those functions do not relate particularly to your tenancy or lease;
- (ii) 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;
- (iii) 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;
- (iv) an allowance, payment or indemnity given to Councillors;
- (v) any ceremonial honour given to Councillors; and
- (vi) setting council tax or a precept under the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

Explanatory Note: Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

This note explains the requirements of the Localism Act 2011 (Sections 29-34) and The Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012, in relation to disclosable pecuniary interests.

These provisions are enforced by criminal sanction. They came into force on 1 July 2012.

1 Notification of disclosable pecuniary interests

Within 28 days of becoming a councillor or co-opted councillor, you must notify the Monitoring Officer of any 'disclosable pecuniary interests'.

A 'disclosable pecuniary interest' is an interest of yourself or your partner (which means spouse or civil partner, a person with whom you are living as husband or wife, or a person with whom you are living as if you are civil partners) within the following descriptions:

(In the extracts from the Regulations below, ‘C’ means you and ‘relevant person’ means you and your partner, as above)

Subject	Prescribed description
Employment, office, trade, profession or vocation	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 C in carrying out duties as a councillor, or towards the election expenses of C. This includes any payment or financial benefit from a trade union within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992.
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.
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 C’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 C’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.

These descriptions on interests are subject to the following definitions;

“the Act” means the Localism Act 2011;

“body in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest” means a firm in which the relevant person is a partner or a body corporate of which the relevant person is a director, or in the securities of which the relevant person has a beneficial interest;

“C” means a councillor of a relevant authority;

“councillor” includes a co-opted councillor;

“director” includes a member of the committee of management of an industrial and provident society;

“land” excludes an easement, servitude, interest or right in or over land which does not carry with it a right for the relevant person (alone or jointly with another) to occupy the land or to receive income;

“relevant authority” means the authority of which C is a councillor;

“relevant period” means the period of 12 months ending with the day on which C gives a notification for the purposes of section 30(1) or section 31(7), as the case may be, of the Act;

“relevant person” means C or any other person referred to in section 30(3)(b) of the Act;

“securities” means shares, debentures, debenture stock, loan stock, bonds, units of a collective investment scheme within the meaning of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 and other securities of any description, other than money deposited with a building society.

2 Register of interests

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.

3 Sensitive interests

Where you consider that disclosure of the details of a disclosable pecuniary interest could lead to you, or a person connected with you, being subject to violence or intimidation, and the Monitoring Officer agrees, if the interest is entered on the register, copies of the register that are made available for inspection and any published version of the register will exclude details of the interest, but may state that you have a disclosable pecuniary interest, the details of which are withheld under Section 32(2).

4 Non participation in case of disclosable pecuniary interest

A) If you are present at a meeting of the authority, or any committee, sub-committee, joint committee or joint sub-committee of the authority, and you have a disclosable pecuniary interest in any matter to be considered or being considered at the meeting,

1. You may not participate in any discussion of the matter at the meeting.
2. You may not participate in any vote taken on the matter at the meeting.
3. If the interest is not registered, you must disclose the interest to the meeting.
4. 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.

5 Dispensations

The authority 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 disclosable pecuniary interest.

6 Offences

It is a criminal offence to:

- fail to notify the Monitoring Officer of any disclosable pecuniary interest within 28 days of election;
- fail to disclose a disclosable pecuniary interest at a meeting if it is not on the register;
- fail to notify the Monitoring Officer within 28 days of a disclosable pecuniary interest that is not on the register that you have disclosed to a meeting
- participate in any discussion or vote on a matter in which you have a disclosable pecuniary interest;
- knowingly or recklessly providing information that is false or misleading in notifying the Monitoring Officer of a disclosable pecuniary interest or in disclosing such interest to a meeting.

The criminal penalties available to a court are to impose a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale and disqualification from being a Councillor for up to 5 years.