

Code of conduct

Adopted by Council 12 November 2025



MASTERTON
WHAKAORIORI
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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1. Introduction

This Governance Code of Conduct (the Code) sets out the standards of behaviour expected from elected and appointed members (members) of the Masterton District Council/Te Kaunihera ā-rohe o Whakaoriori in the exercise of their duties. Its purpose is to:

- enhance the effectiveness of Masterton District Council and the provision of good local government of the Masterton district;
- promote effective decision-making and community engagement;
- enhance the credibility and accountability of Masterton District Council to its communities; and
- develop a culture of mutual trust, respect and tolerance between the members of Masterton District Council and between the members and management.

This purpose is given effect through the values, roles, responsibilities and specific behaviours agreed in this Code.

2. Scope

The Code has been adopted in accordance with clause 15 (1) of Schedule 7 of the Local Government Act 2002 (LGA 2002) and applies to all members. The Code is designed to deal with the behaviour of members towards:

- each other;
- the Chief Executive and staff;
- the media; and
- the general public.

It is also concerned with the disclosure of information that members receive in their capacity as elected members and information which impacts on the ability of the Council to give effect to its statutory responsibilities.

This Code can only be amended (or substituted by a replacement Code) by a vote of at least 75 per cent of members present at a meeting when amendment to the Code is being considered. The Code should be read in conjunction with the Council's Standing Orders.

3. Values

The Code is designed to give effect to the following values:

1. **Public interest:** members will serve the best interests of the people within the Masterton district and discharge their duties conscientiously, to the best of their ability.
2. **Public trust:** members, in order to foster community confidence and trust in their Council, will work together constructively and uphold the values of honesty, integrity, accountability and transparency.
3. **Ethical behaviour:** members will not place themselves in situations where their honesty and integrity may be questioned, will not behave improperly and will avoid the appearance of any such behaviour.
4. **Objectivity:** members will make decisions on merit; including appointments, awarding contracts, and recommending individuals for rewards or benefits.
5. **Respect for others:** members will treat people, including other members, with respect and courtesy, regardless of their ethnicity, age, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or disability. Members will respect the impartiality and integrity of Council staff.
6. **Duty to uphold the law:** members will comply with all legislative requirements applying to their role, abide by this Code, and act in accordance with the trust placed in them by the public.
7. **Equitable contribution:** members will take all reasonable steps to ensure they fulfil the duties and responsibilities of office, including attending meetings and workshops, preparing for meetings, attending civic events, and participating in relevant training seminars.
8. **Leadership:** members will actively promote and support these principles and ensure they are reflected in the way in which Masterton District Council operates, including a regular review and assessment of Masterton District Council's collective performance.

These values complement, and work in conjunction with, the principles of section 14 of the LGA 2002; the governance principles of section 39 of the LGA 2002; and our Masterton District Council governance principles:

Whakamana Tangata	Respecting the mandate of each member and ensuring the integrity of the committee as a whole by acknowledging the principle of collective responsibility and decision-making.
Manaakitanga	Recognising and embracing the mana of others.
Rangatiratanga	Demonstrating effective leadership with integrity, humility, honesty and transparency.
Whanaungatanga	Building and sustaining effective and efficient relationships.
Kotahitanga	Working collectively.

4. Role and Responsibilities

The Code of Conduct is designed to strengthen the good governance of the district. Good governance requires that the complementary roles of the governing body and the administration are understood and respected. These roles involve:

4.1 Members

The role of the governing body includes:

- representing the interests of the people of the Masterton district;
- developing and adopting plans, policies and budgets;
- monitoring the performance of the Council against stated goals and objectives set out in its Long-Term Plan;
- providing prudent stewardship of the council's resources;
- employing and monitoring the performance of the Chief Executive; and
- ensuring Masterton District Council fulfils its responsibilities to be a 'good employer' and meets the requirements of the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015.

4.2 Chief Executive

The role of the Chief Executive includes:

- implementing the decisions of Masterton District Council;
- ensuring that all responsibilities delegated to the Chief Executive are properly performed or exercised;
- ensuring the effective and efficient management of the activities of Masterton District Council;
- maintaining systems to enable effective planning and accurate reporting of the financial and service performance of the local authority;
- providing leadership for the staff of the Masterton District Council; and
- employing staff on behalf of Masterton District Council (including negotiation of the terms of employment for those staff).

Under section 42 of the LGA 2002, the Chief Executive is the only person *directly* employed by the Council itself. All concerns about the performance of an individual member of staff must, in the first instance, be referred to the Chief Executive.

5. Relationships

This section of the Code sets out agreed standards of behaviour between members; members and staff; and members and the public.

5.1 Relationships between members

Given the importance of relationships to the effective performance of the Council, members will conduct their dealings with each other in a manner that:

- maintains public confidence;
- is open and honest;
- is courteous;
- is focused on issues rather than personalities;

- avoids abuse of meeting procedures, such as a pattern of unnecessary notices of motion and/or repetitious points of order; and
- avoids aggressive, offensive or abusive conduct, including the use of disrespectful or malicious language.

Any failure by members to act in the manner described in section 5.1 represents a breach of this Code.

Please note that nothing in this section of the Code is intended to limit robust debate within the Council as long as it is conducted in a respectful and insightful manner.

5.2 Relationships with staff

An important element of good governance involves the relationship between the Council, its Chief Executive and its staff. Members will respect arrangements put in place to facilitate this relationship, and:

- raise any serious concerns about staff or contractors with the Mayor, who will then disclose those concerns to the Chief Executive;
- raise any concerns about the performance or behaviour of the Chief Executive with the Mayor;
- make themselves aware of the obligations that the Council and the Chief Executive have as employers and observe those requirements at all times, such as the duty to be a good employer;
- treat all staff with courtesy and respect and avoid publicly criticising any staff member;
- observe any protocols put in place by the Chief Executive concerning contact between members and staff; and
- avoid doing anything which might compromise, or could be seen as compromising, the impartiality of an employee.

Any failure by members to act in the manner described above represents a breach of this Code.

Members should be aware that failure to observe this portion of the Code may compromise the Council's obligation to be a good employer and consequently expose the Council to civil litigation or affect the risk assessment of Council's management and governance control processes undertaken as part of the Council's annual audit.

5.3 Relationship with the public

Given the vital role that democratic local government plays in our communities it is important that Councils have the respect and trust of their citizens. To facilitate trust and respect in their Council members will:

- interact with members of the public in a fair, respectful, equitable and honest manner;
- be available to listen and respond openly and honestly to community concerns;
- consider all points of view or interests when participating in debate and making decisions;
- treat members of the public in a courteous manner; and
- act in a way that upholds the reputation of Masterton District Council.

Any failure by members to act in the manner described above represents a breach of this Code.

6. Online Channel, Social Media, Media, and Crisis Communication Guidelines

Speaking "on behalf of" Council differs from speaking "about" Council. Your free speech rights remain protected, but your communities and colleagues, and council staff can see what you post online. These principles guide you when engaging in **personal or unofficial online communications** that reference the Council.

6.1 Online Channel Use Principles

- **Follow the Code of Conduct and applicable policies**

Council policies and legislation apply in any public setting where you reference the Council or its activities. This includes the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987 (LGOIMA) and the Privacy Act 2020. These requirements cover any information you share online.

- **Own your actions**

You bear responsibility for anything you post online that could damage the Council's reputation. Use sound judgement and common sense when participating in online environments.

- **Share feedback with Council**

You serve as an advocate for monitoring the social media landscape. When you find positive or negative comments about the Council or its activities that seem significant, share them with the governing body.

- **Refer negative posts to authorised spokespeople**

When you encounter negative or critical posts about the Council or its activities, refer them to the Council's authorised spokesperson unless you hold that role. If you are the authorised spokesperson, consult with communications staff before responding.

- **Separate your political and personal life**

Elected members must take extra care when participating in online forums. The public struggles to separate your personal and Council personas. Commenting online in any forum can bring you into conflict with the Code if your opinion contradicts the Council's position and you don't clearly identify your views as personal.

- **Protect sensitive and confidential information**

Never post sensitive and confidential information provided by the Council. This includes confidential items, public-excluded reports, and commercially sensitive information. Such disclosure breaches the Code requirements.

- **Maintain open and transparent social media presence**

When commenting on matters related to the local authority, represent yourself truthfully. Do not use aliases or different account names, and do not block identification. Only block posts on social media platforms you control when posts are clearly abusive or put you at risk by retaining them. Blocking constructive debate or feedback can bring the whole Council into disrepute.

- **Understand your legal responsibility as a page administrator**

As the owner or administrator of a social media page in New Zealand, you may be considered a 'publisher' under defamation law if you post defamatory comments or have knowledge of defamatory comments posted on your channel and fail to remove them within a reasonable time. This applies even if you did not write the comment yourself. While the Defamation Act 1992 does not explicitly require you to monitor your page, New Zealand case law (e.g., *Wishart v Murray*) suggests that once you are aware of potentially defamatory content, you should act promptly to remove it to avoid legal liability.

6.2 Accuracy and verification standards

Before making any public statement or social media post about Council business, community issues, or local government matters, members should:

- a) **verify information accuracy** - Take reasonable steps to verify the accuracy of factual claims, including checking with appropriate Council staff or reliable sources where necessary
- b) **identify sources** - Where making factual claims, identify credible sources where possible, or clearly state when information is preliminary or unverified
- c) **correct errors promptly** - When factual errors are identified, publish corrections within 24 hours using the same platform and similar prominence as the original post
- d) **distinguish fact from opinion** - Clearly distinguish between factual statements and personal opinions/interpretations.

6.3 Prohibited content

Members must not publish or share content that:

- a) **contains false information** - Includes demonstrably false claims about Council decisions, policies, or community issues
- b) **promotes conspiracy theories** - Spreads unsubstantiated conspiracy theories about Council operations, staff, or community issues
- c) **incites harassment** - Encourages followers to target, harass, or intimidate council officers or other individuals or groups
- d) **amplifies unverified claims** - Shares or amplifies unverified claims from unreliable sources without appropriate disclaimers.

6.4 Online behaviour standards

When engaging in online platforms, members must:

- a) **maintain professional standards** - Apply the same professional conduct standards required in face-to-face interactions
- b) **avoid inflammatory language** - Refrain from using deliberately inflammatory, provocative, or divisive language designed to generate outrage
- c) **respect democratic processes** - Not undermine confidence in democratic institutions or processes through unfounded attacks
- d) **protect vulnerable groups** - Take particular care not to target or enable harassment of vulnerable community members.

6.5 Media Guidelines

The media play an important part in the operation and efficacy of local democracy. To fulfil this role, the media needs access to accurate and timely information about the affairs of council.

From time-to-time individual members will be approached to comment on a particular issue, either on behalf of the Council, or as an elected member in their own right. When responding to the media members must be mindful that:

- operational questions should be referred to the Chief Executive
- policy-related questions referred to the Mayor or the member with the appropriate delegated authority.

When speaking to the media more generally members will abide by the following provisions.

Media contact on behalf of the Council:

The Mayor or Chairperson is the first point of contact for an official view on any issue. If the Mayor is absent, or unable to act, a matter may be referred to the Deputy Mayor or to the relevant committee chairperson (in that order) for a response.

The Mayor may refer any matter to the relevant committee chairperson, a member or to the Chief Executive for comment.

No member may speak to the media on behalf of Council unless first approved to do so by resolution of the Council, or of a Committee of the Council, or by the Mayor.

Media comment on a member's own behalf

Elected members are free to express a personal view in the media, at any time, provided the following rules are observed:

- a) Media comments must not state or imply that they represent the views of the Council.
- b) Media comments which are contrary to a Council decision or policy must clearly state that they do not represent the views of the majority of members.
- c) Media comments must observe the other requirements of the Code. For example, comments should not disclose confidential information, criticise, or compromise the impartiality or integrity of staff.
- d) Media comments must not be misleading, must not purposefully misrepresent the views of the Council or the views of other members and should be accurate within the bounds of reasonableness.
- e) Members are encouraged to advise other members of contact from the media.

6.6 Social Media Guidelines

Pre-Publication Checklist:

Before posting content related to your role as an elected member, ask the following:

- Is this information accurate and verified?
- Could this be misinterpreted or taken out of context?
- Does this maintain professional standards?
- Will this contribute constructively to public discourse?
- Am I complying with all aspects of this Code?

Information Standards

For factual claims about:

- **council decisions:** Verify through official Council records or Chief Executive
- **community statistics:** Use official sources (Stats NZ, government agencies, peer-reviewed research)
- **local issues:** Cross-reference reliable sources
- **breaking news:** Wait for official confirmation before sharing.

Engagement Standards

When responding to comments or criticism:

- respond professionally and constructively
- acknowledge legitimate concerns

- correct misinformation with accurate information and sources
- do not engage with obvious trolling or harassment
- report abusive behaviour to platform administrators.

6.7 Crisis Communication

During crisis situations:

- coordinate with Mayor/Chief Executive or designated council officer before posting
- stick to verified facts
- avoid speculation or inflammatory commentary
- direct complex queries to appropriate Council staff
- monitor your social media for developing issues.

Any failure by members to meet the standards set out above represents a breach of this Code.

7. Information

Access to information is critical to the effective performance of a local authority and the level of public trust felt by the public.

7.1 Confidential information

In the course of their duties members will occasionally receive information, whether in reports or through debate, that is confidential. This will generally be information that is either commercially sensitive or is personal to a particular individual or organisation. Accordingly, members must agree not to use or disclose confidential information for any purpose other than the purpose for which the information was supplied to the member.

7.2 Information received in capacity as an elected member

Occasionally members will receive information from external parties which is pertinent to the ability of Council to properly perform its statutory duties. Where this occurs, and the information does not contravene the privacy of natural persons, the member will disclose such information to other members and/or the chief executive as soon as practicable.

Members who are offered information on the condition that it remains confidential will inform the provider of the information that it is their duty to disclose the information and will decline the offer if that duty is likely to be compromised.

Any failure by members to act in the manner described above represents a breach of this Code.

Please note: failure to observe these provisions may impede the performance of the Council by inhibiting information flows and undermining public confidence. It may also expose the Council to prosecution under the Privacy Act and/or civil litigation.

8. Conflicts of Interest

Elected members will maintain a clear separation between their personal interests and their duties as members in order to ensure that they are free from bias (whether real or perceived). Members therefore must familiarise themselves with the provisions of the Local Authorities (Members' Interests) Act 1968 (LAMIA).

Members will not participate in any Council discussion or vote on any matter in which they have a pecuniary interest, other than an interest in common with the general public. This rule also applies where the member's spouse contracts with Masterton District Council or has a pecuniary interest. Members shall make a declaration of interest as soon as practicable after becoming aware of any such interests.

If a member is in any doubt as to whether or not a particular course of action (including a decision to take no action) raises a conflict of interest, then the member should seek guidance from the Chief Executive *immediately*. Members may also contact the Office of the Auditor General for guidance as to whether they have a pecuniary interest, and if so, may seek an exemption to allow that member to participate or vote on a particular issue in which they may have a pecuniary interest. The latter must be done before the discussion or vote.

Please note: Failure to observe the requirements of the Local Authorities (Members' Interests) Act 1968 could potentially invalidate the decision made, or the action taken, by Council. Failure to observe these requirements could also leave the member open to prosecution. In the event of a conviction, members can be removed from office.

9. Register of Interests

Members shall annually make a declaration of interests. These declarations are recorded in a public Register of Interests maintained by Masterton District Council (refer the Masterton District Council website for Register of Interests). The declaration must include information on the nature and extent of any interest, including:

- any employment, trade or profession carried on by the member or the members' spouse for profit or gain;
- any company, trust, partnership etc for which the member or their spouse is a director, partner or trustee;
- the address of any land in which the member has a beneficial interest, within the jurisdiction of MDC;
- the address of any land owned by Masterton District Council in which the member or their spouse is:
 - a tenant; or
 - the land is tenanted by a firm in which the member or spouse is a partner, a company of which the member or spouse is a director, or a trust of which the member or spouse is a trustee; and
- any other matters which the public might reasonably regard as likely to influence the member's actions during the course of their duties as a member (if the member is in any doubt on this, the member should seek guidance from the Chief Executive).

Members are also required to make a declaration of Pecuniary Interests. This declaration is due in February each year and covers the year prior to the date of the declaration. It requires members to provide the specific information set out in sections 54A to 54I of the Local Government Act (LGA)

Please note: Where a member's circumstances change they must ensure that the Register of Interests is updated as soon as practicable.

10. Ethical Behaviour

Members will seek to promote the highest standards of ethical conduct. Accordingly, members will:

- claim only for legitimate expenses as determined by the Remuneration Authority and any lawful policy of Masterton District Council developed in accordance with that determination;
- adhere to Masterton District Council's internal Sensitive Expenditure Policy Manual
- adhere to Masterton District Council's internal Fraud, Dishonesty and Corruption Policy
- not influence, or attempt to influence, any Masterton District Council staff, officer or member in order to benefit their own, or family's personal or business interests;
- only use the Council resources (such as facilities, staff, equipment and supplies) in the course of their duties and not in connection with any election campaign or personal interests; and
- not solicit, demand, or request any gift, reward or benefit by virtue of their position and notify the Chief Executive if any such gifts are accepted. Where a gift to the value of \$50 or more is accepted by a member, that member must immediately disclose this to the Chief Executive for inclusion in the publicly available register of interests.

Any failure by members to comply with the provisions set out in this section represents a breach of this Code.

10.1 Undischarged bankrupt

In accordance with clause 15(5) of Schedule 7 (LGA 2002) any member who is an "undischarged bankrupt" will notify the Chief Executive prior as soon as practicable after being declared bankrupt. The member will also provide the Chief Executive with a brief explanatory statement of the circumstances surrounding the member's adjudication and the likely outcome of the bankruptcy.

11. Creating a supportive and inclusive environment

In accordance with the purpose of the Code, members agree to take all reasonable steps in order to participate in activities scheduled to promote a culture of mutual trust, respect and tolerance. These include:

- attending workshops or programmes organised by the Council for the purpose of facilitating agreement on the Council's vision, goals and objectives and the manner and operating style by which members will work;
- taking part in any assessment of the Council's overall performance and operating style during the triennium¹; and
- taking all reasonable steps to ensure they possess the skills and knowledge to effectively fulfil their Declaration of Office (the Oath) and contribute to the good governance of the Masterton district.

12. Breaches of the Code

Members must comply with the provisions of this Code (LGA 2002, schedule 7, s. 15(4)). Any member, or the Chief Executive, who believes that the Code has been breached by the behaviour of a member, may make a complaint to that effect. All complaints will be

considered in a manner that is consistent with the following principles.

12.1 Principles

The following principles will guide any processes for investigating and determining whether or not a breach under this Code has occurred:

- that the approach for investigating and assessing a complaint will be proportionate to the apparent seriousness of the alleged breach;
- that the processes of complaint, investigation, advice and decision-making will be kept separate as appropriate to the nature and complexity of the alleged breach; and
- that the concepts of natural justice and fairness will apply in the determination of any complaints made under this Code. This requires, conditional on the nature of an alleged breach, that affected parties:
 - have a right to know that an investigation process is underway;
 - are given due notice and are provided with an opportunity to be heard;
 - have confidence that any hearing will be impartial;
 - have a right to seek appropriate advice and be represented; and
 - have their privacy respected.

¹ Refer Appendix B self-assessment template

12.2 Complaints

Any issue regarding a potential breach of this Code of Conduct should first be raised with the Mayor prior to a formal complaint being lodged.

All potential breaches raised with the Mayor should be made in writing and forwarded to the Mayor in the first instance who will work with the complainant to come to a resolution. If the complainant and Mayor are unable to reach a satisfactory resolution, a formal complaint will be referred to the Chief Executive.

If a complaint relates to the Mayor, then the potential breach must be made in writing to the Chair of the Finance, Risk and Assurance Committee who will work with the complainant to come to a resolution. If the Chair of the Finance, Risk and Assurance Committee and the complainant are unable to reach a satisfactory resolution a formal complaint will be referred to the Chief Executive.

On receipt of a complaint the Chief Executive must forward that complaint to Council's Legal Counsel for a preliminary assessment to determine whether the complaint should be referred to an independent investigator for full investigation.

The Code is designed to be a self-regulatory instrument, therefore only members and the Chief Executive may make a complaint under this Code. For clarity, if a member of staff or member of the public believed the Code had been breached by a member then they should advise the Mayor or Chief Executive of the alleged breach for consideration of further action.

12.3 Investigation, advice and decision

Where Council's Legal Counsel considers that a complaint warrants a full investigation, the steps outlined in Appendix A will be followed.

12.4 Materiality

An alleged breach under this Code is material if, in the opinion of the independent investigator, it would, if proven, bring a member or the Council into disrepute or, if not addressed, reflect adversely on another member of the Council.

13. Penalties and actions

Where a complaint is determined to be material and referred to the Council, the nature of any penalty or action will depend on the seriousness of the breach.

13.1 Material breaches

In the case of material breaches of this Code the Council, or a committee with delegated authority, may require one of the following:

- a letter of censure to the member;
- a request (made either privately or publicly) for an apology;
- a vote of no confidence in the member;
- removal of responsibilities such as committee chair or Deputy Mayor
- removal of certain council-funded privileges (such as attendance at conferences);
- restricted entry to council offices, such as no access to staff areas (where restrictions may not previously have existed);
- limitation on any dealings with council staff so that they are confined to the Chief Executive only;
- suspension from committees or other bodies to which the member has been appointed; or
- an invitation for the member to consider resigning from the Council.

The Council or committee may decide that a penalty will not be imposed where a respondent agrees to one or more of the following:

- attend a relevant training course; and/or
- work with a mentor for a period of time; and/or
- participate in voluntary mediation (if the complaint involves a conflict between two members); and/or
- tender an apology.

The process is based on the presumption that the outcome of a complaints process will be made public unless there are grounds, such as those set out in the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987 (LGOIMA), for not doing so.

13.2 Statutory breaches

In cases where a breach of the Code is found to involve regulatory or legislative requirements, the complaint will be referred to the relevant agency. For example:

- breaches relating to members' interests (where members may be liable for prosecution by the Auditor-General under the Local Authorities (Members' Interests) Act 1968;
- breaches which result in the council suffering financial loss or damage (where the Auditor-General may make a report on the loss or damage under section 44 of the LGA 2002 which may result in the member having to make good the loss or damage); or

- breaches relating to the commission of a criminal offence which will be referred to the Police (which may leave the elected member liable for criminal prosecution).

14. Review

Once adopted, the Code continues to be in force until amended by Masterton District Council. The Code can be amended at any time but cannot be revoked unless the Council replaces it with another Code.

Once adopted, amendments to the Code require a resolution supported by 75 per cent of the members of the Council present at a Council meeting where the amendment is considered.

Council may formally review the Code as soon as practicable after the beginning of each triennium. The results of that review will be considered by the Council in regard to potential changes for improving the Code.

Appendix A: **Process for the determination and investigation of complaints**

Step 1: Mayor receives complaint

All complaints made under this Code will be made in writing and forwarded to the Mayor in the first instance who will work with the complainant to come to a resolution (complaints related to a breach of the Code by the Mayor will be forwarded to the Chair of the Finance, Risk and Assurance Committee). If the complainant and Mayor (or the complainant and the Chair of the Finance, Risk and Assurance Committee in the case of a complaint against the Mayor) are unable to reach a satisfactory resolution, the complaint will be referred to the Chief Executive who will refer the complaint in the first instance to Council's Legal Counsel, then if the complaint meets the criteria set out in the code, to an independent investigator. If the complaint is referred to an independent investigator, the Chief Executive will also:

- inform the complainant that the complaint has been referred to the independent investigator and the name of the investigator, and refer them to the process for dealing with complaints as set out in the Code; and
- inform the respondent that a complaint has been made against them, the name of the investigator and refer them to the process for dealing with complaints as set out in the Code.

Step 2: Legal Counsel makes preliminary assessment

On receipt of a complaint the Council's Legal Counsel will assess whether:

- the complaint is frivolous or without substance and should be dismissed;
- the complaint is outside the scope of the Code and should be redirected to another agency or process;

On receiving the Legal Counsel's preliminary assessment, the Chief Executive will:

- where it is determined that a complaint is frivolous or without substance, inform the complainant and respondent directly and inform other members (if there are no grounds for confidentiality) of the decision;
- in cases where it is found that the complaint involves a potential legislative breach and outside the scope of the Code, forward the complaint to the relevant agency and inform both the complainant and respondent of the action.

Following assessment by the Legal Counsel, If the complaint is not found to be frivolous or without substance and is within the scope of the Code the Chief Executive will refer the complaint to an independent investigator.

Step 3: Independent Investigator initial assessment

On receiving a complaint, the investigator will undertake an assessment to determine whether

- the complaint is non-material; or
- the complaint is material, and a full investigation is required.

In making the assessment, the investigator may make whatever initial inquiry is necessary to determine the appropriate course of action. The investigator has full discretion to dismiss any complaint which, in their view, fails to meet the test of materiality.

Step 4: Actions where a breach is found to be non-material

If the subject of a complaint is found to be non-material the investigator will inform the Chief Executive and, if they choose, recommend a course of action appropriate to the breach, such as;

- that the respondent seek guidance from the Chairperson or Mayor;
- that the respondent attend appropriate courses or programmes to increase their knowledge and understanding of the matters leading to the complaint.

The Chief Executive will advise both the complainant and the respondent of the investigator's decision and any recommendations, neither of which are open to challenge. Any recommendations made in response to a non-material breach are non-binding on the respondent and the council.

Step 5: Actions where a breach is found to be material

If the subject of a complaint is found to be material the investigator will inform the Chief Executive, who will inform the complainant and respondent. The investigator will then prepare a report for the council on the seriousness of the breach.

In preparing that report the investigator may:

- consult with the complainant, respondent and any affected parties;
- undertake a hearing with relevant parties; and/or
- refer to any relevant documents or information.

On receipt of the investigator's report the Chief Executive will prepare a report for the council or committee with delegated authority, which will meet to consider the findings and determine whether or not a penalty, or some other form of action, will be imposed. The Chief Executive's report will include the full report prepared by the investigator.

Step 6: Process for considering the investigator's report

Depending upon the nature of the complaint and alleged breach the investigator's report may be considered by the full council, excluding the complainant, respondent and any other 'interested' members, or a committee established for that purpose.

The council or committee will consider the Chief Executive's report in open meeting, except where the alleged breach concerns matters that justify the exclusion of the public, such as the misuse of confidential information or a matter that would otherwise be exempt from public disclosure under s.48 of the LGOIMA, in which case it will be a closed meeting.

Before making any decision in respect of the investigator's report the council or committee will give the member against whom the complaint has been made an opportunity to appear and speak in their own defense. Members with an interest in the proceedings, including the complainant and the respondent, may not take part in these proceedings.

The form of penalty that might be applied will depend on the nature of the breach and may include actions set out in section 13.1 of this Code.

In accordance with this Code councils will agree to implement the recommendations of a Code of Conduct Committee without debate.

Appendix B: Self-Assessment template

Please rate how you view the performance of elected members collectively (acting as the council) in the following areas:

A rating of 1 indicates an excellent level of performance – through to a rating of 4 indicating that the collective performance of elected members could improve significantly.

1. We act together as a team to deliver value to the people of our district/region.

1	2	3	4	(please circle)
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2. We are effective in being part of a coordinated approach to promote the district/regions.

1	2	3	4	(please circle)
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3. We have effective working relationships with key stakeholder groups.

1	2	3	4	(please circle)
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4. We have an effective working relationship with Council staff through members interactions with the Chief Executive.

1	2	3	4	(please circle)
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5. We engage effectively with the community on issues of importance to them.

1	2	3	4	(please circle)
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6. We are well prepared and well equipped to make informed decisions in our capacity as elected representatives.

1	2	3	4	(please circle)
---	---	---	---	-----------------

7. We participate appropriately in debates and act collectively in the best interests of the Northland region.

1	2	3	4	(please circle)
---	---	---	---	-----------------

8. Council decisions are made in an open and transparent fashion.

1	2	3	4	(please circle)
---	---	---	---	-----------------

9. We treat each other with mutual respect and demonstrate tolerance to different points of view in order to arrive at the best decisions for the region as a whole.

1

2

3

4

(please
circle)

10. We have a clear sense of direction and understanding

1

2

3

4

(please
circle)

The objective of this assessment is not necessarily that all members should agree.

Analysis of results may provide a useful starting point for discussions on the overall performance of the governance functions of the council and provide some insight into areas where improvements may be possible.

Appendix C: Legislation bearing on the role and conduct of elected members

This is a summary of the legislative requirements that have some bearing on the duties and conduct of elected members. The full statutes can be found at www.legislation.govt.nz.

The Local Authorities (Members' Interests) Act 1968

The Local Authorities (Members' Interests) Act 1968 (LAMIA) provides rules about members discussing and voting on matters in which they have a pecuniary interest and about contracts between members and the council.

A pecuniary interest is likely to exist if a matter under consideration could reasonably give rise to an expectation of a gain or loss of money for a member personally (or for their spouse or a company in which they have an interest). In relation to pecuniary interests the LAMIA applies to both contracting and participating in decision-making processes.

With regard to pecuniary or financial interests a person is deemed to be "concerned or interested" in a contract or interested "directly or indirectly" in a decision when:

- a person, or spouse or partner, is "concerned or interested" in the contract or where they have a pecuniary interest in the decision; or
- a person, or their spouse or partner, is involved in a company that is "concerned or interested" in the contract or where the company has a pecuniary interest in the decision.

There can also be additional situations where a person is potentially "concerned or interested" in a contract or have a pecuniary interest in a decision, such as where a contract is between an elected member's family trust and the council.

Determining whether a pecuniary interest exists

Elected members are often faced with the question of whether or not they have a pecuniary interest in a decision and if so whether they should participate in discussion on that decision and vote. When determining if this is the case or not the following test is applied:

"...whether, if the matter were dealt with in a particular way, discussing or voting on that matter could reasonably give rise to an expectation of a gain or loss of money for the member concerned." (OAG, 2001)

In deciding whether you have a pecuniary interest, members should consider the following factors.

- What is the nature of the decision being made?
- Do I have a financial interest in that decision - do I have a reasonable expectation of gain or loss of money by making that decision?
- Is my financial interest one that is in common with the public?
- Do any of the exceptions in the LAMIA apply to me?
- Could I apply to the Auditor-General for approval to participate?

Members may seek assistance from the Mayor/Chair or other person to determine if they should discuss or vote on an issue but ultimately it is their own judgment as to whether or not they have pecuniary interest in the decision. Any member who is uncertain as to whether they have a pecuniary interest is advised to seek legal advice. Where uncertainty exists, members may adopt a least-risk approach which is to not participate in discussions or vote on any decisions.

Members who do have a pecuniary interest will declare the pecuniary interest to the meeting and not participate in the discussion or voting. The declaration and abstention needs to be recorded in the meeting minutes.

The contracting rule

A member is disqualified from office if he or she is “concerned or interested” in contracts with their council if the total payments made, or to be made, by or on behalf of the council exceed \$25,000 in any financial year. The \$25,000 limit includes GST. The limit relates to the value of all payments made for all contracts in which you are interested during the financial year. It does not apply separately to each contract, nor is it just the amount of the profit the contractor expects to make or the portion of the payments to be personally received by you.

The Auditor-General can give prior approval, and in limited cases, retrospective approval for contracts that would otherwise disqualify you under the Act. It is an offence under the Act for a person to act as a member of the council (or committee of the council) while disqualified.

Non-pecuniary conflicts of interest

In addition to the issue of pecuniary interests, rules and common law govern conflicts of interest more generally. These rules apply to non-pecuniary conflicts of interest, including common law rules about bias. In order to determine if bias exists or not members need to ask:

“Is there a real danger of bias on the part of the member of the decision-making body, in the sense that he or she might unfairly regard with favour (or disfavour) the case of a party to the issue under consideration?”

The question is not limited to actual bias, but relates to the appearance or possibility of bias reflecting the principle that justice should not only be done, but should be seen to be done. Whether or not members believe they are not biased is irrelevant.

Members focus should be on the nature of the conflicting interest or relationship and the risk it could pose for the decision-making process. The most common risks of non-pecuniary bias are where:

- members' statements or conduct indicate that they have predetermined the decision before hearing all relevant information (that is, members have a “closed mind”); and
- members have a close relationship or involvement with an individual or organisation affected by the decision.

In determining whether or not they might be perceived as biased, members must also take into account the context and circumstance of the issue or question under consideration. For example, if a member has stood on a platform and been voted into office on the promise of implementing that platform then voters would have every expectation that the member would give effect to that promise, however he/she must still be seen to be open to considering new information (this may not apply to decisions made in quasi-judicial settings, such as an RMA hearing).

Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987

The Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987 sets out a list of meetings, procedures and requirements that apply to local authorities and local/community boards. Of particular importance for the roles and conduct of elected members is the fact that the Chairperson has the responsibility to maintain order at meetings, but all elected members should accept a personal responsibility to maintain acceptable standards of address and debate. No elected member should:

- create a disturbance or a distraction while another councillor is speaking;
- be disrespectful when they refer to each other or other people; or
- use offensive language about the council, other members, any employee of the council or any member of the public.

See Standing Orders for more detail.

Secret Commissions Act 1910

Under this Act it is unlawful for an elected member (or staff member) to advise anyone to enter into a contract with a third person and receive a gift or reward from that third person as a result, or to present false receipts to council.

If convicted of any offence under this Act a person can be imprisoned for up to two years, and/or fines up to \$1000. A conviction would therefore trigger the ouster provisions of the LGA 2002 and result in the removal of the member from office.

Crimes Act 1961

Under this Act it is unlawful for an elected member (or officer) to:

- accept or solicit for themselves (or anyone else) any gift or reward for acting or not acting in relation to the business of council; and
- use information gained in the course of their duties for their, or another person's, monetary gain or advantage.

These offences are punishable by a term of imprisonment of seven years or more. Elected members convicted of these offences will automatically cease to be members.

Financial Markets Conduct Act 2013

Financial Markets Conduct Act 2013 (previously the Securities Act 1978) essentially places elected members in the same position as company directors whenever council offers stock to the public. Elected members may be personally liable if investment documents such as a prospectus contain untrue statements and may be liable for criminal prosecution if the requirements of the Act are not met.

The Local Government Act 2002

The Local Government Act 2002 (LGA 2002) sets out the general powers of local government, its purpose and operating principles. Provisions directly relevant to this Code include:

Personal liability of members

Although having qualified privilege, elected members can be held personally accountable for losses incurred by a local authority where, following a report from the Auditor General under section 44 LGA 2002, it is found that one of the following applies:

- a) money belonging to, or administered by, a local authority has been unlawfully expended; or
- b) an asset has been unlawfully sold or otherwise disposed of by the local authority; or
- c) a liability has been unlawfully incurred by the local authority; or
- d) a local authority has intentionally or negligently failed to enforce the collection of money it is lawfully entitled to receive.

Members will not be personally liable where they can prove that the act or failure to act resulting in the loss occurred as a result of one of the following:

- a) without the member's knowledge;
- b) with the member's knowledge but against the member's protest made at or before the time when the loss occurred;
- c) contrary to the manner in which the member voted on the issue; and
- d) in circumstances where, although being a party to the act or failure to act, the member acted in good faith and relied on reports, statements, financial data, or other information from professional or expert advisers, namely staff or external experts on the matters.

In certain situation members will also be responsible for paying the costs of proceedings (section 47 LGA 2002).



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