

TITLE	Consultation on the WBC Code of Conduct for Councillors
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Standards Committee on 12 October 2020
WARD	None Specific
DIRECTOR	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

High ethical standards in local government help to build trust and confidence amongst local residents and communities.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee:

- 1) consider and confirm the attached consultation document;
- 2) receive a further report in due course on the results of the public consultation;
- 3) note that, following agreement on the final changes to the Code of Conduct, a report will be submitted to the Constitution Review Working Group prior to approval by the full Council;
- 4) note the publication and contents of the LGA Model Member Code of Conduct.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

At its meeting on 2 March 2020, the Committee considered the Code of Conduct for Councillors in light of the Best Practice principles set out in the report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL).

The Standards Committee agreed to carry out a public consultation on the proposed amendments to the Code of Conduct. It also requested sight of the consultation document prior to the commencement of the consultation exercise.

Unfortunately, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has delayed the consultation exercise. The consultation document has now been completed in draft and is attached for Member discussion and comment.

The report also considers the Local Government Association Model Member Code of Conduct, published in May 2020.

Background

At its meeting on 2 March 2020, the Committee considered the WBC Code of Conduct for Councillors in light of the Best Practice principles set out in the report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL).

The CSPL report (January 2019) had concluded that the vast majority of local government Members and Officers wished to maintain the highest standards of conduct. However, there were ongoing examples of bullying, harassment and disruptive behaviours. The CSPL also identified risks around conflicts of interest, gifts and hospitality and expressed concern about the increasing complexity of decision making which put governance procedures under increasing strain.

The CSPL report included a list of Best Practice principles and suggested that each local authority compare existing arrangements against the list. The CSPL report stated: "Our best practice recommendations are directed to local authorities, and we expect that any local authority can and should implement them".

The Standards Committee considered the Best Practice principles and concluded that the Council's policies and procedures were generally in line with best practice. The Committee agreed to carry out a public consultation on proposed amendments to the Code of Conduct. The Committee also requested sight of the consultation document prior to the commencement of the consultation exercise. The draft consultation document is set out at Annex A for discussion and agreement.

LGA Model Member Code of Conduct

Members may be aware that the Local Government Association (LGA) has also published a Model Member Code of Conduct (May 2020). The Model Code of Conduct has been published as a template for councils to use in whole or with local amendments.

It is considered that the WBC Code of Conduct for Councillors is consistent with the LGA Model Code. However, Members may wish to consider any specific aspects of the Model Code as part of their deliberations on the consultation document. The LGA document is also appended to the report for information.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£0	N/A	N/A
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£0	N/A	N/A
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£0	N/A	N/A

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision
None

Cross-Council Implications
The work and conduct of Members and Officers can impact all aspects of the work of Borough, Town and Parish Councils.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2
Not applicable

Public Sector Equality Duty
The WBC Code of Conduct for Councillors contains a provision which states that Councillors must not do anything which may cause their Council to breach any of the provisions of the Equality Act 2010. Any alleged breaches relating to the Equality Act duties are addressed through the complaints procedure

List of Background Papers
Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life – January 2019 LGA Model Member Code of Conduct – May 2020

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