

## **THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC LIFE**

### **Standards Committee – 22 January 2015**

Report of                      Monitoring Officer

Status:                         For consideration

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**Executive Summary:** This report informs the Standards Committee on the work of the Committee on Standards in Public Life during 2012-13 in relation to the Seven Principles of Public Life.

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**This report supports the Key Aim of** effective management of Council resources.

**Contact Officer(s)**      Mrs Christine Nuttall – Chief Officer Legal and Governance

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**Recommendation to the Standards Committee:** That the guidance set out in this report be noted.

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**Reason for recommendation:** to make Members aware of the work undertaken by Committee on Standards in Public Life in relation to the Seven Principles of Public Life.

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### **Introduction and Background**

- 1 The Localism Act 2011 requires that a relevant authority must promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Members and Co-opted Members of the authority. In discharging its duty a relevant authority, must, in particular, adopt a Code dealing with the conduct that is expected of Members and Co-opted Members of the authority when they are acting in that capacity.
- 2 The legislation also states that an authority must secure that a Code adopted by it, when viewed, as a whole, is consistent with the following principles:
  - Selflessness
  - Integrity
  - Objectivity
  - Accountability
  - Openness
  - Honesty
  - Leadership

The Code of conduct adopted by Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) embraces all these principles.

### The Committee on Standards in Public Life

- 3 The Committee on Standards in Public Life in its publication “Standards matter – A review of best practice in promoting good behaviour in public life” looked at the Seven Principles of Public Life and whether these should be reformulated.
- 4 Their view was that changing the principles now would be both pointless and unnecessary and that they should be kept as they are. However, they concluded that the brief descriptions appended to each one should be clarified and they made the following suggestions:

Principle	Revised description
Preamble	The principles of public life apply to anyone who works as a public office holder. This includes all those who are elected or appointed to public office, nationally and locally, and all people appointed to work in the civil service, local government, the police, courts and probation services, NDPBs and in the health, education, social and care services. All public office holders are both servants of the public and stewards of public resources. The principles also have application to all those in other sectors delivering public services.
Selflessness	Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.
Integrity	Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.
Objectivity	Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.
Accountability	Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.
Openness	Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.
Honesty	Holders of public office should be truthful.
Leadership	Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour. They should actively promote and robustly support the

principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

- 5 The Committee summarises by stating that the Seven Principles of Public Life remain broadly relevant, but there is scope for updating what they mean in practice, particularly in respect of honesty and integrity.
- 6 There is a growing area of ambiguity occupied by people contracted to deliver public services who may not be public office-holders. The ethical standards captured by the seven principles should also apply to such people. There is therefore a responsibility on public office holders to specify requirements about standards of behaviour in the contracts they let on behalf of the public sector.
- 7 Public office holders are entitled to privacy in their personal lives. But it is important to recognise that there can be circumstances in which private behaviour can affect the reputation and integrity of a public institution, and which require an appropriate response. Such intrusion should only happen where there is a clear public interest to justify it, and should always be proportionate.

The publication produced by the Committee on Standards in Public Life entitled Standards matter – A review of best practice in promoting good behaviour in public life” can be viewed by following the link

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/228884/8519.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/228884/8519.pdf)

## **Key Implications**

### Financial

There are no direct financial implications arising out of this report.

### Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement.

Under the Localism Act 2011, the Council is required to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Members and Co-opted Members of the authority. In addition, the Standards Committee’s terms of reference state that the Committee is to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Members and Co-opted Members of the District Council and to make recommendations for improving standards.

Failure to have and maintain high ethical standards can have significant reputational consequences. However, by keeping Members informed in relation to recent guidance produced by the Committee on Standards in Public Life, Members understanding of the Seven Principles of Public Life will be clarified and help to set and maintain high standards of behaviour amongst Members, staff and partner organisations which can significantly enhance reputation and can reduce the risk of wrongdoing.

### Equality Assessment

The decision recommended through this paper has a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

## **Conclusions**

- 12 The work undertaken by the Committee on Standards in Public Life in relation to looking at the need to re-evaluate the Seven Principles of Public Life clarifies Members understanding in relation to what amounts to acceptable behaviour.

## **Background Papers:**

[Standards matter A review of best practice in promoting good behaviour in public life January 2013 produced by the Committee on Standards in Public Life](#)

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