

INTEGRITY AND CONFLICTS OF INTEREST INFORMATION

In 1995, the Committee on Standards in Public Life defined seven principles, which should underpin the actions of all who serve the public in any way. These are:

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| Selflessness | Holders of public office should take decisions solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or other friends. |
| Integrity | Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might influence them in the performance of their official duties. |
| Objectivity | In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit. |
| Accountability | Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office. |
| Openness | Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their |

decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.

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| Honesty | Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest. |
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| Leadership | Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by example. |
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All successful candidates must uphold the principles and values of public service.

What is a conflict of interest?

The highest standards of propriety, involving impartiality, integrity and objectivity are required of the Board. This means that any private, voluntary, charitable or political interest which might be material and relevant to the work of the Board should be declared.

There is always the possibility for real or perceived conflicts of interest to arise. Both are a problem, as the perceived inference of a conflict may, on occasions, be as damaging as the existence of a real conflict.

It is important, therefore, that you consider your circumstances when applying for appointment and identify any potential conflicts of interest, whether real or perceived.

Surely a perceived conflict is not a problem, as long as I act impartially at all times?

The integrity of the individual is not in question here. However, it is necessary for the standing of the Board that members of the public

have confidence in their independence and impartiality. Even a perceived conflict of interest on the part a Board member can be extremely damaging to the Board's reputation and it is therefore essential that these are declared and explored, in the same way as an actual conflict would be. The fact that the Board member acted impartially may be no defence against accusations of potential bias.

What should I do if I think I have a conflict of interest?

You will find a section on the Application Form entitled '*Integrity and Conflicts of Interest*' for you to complete. This section of the form requires you to consider and declare whether or not you have a real, or perceived, conflict. If you are unsure if your circumstances constitute a possible conflict, you should still complete this section, in order to give the Selection Panel as much information as possible.

If I declare a conflict, does this mean I will not be considered for appointment?

No – each case is considered individually. If you are selected for interview, the Selection Panel will explore with you how far the conflict might affect your ability to carry out the functions of the Board effectively and impartially and how this might be handled, if you were to be appointed. However, if, following the discussion with you, the Selection Panel believes that the conflict is too great and would call into question the integrity of the appointment they can withdraw your application from the competition.

What happens if I do not declare a known conflict, which is then discovered by the Assembly Commission after my appointment?

Again, each case would be considered on its merits, but the Assembly Commission may take the view that by concealing a conflict of interest,

you would have deemed to have breached the Seven Principles of Conduct Underpinning Public Life and may terminate your appointment

What happens if I do not realise a potential conflict exists?

This situation may arise where the applicant is not familiar with the broad range of work which a body covers and therefore does not realise that a conflict might exist. In some cases, the Board, with their wider knowledge of the body, might deduce that there is a potential conflict issue, based on the information on employment and experience provided by the candidate in the application form.

What happens if a conflict of interest arises after an appointment is made?

This could arise for two main reasons. The first is that the member's circumstances may change, for example, they may change jobs and in doing so, a conflict with their work on the Board becomes apparent. The second is where a member is unfamiliar with the range of the work of the Board, but after appointment, it becomes clear that a conflict exists where none had been envisaged during the appointment process.

In both cases, the issue should be discussed with the Chairperson of the Board and the Clerk/Chief Executive to decide whether or not the member can continue to carry out their role in an appropriate manner and each case is considered individually.

It may be that the conflict is such that it would be impractical for the member to continue on the Board, if they would have to withdraw from a considerable amount of the Board's routine business. In such cases, the member may be asked to stand down from the Board.

Areas where a conflict could arise

There are a number of issues, which could lead to real, or apparent, conflicts of interest. These include:

- Relevant pecuniary or other interests outside the organisation
- Relationships with other individuals/parties/organisations which could lead to perceived or real split loyalties
- Perception of rewards for past contributions or favours
- Membership of some societies or organisations

The above list of issues is not exhaustive, so you should consider carefully your own circumstances to gauge whether or not a real, or perceived, conflict might exist.