

WARMINGTON PARISH COUNCIL



CODE OF CONDUCT FOR WARMINGTON PARISH COUNCILLORS AND CO-OPTED COMMITTEE MEMBERS

This Code applies to all Councillors of Warmington Parish Council and to people co-opted to the council's committees but are not elected or co-opted members of the council. This Code is a requirement of the Localism Act 2011 and forms part of the Standing Orders of Warmington Parish which all Councillors will follow. This code is based on the seven Nolan principles of public life, originally adopted by the council on 2nd July 2012 and revised in 2018

1.0 Introduction

As a Councillor you are a representative of the Council, and the public and other stakeholders will form a view of Warmington Parish Council as a result of your actions. As such you must conduct yourself in a manner which is consistent with the Council's duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct of Councillors.

2.0 Selflessness

As a public figure, your public role as a Councillor may overlap with your personal or professional life and interests. However, as a Councillor you will serve only the public interest and will never improperly confer an advantage or disadvantage on any person. At all times you will act in accordance with the trust that the public is entitled to place in you.

3.0 Integrity and honesty

As a councillor you will be truthful. You will consider your actions carefully to avoid placing yourself in situations where your honesty and integrity may be questioned and will on all occasions avoid improper behaviour or the appearance of improper behaviour.

4.0 Objectivity (in decision making)

You will make decisions on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias, including when making appointments, awarding contracts or recommending individuals for rewards or benefits. You must approach decisions with an open mind and listen to the views of others and assess the information presented at the decision-making meeting. You must then reach your own conclusions on issues and act accordingly. Failure to do so may expose the decision to challenge on the basis of pre-determination.

5.0 Accountability

Everything Warmington Parish Council does must be able to stand the test of scrutiny by the public, the media, other stakeholders, and the courts. You are accountable to the public for your actions and the manner in which you carry your responsibilities and will co-operate fully and honestly with any scrutiny appropriate to your particular office.

6.0 Openness:

6.1 Warmington Parish Council strives to maintain an atmosphere of openness throughout the organisation to promote confidence of the public, stakeholders, staff and regulators. You will be as open as possible about your actions and those of the council, and should be prepared to give reasons for those actions. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for doing so.

6.2 You will review your Register of Interests (including Disclosable Pecuniary Interests as required by the Localism Act and related regulations) at least annually to ensure ongoing accuracy

6.3 You need to consider carefully your position before participating in any decisions or activity, especially those relating to regulatory activities such as planning or licensing. Where the decision or activity is so closely tied to your personal or professional life that your ability to make an impartial decision may be called into question you must consider whether you need to declare, at any relevant meeting, any new Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI) or other conflict of interest or circumstance. These will be added to your Register of Interests as soon as possible after the meeting.

You must consider how your personal interests may appear to a reasonable member of the public in possession of all the facts – would they consider you able to make an impartial decision on the matter at hand?

6.4 The law says that if you have a DPI you must **not** become involved in the discussions nor must you **vote** in relation to such matters. You will leave the room in which a meeting is taking place if you have a DPI in a If you have other interests in the matter you should also consider if it is appropriate for you to take part in the discussions or debate and remove yourself if in any doubt. Breaches of the rules relating to Disclosable Pecuniary Interests may lead to criminal sanctions being imposed.

6.5 You must declare within 28 days of receipt any gifts or hospitality valued over £50 (on one occasion or from the same donor within one year) given in respect of your role as a Councillor in your Register of Interests.

7.0 Leadership

You will promote and support these principles by leadership and by example, and should act in a way that secures or preserves public confidence and avoids bringing your role or the council into disrepute You will actively promote and robustly support this code and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

8.0 Other obligations (councillors only)

In addition to the above principles, you will:

- a) Strive to establish respectful and courteous relationships with everyone you come into contact with as Councillors. You will also respect the impartiality and professional role(s) of the council's statutory officers and its other employees.
- b) In a small community, the behaviour of members of the council and its representatives are very often viewed in light of that person being a councillor. You will do your utmost to ensure that you do not bring the council into disrepute and will always act within the law and lead by example. Bullying, harassment and hate crimes in particular may result in the council removing a member from all committees and additional roles.
- c) Uphold the law in relation to the policies of the council and its legal obligations.
- d) Not disclose or use confidential information for any purpose other than that provided for by the law.
- e) Use those particular council resources provided for the undertaking of council duties in accordance with council policies or constitution and not for any other purposes.

9.0 Training (councillors only)

Participation in training and development activities is not a legal requirement to be a Councillor. However, this council expects that you will participate, in induction and other training and development activities in relation to standards matters. And in order that you fulfil your role as a member of the council in a properly informed manner.

10.0 Summary

This code is intended to provide a guide and protection for councillors in carrying out their duties. However, a breach of any part of this code may result in a complaint being made. A complaint will be assessed according to the arrangements to be later clarified by East Northamptonshire District Council.

The remainder of this document outlines the high standards that Warmington Parish Council expects from its officer(s) and members and will also apply to anyone assisting the council in a voluntary role:

11.0 Internet protocol (councillors only)

Email is all about communication with other people, and as such some basic email protocol / courtesy should be observed:

a) Email Best Practice

- Ensure that each email has a specific target audience.
- Be selective, especially when deciding who should be copied in on an email. This ensures that only those who really require the information receive it and avoids wasteful emails and wasted time/resources.

- If you are copying in a recipient(s) who you are not certain have given permission for their email to be circulated use Bcc to protect their information (in accordance with GDPR requirements).

b) **Basic Email Etiquette**

- Always include a subject line in your message.
- If you are introducing a new subject, start a new email or include the subject in the subject line.
- Avoid using capitals as this is equivalent to shouting and very bad email etiquette.
- When replying to an email, include enough of the original message to provide a context, but avoid including the whole trail, unless it is essential
- An email signature is a good way of providing detail of who is sending the email, and the details of how to respond.
- Consider the tone and language used, and the use of plain English.
- When sending externally emails, these represent and reflect upon the Council – respect and courtesy should apply always. Quick notes to colleagues may be quite different to emails to suppliers or customers of the council.

c) When communicating by email regarding council business, in order to comply with GDPR requirements, you will use the email address allocated to you by the council. Should it be necessary to employ the services of a consultant to set up your personal computer, the parish council will cover this cost on receipt of an email from the consultant.

d) **Social Media Policy**

The aim of this policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to parish councillors, council staff and others who engage with the council using online communications, collectively referred to as social media. Social media is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet.

This policy covers all forms of social media and social networking sites which include (but are not limited to):

- Parish Council Website
- Facebook, Instagram, SnapChat and other social networking sites
- Twitter and other micro blogging sites
- YouTube and other video clips and podcast sites
- LinkedIn
- Bloggs and discussion forums
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The principles of this policy apply to parish councillors and staff and applies to others communicating with the Parish Council. The policy sits alongside relevant existing policies which need to be taken into consideration.

Individual parish councillors and council staff are responsible for what they post in a council and personal capacity.

In the main, councillors and council staff have the same legal duties online as anyone else, but failure to comply with the law may have more serious consequences.

The parish council's website and Social media may be used to

- Distribute agendas, post minutes and dates of meetings
- Advertise events and activities
- Good news stories linked website or press page
- Vacancies
- Share information from partner agencies such as Principal Authorities, Police, Library, Health etc.
- Announcing new information
- Post or Share information from other parish related community groups such as schools, sports clubs, community groups and charities

The clerk is the 'webmaster' and moderator, responsible for all content on all platforms. S/he will remove and inappropriate material or information not relevant to Warmington. The moderator will have authority to remove any posts made by third parties from council social media pages which are deemed to be of a defamatory or libellous nature.

e) Code of Practice

- 1) When using social media (including email) parish councillors and council staff must be mindful of the information they post in both a personal and council capacity and keep the tone of any comments respectful and informative.
- 2) Online content should be accurate, objective, balanced and informative.
- 3) Parish councillors and council staff must not:
 - hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms
 - present personal opinions as that of the council
 - present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the council
 - post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the council or undermine the council's decisions or policies in any way
 - post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks
 - engage in personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications
 - use an individual's name unless given written permission to do so
 - publish photographs or videos of minors without parental permission
 - post any information that infringes copyright of others
 - post any information that may be deemed libel
 - post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment
 - bring the council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal capacity
 - post offensive language relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief
 - conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence:
 - Publishing untrue statements about a person which is damaging to their reputation is libel and can result in a court action and fine for damages. This also applies if someone else publishes something libellous on your social media site. A successful libel claim will result in an award of damages against you.
 - Posting copyright images or text on social media sites is an offence. Breach of copyright will result in an award of damages against you.
 - Publishing personal data of individuals without permission is a breach of GDPR legislation is an offence.
 - Publication of obscene material is a criminal offence and is subject to a custodial sentence.
- 4) Councillors views posted in any capacity in advance of matters to be debated by the council at a council or committee meeting may constitute Pre-disposition, Pre- determination or Bias and may require the individual to declare an interest at council meetings and take no part in discussions.

Anyone with concerns regarding content placed on social media sites that denigrate parish councillors, council staff or residents should report them to the Clerk of the Council.

Misuse of social media content that is contrary to this and other policies could result in action being taken.

ⁱ The Committee on Standards in Public Life (the Nolan Committee) recommended in 1996 [seven principles of conduct](#) that should underpin the work of public authorities.