BEST PRACTICE AGREEMENT 2022

Argyll and Bute Council
Argyll and Bute Community Councils

Argyll and Bute Council Commitment

Community Council Commitment

Code of Guidance for Communications

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Best Practice Agreement

The work of community councils across Argyll and Bute varies from community council to community council – as does their method of operation and the ways in which they engage with a range of public and other community bodies. It should not be forgotten however that that main purpose of a community council is to represent the views of the community which it represents.

This Best Practice Agreement outlines the commitments required from both Argyll and Bute Council and community councils to build strong relationships and operate effectively together to advance the interest of Argyll and Bute communities. It also incorporates a Code of Communication, Financial Guidelines, and Code of Conduct for community councillors.

Argyll and Bute Council will keep the responsibilities and procedures laid down in this Code of Practice under regular review, and where it appears necessary or desirable to make any amendments, will formally consult community councils on such proposals to review.

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Argyll and Bute Council Commitment

Community Engagement

1. Argyll and Bute Council recognises that community councils have made, and will continue to make, a valuable contribution to the development of Argyll and Bute through their engagement in localised community planning, their representation of community views and their promoting and delivery of local activities.

2. Argyll and Bute Council, in recognising the statutory purpose of community councils, recognises that they have a clear link to their local Area Community Planning Groups.

3. Argyll and Bute Council will be guided in its community engagement activities by the National Standards of Community Engagement. Argyll and Bute Council will, using the National Standards of Community Engagement, consider the appropriateness of how best to consult with local communities, this could include:

   - direct consultation with particular user groups rather than geographical communities
   - direct consultation with individual community councils where there is a geographic link to a physical or policy development likely to have an effect on the people whom community councils represent
   - regular engagement through the Area Community Planning Groups

4. It is recognised that not all community councils require to be consulted in every matter. Consultations with community councils should be carefully considered against a test of relevance and appropriateness.

5. In consulting with community councils, Argyll and Bute Council recognises the need to allow community councils sufficient time to respond. Where possible, Argyll and Bute Council will aim to give community councils a period of at least one month in which to reply. In relation to planning applications, or other licensing matters, there may be a different timescale.

6. Some services, particularly Planning and Licensing, must follow statutory procedures. Advice and training on procedure to be adopted will be issued independently to this Best Practice Agreement, and will be kept updated if there are any national or local policy changes.

7. Argyll and Bute Council is committed to encouraging open, local, democratic debate and will support community councils to ensure that they are best place to facilitate this. This will include the:
   - Timely provision of relevant information in accordance with the timescales set out in our customer services charter.
   - Recognition of status as a community representative body for their area(noting that is enhanced where robust community engagement processes are evidenced)
   - support from the Community Development Team to improve their own community engagement processes
   - a programme of training and development as organised by the Community Council Liaison Officer to address identified training needs, support understanding of Standing Orders and Constitution, to understand the specific operation of council departments, and to generally promote good practice.

8. Argyll and Bute Council will facilitate on request an annual engagement meeting between the council leadership and representatives of all community councils. At such meetings community councils may comment generally on matters of concern and may be used to sound out general proposals by Argyll and Bute Council where strategic developments are likely to affect local communities.

Elections

9. Argyll and Bute Council will organise and conduct elections to community councils on a 4 year basis. The Returning Officer may vary the term should other electoral timetables conflict with the community council elections, to prevent disruption to the community council process. Argyll and Bute Council will seek to promote electoral participation in such elections by providing general publicity and will seek to maximise electoral participation by using postal voting.

10. Argyll and Bute Council will seek to work with individual community councils, community council caucuses and other representative bodies within the area to promote electoral participation and will facilitate the dissemination of good practice re participation to all community councils.

11. Argyll and Bute Council will, through the Returning Officer, run any necessary by-elections during the 4 year term of the community council, working with the local community council to promote electoral participation.

Finance and Resources

12. Argyll and Bute Council will continue to provide funding for the administration of community councils through the payment of an annual grant. This will be paid following submission of community council's audited accounts (following approval at the AGM) together with a request for the administration grant and minutes of the AGM. Where community council records are not up to date, the CCLO will make a request that missing documentation from the previous 12 month period be brought up to date prior to the grant payment being released.

13. Argyll and Bute Council will continue to meet the costs of Public Liability Insurance in respect of the reasonable and proper activities of the community council.

14. Argyll and Bute Council will continue to provide photocopying of agendas and minutes for community councils through its network of Customer Service Points or Kilmory headquarters. Other copying may be provided subject to authorisation being obtained from the Council's Community Council Liaison Officer.

15. Argyll and Bute Council will provide general financial and administrative advice to community councils through the Legal and Regulatory Support Service.

Meetings, Minutes and Reports

16. Argyll and Bute Council will make available through its Modern.Gov online system the agenda and reports for all council committee meetings 5 days in advance of the meeting date, except where these reports contain exempt information as defined in the appropriate paragraph of Part 1 of Schedule 7A to the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973. These will be published on www.argyll-bute.gov.uk. Where requested, the council will provide email notification to community councils of their publication.

17. Argyll and Bute Council will make available for viewing within 7 days of the meeting, minutes of all council committee meetings. These will be published on

www.argyll-bute.gov.uk

18. Argyll and Bute Council will make available dates of its formal committee meetings and dates of Area Community Planning Groups, local liaison groups as existing.

Communications

19. The council's advice on communications is contained within "Code of Guidance for Communications with the Council." Argyll and Bute Council is committed to respecting this advice.

20. Argyll and Bute Council will hold a centralised list of community council contacts which will be updated as per instruction from community councils.

21. Subject to appropriate consent being given, Argyll and Bute Council will provide details of the nominated contact(s) (normally the Secretary and/or Convener) on their website. This may include their name, address, telephone number and email address.

Community Council Commitment

Community Engagement

1. Community councils have a statutory right to ascertain, co-ordinate and express the views of the communities to Argyll and Bute Council and other public bodies. Community councils should seek to establish close, constructive relationships with Argyll and Bute councillors, council staff and other bodies as appropriate.

2. In ascertaining views, community councils should ensure there is wide consultation with the community and they should encourage local interest and participation in community debate. It is recognised that the more robust community councils can be in evidencing good community engagement, the more weight will be attributed to their view. Primary accountability is to the electorate (or those under 16 who are resident within the catchment area of a primary and/or secondary school within the community council boundary) so community councils should always approach informal soundings and more formal consultations with that in mind.

3. Community councils should give consideration to the use of social media which could play a part in engaging with community and under-represented groups whose views may not be forthcoming at meetings of the community council.

4. In expressing views, community councils should ensure that they reflect the balance of community interest and that the views expressed are set out in writing and relevant to the issues under discussion. The Secretary as official correspondent should ensure that they are acting with appropriate authority of the community council to do so when setting out the views of the community council in writing.

5. Community councils may identify specific arrangements for consultation on planning applications. To ensure the timely update of any change in planning contacts community councils are requested to notify the Community Council Liaison Officer who will instruct the planning team to update their contact information in line with an agreed procedure. Theplanning contact should be aware of the system for planning applications consultation operated by the council and should respond within the time limits laid down.

6. Community councils should encourage participation by other local organisations including special interests groups, civic groups, youth groups, tenants and residents associations, etc to ensure that a wide range of views are known to the community councils.

7. Community councils should actively support the development of community action plans for their area – whether as the lead body, or as a key stakeholder. Where these exist they may be used by community councils to help prioritise key work / consultation areas and communication of these to public and partners.

8. In particular community councils should appoint personnel to represent them at any appropriate Area Community Planning Group activity / forum. This contact will represent the views of the community council within the activity / forum and will feedback to their community councils.

9. Community councils will make every effort to participate in and respond to relevant consultations to ensure their community is represented in matters of interest.

Elections

10. Community councils should encourage contested community council elections or by-elections, promoting electoral participation, the role of community councils and community councillors within the community they represent.

Meetings, Minutes and Reports

11. Community councils should ensure that invitations are extended to all Argyll and Bute councillors to attend any meeting of the community council within their ward area. Community councils should recognise that Argyll and Bute councillors may have more than one community council within their ward area (in addition to their other commitments as councillors) and have discretion about their own arrangements, or ward arrangements to attend community council meetings.

12. Community councils should ensure that all meetings and activities are publicised in accordance with the detail set out in the Model Constitution 7 days prior to the meeting, and that there is an opportunity for members of the public and special interest groups to participate in discussion on the basis of information provided by the community council. Public discussion and open debate should be encouraged through the use of regular agenda items such as "Public Questions".

13. Community councils should ensure that all minutes of meetings displayed publicly and are forwarded to relevant Argyll and Bute ward councillors and the CCLO. Community councils should consider whether the use of a website may have a role to play in widening access to their minutes etc.

14. Community councils will liaise with other community councils and local organisations to share good practice and exchange information on matters of common interest.

15. Community councils must hold, in addition to an AGM, a minimum of 6 ordinary meetings of the council each year, where the electorate is above 600. Where the electorate is 600 or less, a minimum of 4 ordinary meetings should be held. If desired a summer recess should be considered, good practice would be to tie in with any Council recess (currently scheduled for themonth of July).

16. Community councils shall ensure that, as far as reasonably practicable, meetings are held in premises accessible to **all** members of the community. Provisions for remote access may assist in accessibility.

17. Where representatives of community / other groups attend and speak at a community council meeting on behalf of their groups, to promote good transparency, such attendance and input given should be noted clearly in the minutes of the meeting.

Finance and Resources

18. Community Councils shall have due regard to the Financial Guidelines contained within the Best Practice Agreement.

19. Community councils should encourage members to attend any training provided to assist in terms of their operation as a community council – in particular that relating to improving their own community representation.

20. Community councils may wish to make a mileage payment to its members in respect of attendance at such training sessions and, where large geographic areas are covered, the mileage associated with attending meetings. Such arrangements should be agreed by the community council who will put in place an appropriate procedure for claiming such monies and also agree a rate of payment. There will be no additional payment from the council.

21. Community councils shall encourage local development by promoting funding of community efforts. They may set up and raise specific funds for this purpose.

Communications

22. The council's advice on communications is contained within "Code of Guidance for communications with the council." Community councils will respect the advice contained within this.

23. Community councils should ensure that an up-to-date contact list of all members, elected and co-opted, is maintained and changes notified to the Community Council LiaisonOfficer.

Good Practice Agreement
Code of Guidance for Communications with the Council

This is the Code of Guidance for Communications between Argyll and Bute Council and community councils referred to in the Best Practice Agreement.

Communications between such groups should follow the guidance below:

1. Enquiries

1.1 Enquiries are classified as “routine” or “major”.

1.1.1 “Routine Enquiry” includes enquiries to individual services regarding minor defects or service requests e.g. repairs required to street lights, road surfaces, uplift of rubbish, damaged play equipment, etc.

Such enquiries should be made through the council’s “Report it” section on thewebsite www.argyll-bute.gov.uk , which is a 24 hour service, or within office hours by calling the appropriate number from the list below:

- Council Tax Enquiries: 01546 605511/ctax1@argyll-bute.gov.uk
- Benefit Enquiries: 01546 605512
- Roads & Lighting, car parking fines and faults, Waste Collection, Flytipping, abandoned vehicles, Dog Fouling, pest control: 01546 605514 or by emailing roadsandinfrastructure@argyll-bute.gov.uk
- Complaints and Feedback: 01546 605516
- Social Care & Blue Badges: 01546 605517
- Planning and Building Control Services: 01546 605518 or
  Planning.maki@argyll-bute.gov.uk
  planning.olandi@argyll-bute.gov.uk
  planning.bandc@argyll-bute.gov.uk
  planning.handi@argyll-bute.gov.uk
- Regulatory Services: 01546 605519
- Book a pitch, room or minibus – 01546 605520
- Homelessness: 01546 555936
- Non-Domestic Rates – ndr@argyll-bute.gov.uk
- Switchboard/General Enquiries: 01546 605522

For service disruption information, the council provides proactive information on issues with services such as roads, lighting and waste collection on the “Service Disruption” page of the Council Website. You can also sign up to receive information regarding Service Disruption (and other information) by subscribing to the “Keeping in the Loop” service. Alternatively, there is a 24 hour phone line – 01546 604040 which provides voiceform updates, or you can email your enquiry to enquiries@argyll-bute.gov.uk . It is also possible to text your query to the council - 07860 023933.

1.1.2 “Major enquiry” includes a proposal to remove or amend a service,which would affect a number of members of the community. Such enquiries shall always be in writing.

1.1.3 “Planning comments” are comments made by the planning contact of the community council to the Planning Department, in response to notification about a planning application. Planning comments should always be in writing.

1.1.4 Writing includes typed or hand-written notes or letters, faxes or E-mails.

2. Making an Enquiry

2.1 Routine enquiries should be made to the department directly concerned. Routine

enquiries may be made on the website, in writing or by telephone, fax, or e-mail or by calling in person to a Customer ServicePoint. A copy of a routine enquiry need not be sent to an Argyll and Bute councillor unless the community council considers that it is appropriateto do so.

2.2 Major enquiries should always be made in writing and delivered by letter,fax or e-mail to the most suitable office of the service concerned. Major enquiries should be signed by the secretary, as official correspondent of the community council, or in the secretary's absence by the Convener of the community council. Major complaints should always be copied to the local Argyll and Bute councillor/s.

2.3 Where community councils are unsure of the appropriate personnel the CCLO should be contacted for advice.

2.4 Where the enquiry concerns:

2.4.1 The Constitution of a community council;

2.4.2 The election of community councils i.e. the overall electoral system and not the procedure adopted at a specific election;

2.4.3 Funding of a community council;

2.4.4 Proposed amendments to the area of community council;

2.4.5 The formation of a new community council;

2.4.6 A statutory code, such as that relating to planning applications (i.e. the code itself and not the way in which a specific application was dealt with); or

2.4.7 A query with regard to the application of this advice

In the first instance the enquiry should be made to the CommunityCouncil Liaison Officer.

2.5 Enquiries, whether routine or major, should be addressed to individual services departments about individual issues. A series of enquiries on different service issues should not be addressed to one service (other than the Community Council Liaison Officer as above).

2.6 Where communications are from Argyll and Bute Council to a communitycouncil these will normally be addressed to the Secretary of the community council concerned, except where a liaison or contact nomination has previously been agreed, for example a planning or licensing liaison contact.

3. Responses

3.1 Routine/simple enquiries will be responded to within 5 working days. Services should advise, within 5 working days, where a routine enquiry is more complex and falls within the 20 day response category.

3.2 Where a council official deems it appropriate, a copy of any written response regarding a routine enquiry may be sent to the appropriateArgyll and Bute councillor.

3.3 Responses to major enquiries will depend upon the nature of the enquiryand the ability of the service to respond. Where a major enquiry can bedealt with within existing resources or comes within existing policies, then it will be dealt with by the service in accordance with the policy.

3.4 Where a major enquiry raises a new issue or cannot be dealt with withinexisting resources or could cause undue demand on resources, the appropriate officer concerned shall respond to the community council stating this view. A copy of any such response must be sent to the relevant local councillors.

3.5 If, in the view of the appropriate officer, a major enquiry cannot be dealt with by the specific service, because it is against council policy, or would,in the appropriate officer's view, be impracticable, unreasonable or not possible for some other stated reason, then the appropriate officer shall write to the community council with these views and a copy of any such response should be sent to the relevant local councillors.

3.6 In writing to the council, community councils should be specific about thedetails of any complaint, and give sufficient detail to identify the specific items, identifying locations and the nature of events which are of concernand any persons involved, including addresses.

3.7 Some services, particularly Planning, must follow statutory procedures. Advice on the procedure to be adopted by community councils in respectof responses to planning applications have been issued and should be followed by the planning contact of the community.

3.8 The use of the Internet and e-mail is encouraged.

4. Timescale For Written Response

4.1 Enquiries will be acknowledged within three working days.

4.2 Email and other such simple enquiries will be responded to within 5 working dates of the date of receipt of your enquiry.

4.3 If not considered routine the council will let you know within 5 working days and will provide information as to how your enquiry is being dealt with.

5. Keeping Argyll and Bute Councillors Informed

5.1 Community councils should keep local Argyll and Bute councillors informed with regard to more complex enquiries. The community councils are encouraged to agree a method of keeping Argyll and Butecouncillors updated on key issues that arise in the area, recognising that it will not always be possible for attendance at every meeting, andthis may best be done by either maintaining a briefing log that can be provided to councillors after the meeting or prompt forwarding of draft minutes.

5.2 The community council Secretary should send copies of letters, faxes and e-mails to the local Argyll and Bute councillor/s at the time such an enquiry is made.

5.3 Departments, in responding to community councils, shall send a copy of any response on a more detailed enquiry, relating to a service issue,to the local Argyll and Bute councillor/s at the same time as it is sent tocommunity council.

6. Issues About Service Responses

6.1 Where a community council is not satisfied with the action taken or response to an enquiry, the community council may raise the issue with the management of that service in accordance with the council's published complaints procedure. The Community council should outline its views on the response, which has been made by the council department and shall state the action, which the community council considers, should be taken.

7. Customer Care Advice

7.1 Specific guidance on individual services may be available from the service departments, which should be consulted as they may contain advice with regard to any enquiry or targets set for performance by services. Specific advice from service departments with regard to targets for responses, or any subsequently corporate

adopted standards, will override general advice contained within this code.

8. Role of Argyll and Bute Councillors

8.1 Argyll and Bute councillors, as the elected representative for their wards, have a duty to represent all of the electors within their area. Community councillors have a duty to communicate the views of their communities to Argyll and Bute Council and therefore it is important that there is a good working relationship between community councillors and Argyll and Bute Councillors who have a common cause in promoting the views of the communities which they represent.

8.2 Community councillors should ensure that Argyll and Bute Councillors are kept informed of any matter of concern relating to a service provided by Argyll and Bute Council.

8.3 Likewise, Argyll and Bute councillors should inform community councillors of proposals by Argyll and Bute Council and the reaction by Argyll and Bute Council to any matters raised by the community council.

8.4 Community councils should ensure that Argyll and Bute councillors are invited to all meetings of the community council in their ward area, recognising that Argyll and Bute councillors may have more than one community council within their wards area (in addition to their other commitments as councillors) and have discretion about their own arrangements, or ward arrangements to engage with community councils.

Community Council Financial Guidelines

1. Introduction

1.1 The purpose of this guidance is to provide community councils with simple instructions on the minimum level of documentation and records, which should be maintained.

2. Recording of Receipts and Payments

2.1. As a bare minimum the Treasurer should maintain records of all receipts and payments in a cash book using separate pages for each. Ideally this should be extended to include separate identifying columns for cash and bank. Depending on the detail required this could be further expanded to provide a fully analysed cash book, detailing the main categories of receipts and payments, e.g. grant income, postages, photocopying etc.

2.2. Good practice when bookkeeping is to record all transactions as quickly as possible and in as much detail as necessary. Wherever possible an invoice or till receipt should be received for every payment made, numbered sequentially and carefully filed. Where an invoice or till receipt is not available a pro-forma voucher should be raised by the Treasurer detailing what the payment was for and signed by the person receiving payment.

2.3. As with payments, receipts should be supported by appropriate documentation, which should be numbered sequentially and carefully filed. All cash/cheques should be given to the Treasurer as soon as possible. The Treasurer should issue a receipt (keeping a copy) detailing the amount of the receipt, what it relates to and who it has been received from. This is particularlyimportant where cash (as opposed to cheque) is involved.

2.4. Additionally, a list should be prepared of any assets held by the community council, such as computers etc. This should be retained by the Treasurer and updated at least annually or as required and submitted with the annual accounts to the council.

3. Annual Accounts

3.1. Annual accounts should be prepared at the end of each year of the council's operations, summarising the receipts and payments made during that year.The financial year of the community council will be specified within their Constitution.

3.2. The use of receipts and payments accounts is recommended. By definition thiswill only include physical receipts and payments made during the period, not transactions which still have to be concluded. Any transactions not concluded by close-of-business on the final day of the financial period must be accounted for in the following financial year. Ideally, every effort should be made to make all payments and receive all income before close of business on the last day ofthe relevant accounting year. If exceptionally there was a significant payment due but not made by the year-end then an appropriate note should be made to the accounts.

3.3. The annual accounts should show opening bank and cash balances, summarised details of receipts and payments for the year and the closing bank and cash balances. Appropriate vouchers should be retained as evidence for each transaction.

3.4. A suggested sample layout for annual accounts is included at the end of the document.

4. Examination of Annual Accounts

4.1 These accounts require to be examined by a person suitably experienced in accountancy (preferably a qualified accountant) and who is not a member of the community council or related to a community councillor.

4.2. The examiners should confirm the bank and cash balances and examine all documents for authenticity, propriety, etc. to verify the accounts and sign and date them with a statement saying:

"I have examined the books and records of the XXX Community Council for the period XXX to XXX and have found the above statement to be correctly stated and sufficiently vouched."

5. Bank Accounts and Cash

5.1. Each community council should open a bank account in the name of the council. It is suggested that this account should be an interest- paying cheque account. However, where a community council holds large balances due to fund raising activities better rates of interest may be earned byhaving a separate deposit account.

5.2. The account should be operated with two signatories required for each cheque, with a minimum of three persons designated as signatories for ease ofoperating the account. This should always be the Treasurer and two other designated officers of the community council. Community councils are encouraged to put in place additional safeguards where online banking which generally only requires one signatory. This might, for example, include regular submission of bank statements to meetings.

5.3. Signatories should not sign blank cheques but the cheque should be prepared by the Treasurer and presented to another signatory along with appropriate documentary evidence relating to the payment. The signatory should sign the cheque and endorse the documentation with the cheque number and thepayment date to show the payment has been made.

5.4. Cash held by the community council should be kept to a minimum and alwaysheld in a lockfast container.

Example of a Basic Layout for a Cash Book			
INCOME			
Description	Ref	Chq No/Cash	Total (£)
Balance b/fwd 1 April 2021			300.00
Grant-Argyll and Bute Council	4		300.00
TOTAL			600.00
EXPENDITURE			
Description	Ref	Chq No/Cash	Total (£)
Wren Websites	1	00145	150.00
Starling Stationers		Cash	50.00
Eagle Herald	3	00146	125.00
Osprey Room Hire Ltd	5	00147	50.00
Donation-Bloggs Group	6	Cash	125.00
Balance c/f 31 March 2022			100.00
TOTAL			600.00

"Ref" refers to the sequential numbering mentioned in paragraph 2.2 of the Financial Guidelines.

Example of Preferred Layout for Annual Accounts

XXX COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Statement of Income and Expenditure of XXX Community Council for the period XXX to XXX

Income	£
Council Grant	XXX
Other Donations	XXX
Income From Fund Raisers	XXX
Other Income	XXX
Bank/Building Society Interest	XXX
Total Income	XXX
Expenditure	
Postages	XXX
Hall Hire	XXX
Advertising	XXX
(Surplus)Deficit for the Period	XXX
Opening Balance	XXX
Closing Balance as at XXX	XXX
Represented By	
Bank Account	XXX
Cash in hand	XXX

Prepared by …… Date……..

Examiners' Certificate

I have examined the books and records of the XX Community Council for the period XXX to XXX and have found the above statement to be correctly stated and sufficiently vouched.

Signed by …….. Date……..

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR COMMUNITY COUNCILLORS

The Code of Conduct for community councillors is based largely on the Code of Conduct for local authority councillors and relevant public bodies as provided for in The Ethical Standards in Public Life etc (Scotland) Act 2000.

Community councillors, as elected representatives of their communities, have a responsibility to make sure that they are familiar with, and that their actions comply with, the principles set out in this Code of Conduct. The Code of Conduct and its principles shall apply to all community councillors and those representing the community council. These principles are as follows:

- Service to the community (public service)
- Selflessness
- Integrity
- Objectivity
- Accountability and Stewardship
- Openness
- Honesty
- Leadership
- Respect

Service to the Community

As a community councillor you have a duty to act in the interests of the local community, which you have been elected or nominated to represent. You also have a duty to act in accordance with the remit of the Scheme for the Establishment of Community Councils, as set out by your local authority under the terms of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973.

You have a duty to establish and reflect, through the community council, the views of the community as a whole, on any issue, irrespective of personal opinion.

You should ensure that you are, within reason, accessible to your local community and local residents. Various mechanisms to allow the general community to express their views, i.e. suggestion boxes, community surveys, opinion polls should, where possible, should be made available.

Selflessness

You have a duty to take decisions solely in terms of the interest of the community that you represent. You must not use your position as a community councillor to gain financial, material, political or other personal benefit for yourself, family or friends.

Integrity

You must not place yourself under any financial or other obligation to any individual or organisation that might reasonably be thought to influence you in your representation of your community. If you have any private and/or personal interest in a matter to be considered by the community council, you have a duty to declare this and if deemed necessary by other members, withdraw from discussions and the decision making process with regard to that matter.

You should not accept gifts or hospitality that may be seen to influence or be intended to influence your opinion or judgement. The offer and/or receipt of any gifts,regardless of form, should always be reported to and noted by the Secretary of the community council.

Objectivity

In all your decisions and opinions as a community councillor, you must endeavour to represent the overall views of your community, taking account of information which is provided to you or is publicly available, assessing its merit and gathering information as appropriate, whilst laying aside personal opinions or preferences.

You may be appointed or nominated by your community council to serve as a member of another representative body. You should ensure that this Code ofConduct is observed when carrying out the duties of the other body.

You are free to have political and/or religious affiliations; however you must ensure that you represent the interests of your community and community council and notthe interests of a particular political party or other group.

Accountability and Stewardship

You are accountable for the decisions and actions that you take on behalf of your community through the community council. You must ensure that the community council uses its resources prudently and in accordance with the law.

Community councillors will individually and collectively ensure that the business of the community council is conducted according to the Scheme for the Establishment of Community Councils and this Code of Conduct.

Community councillors will individually and collectively ensure that annual accounts are produced showing the financial undertakings of the community council as set out in the Scheme for the Establishment of Community Councils. They must also ensure that all resources are used efficiently, effectively and fairly and are used strictly for the purposes of community council business and for no other purpose.

Minutes of meetings recording all actions and decisions made should be produced and circulated to all members of the community council as soon as possible after each meeting.

Any breach of the Scheme for the Establishment of Community Councils may be reported to the local authority to determine what action, if necessary, should be taken.

Openness

You have a duty to be open about your decisions, actions and representations, giving reasons for these where appropriate. You should be able to justify your decisions and be confident that you have not been unduly influenced by the views and/or opinions of others.

If you have dealings with the media, members of the public, or others not directly involved in your community council, you should ensure that an explicit distinction is made between the expression of your personal views and opinions from any views or statement made about or on behalf of the community council.

Honesty

You have a duty to act honestly. You also have an obligation to work within the law at all times. You must declare any private interest relating to your community council duties and take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the interest of the community and the community council.

Leadership

You have a duty to promote and support the principles of this Code of Conduct by leadership and example, to maintain and strengthen the community's trust and confidence in the integrity of the community council and its members in representing the views and needs of the local area. You must also promote social inclusion and challenge discrimination in any form.

You should act to assist the community council, as far as possible, in the interest of the whole community that it serves. Where particular interest groups' concerns are in conflict with those of other groups or other areas you should help to ensure that the community council is aware of them.

Respect

You must respect fellow members of your community council and those that you represent, treating them with courtesy, respect and in a non-discriminatory manner at all times. This should extend to any person, regardless of their position, you have dealings with in your capacity as a community councillor.

Recognition should be given to the contribution of everyone participating in the work of the community council. You must comply with Equal Opportunities legislation and ensure that equality of opportunity be given to every participant to have their knowledge, opinion, skill and experience taken into account.

You should ensure that confidential material, including details about individuals, is treated as such and that it is handled with dignity and discretion and is not used for personal, malicious or corrupt purposes.