

Officer Code of Conduct

Lead Member: Cllr William Wallace, Chair of the Committee

Lead Officer: Scott Wooldridge, Monitoring Officer

Contact Details: tel (01823) 357628 or e-mail: swooldridge@somerset.gov.uk

1. Summary

- 1.1.** The purpose of this Code is to help employees support the County Council's aim to provide high quality services fairly and efficiently in line with its values of listening, responsibility, trust and respect. It also provides the public and our partners with assurance on the standards of personal conduct that is expected of officers.

The Council already publishes as part of its Constitution a Members Code of Conduct for its elected members. Whilst the Council has a standards of conduct policy for employees there is no Officer Code of Conduct currently as part of the Council's Constitution, unlike other councils.

Good practice and comparison with other county councils shows that there is a case for an Officer Code of Conduct to be developed and published as part of the Constitution.

- 1.2.** The Council needs to ensure its decisions and operations are open, accountable and in line with recognised ethical standards. The Council expects all employees to promote and maintain high standards of personal conduct to sustain the good reputation of the Council and its services. Officers of the Council are therefore required to be aware of and act in accordance with The Seven Standards of Public Life.

The Code would apply to all Council employees (except school staff who are subject to their own requirements) undertaking their duties on behalf of the Council and when representing the Council on external boards, committees, etc.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Committee considers and approves the proposed Officer Code of Conduct set out in Appendix 1 for inclusion within the Council's Constitution and publication on the council's website.**

3. Background

- 3.1.** In January 2019, the Parliamentary Committee on Standards in Public Life published their report and this was reported to the Constitution and Standards Committee meeting in February 2019. The report includes a series of recommendations to the Government for improvements to local authority standards arrangements including strengthening the ability for a council to take actions where a serious breach of the Code of Conduct is proven. The Committee welcomed the report and recommendations and the Government's response to the report is awaited.
- 3.2.** The Council is committed to its officers and its elected members maintaining the highest standards of conduct in undertaking their duties on behalf of the council.

This expectation is supported by the functions and responsibilities of the Constitution & Standards Committee, the Constitution, the Chair of Council, Members' Code of Conduct, legislation, the Monitoring Officer, standards of conduct for officers, council policies and procedures.

3.3. Many councils publish their Officer Code of Conduct as part of their Constitution and on their websites to provide assurance and transparency on what the public, elected members and partners can expect in terms of standards of personal conduct.

3.4. The Monitoring Officer has reviewed the council's existing policy and procedures for staff regarding standards of conduct, together with best practice and codes of conduct of other county councils. This has resulted in a draft Officer Code of Conduct being developed for consideration for approval. Subject to consideration and approval, the proposed Officer Code of Conduct would then be published as part of the Council's Constitution and on its website.

3.5. Training and promoting awareness

The Committee on Standards in Public Life's view is that ethical standards training on standards of behaviour even where offered, may not always be taken up. The proposed Code of Conduct will be promoted through Core Brief and other internal communications in order to improve awareness and assist staff.

4.0 Consultation

The draft Officer Code of Conduct has been developed with Human Resources and Legal Services. It has also been consulted with Trade Union representatives.

5.0 Implications

Financial: There are no costs associated with the proposals in this report beyond officer time required to publish the proposed Code and promote awareness amongst staff.

Legal: As detailed in the report.

Impact Assessment: The Council's duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 is to have "due regard" to the matters set out in relation to equalities when considering and making decisions on the provision of services. There are no direct impacts of the report's recommendations on the provision of services. There are no direct impacts on sustainability, health and safety, community safety or privacy aspects as a result of these proposals.

5. Background papers

5.1. Council's Constitution

Standards of Conduct for officers

Note: For sight of individual background papers please contact the report author