

LGA Model Councillor Code of Conduct Training Pack

Introduction

Why high standards in public life matter

In its report on Local Government Ethical Standards published in January 2019, the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) said:

“Local government impacts the lives of citizens every day, providing essential services to those it serves. Its decisions directly affect the quality of life of local people. High standards of conduct in local government are needed to demonstrate that those decisions are taken in the public interest and to maintain public confidence”.

The Local Government Association (LGA) reinforced this message in the Joint statement to councillors made in the introduction to its Model Councillor Code of Conduct:

“The role of councillors across all tiers of local government is a vital part of our country’s system of democracy. It is important that as councillors we can be held accountable and all adopt the behaviours and responsibilities associated with the role”.

“The public have high expectations of us and entrust us to represent our local area, taking decisions fairly, openly and transparently. We have both an individual and collective responsibility to meet those expectations by maintaining high standards and demonstrating good conduct and by challenging behaviour which falls below expectations.”

This training pack has been developed to assist officers deliver high quality training to councillors on this vital topic.

The background to the development of the LGA Model Code and Guidance

Recommendation One of the CSPL Report on Local Government Ethical Standards (the CSPL report) was that:

“The Local Government Association should create an updated model code of conduct, in consultation with representative bodies of councillors and officers of all tiers of local government”.

The LGA, in association with key partners and following extensive consultation with the sector, published a Model Councillor Code of Conduct (the model code) in December 2020. The development of the model code is part of the LGA’s work in

supporting all tiers of local government to continue to aspire to high standards of leadership and performance, and the LGA's Civility in Public Life programme.

A key finding from the consultation on the model code with the sector was the need for guidance and training to support councils and councillors embed the principles of the model code.

In July 2021 Guidance on the LGA Model Councillor Code of Conduct was published (the LGA guidance). The purpose of this guidance was to help the understanding of, and consistency of approach towards, the model code.

The importance of training on this topic

The CSPL report stressed the importance of training for councillors as a key means of reinforcing the importance of standards in public life:

“Expected standards of behaviour should be embedded through effective induction and ongoing training. Political groups should require their members to attend code of conduct training provided by a local authority.”

The CSPL also commented on the optimum approach to training on standards:

“To be successful, induction training should not be dry or compliance-focussed but should set out the rationale for high standards in public life and should be scenario-based so that councillors can engage with concrete examples and see the relevance of standards to different areas of activity in which they might be involved”.

Although the CSPL comments refer specifically to induction training, the LGA endorses this approach for **all** councillor training relating to standards and conduct and the training pack has been prepared in this context.

The development, purpose and intended outcomes of the training pack

Following the development of the model code and guidance in consultation with members and officers, this training pack has been developed to support member training.

This training pack has been prepared to enable officers to deliver high quality and effective training to councillors on standards of conduct. It supports the LGA's aims to clearly articulate the standards expected of anyone engaging in public and political discourse and debate, and what is needed to achieve those standards.

The training pack is designed to be usable by all principal local authorities which have adopted the model code or a variation of it. The pack has been created so that it can be adapted to suit each council's purposes.

Please note that the material is not designed for councillors to use on their own for self-managed learning. It has been prepared to support a presentation delivered by officers (either virtually or face-to-face)

The intended outcomes of any training delivered using the pack are that:

- Councillors have an opportunity to reflect on the challenges of upholding high standards of conduct and to work through practical examples
- Councillors have a better understanding of the principles of good councillor conduct and how their authority's code applies to them and
- Councillors feel immediately more confident in the expectations of behaviour required of them and how to meet these.

The desired outcomes of the overall programme of training by local authorities using the training pack are that:

- Councillors' behaviour and standards are improved
- Complaints against councillors are reduced
- Councils' and councillors' reputations are better protected and
- Prospective councillors are not put off from standing for election due to poor behaviour of councillors.

The contents of the training pack

The pack contains the following parts:

Part 1: This Introduction

Part 2: The PowerPoint presentation

Part 3: Speaker's notes to support the delivery of the training

Part 4: Resource document containing links to useful sources/material

This Introduction is provided as useful background for officers who are organising, or who may be personally delivering, the training. It is not intended to be part of any training material shared with councillors.

The PowerPoint presentation forms the core part of the material. Its content is designed to be drawn on and adapted for your use, whether you have adopted the model code as it is drafted or to cover your own specific code and circumstances.

The **Speaker's notes** cover four things:

Section 1: How to use the presentation

Section 2: General guidelines on training techniques

Section 3: Detailed notes to accompany the PowerPoint presentation

Section 4: Transcript of Lord Evans' opening comments

Again, these notes are for your background and to support you in delivering the training and are not intended for sharing with the councillors.

The transcript of Lord Evans' comments is included as an accessibility tool.

The **Resource document** is primarily for your background information and is intended to be an easy way of accessing useful source material. You can share this with the councillors attending the training if you think this would be helpful. If so, you may want to add links to your own documents or references including:

- Your own code (if this differs from the model code)
- Your procedure for dealing with complaints
- Any relevant protocol or other code including
 - Gifts and hospitality
 - Officer/member protocol
 - Planning code of practice
 - Social media guidance

How the training pack can be used by each local authority

The training pack covers all aspects of the model code and draws on lots of examples from the guidance. It has been produced in a way which will enable you to decide how to structure your training. You may choose to run one training event or a number of different sessions focusing on different aspects of the code eg standards of behaviour, interests etc. The material is structured in a way to enable you to select the most appropriate content to meet your needs, and to put this together into a comprehensive presentation.

Further details of how you may want to tailor the presentation are contained in Part 3: Speaker's notes.

The training pack has been prepared for use by principal councils when delivering training to their own members. It therefore does not address issues or challenges specific to parish or town councillors, but can be adapted.

The training pack focuses on the core contents of the model code; it therefore does not cover the detailed procedure for dealing with standards complaints, hearings sanctions etc. It does refer at very high level to the usual way of dealing with a standards complaint. If you want to adapt or expand this section of the material to cover your own arrangements in detail, this should be easy for you to do. However you should consider the additional time this will add to the session.

The material has been prepared on the assumption that the officer presenting the training has reasonable experience of dealing with code of conduct issues and working with elected members.

Contact details for feedback

It is important that we get feedback on the training pack so that we can review and improve it in the future.

If you have any comments or suggestions, or would like to let us know how the training material was received in your council, please do contact:

Modelcode@local.gov.uk