

Code of Practice
For Community Relations Council Board Members
May 2025

1. Introduction

This Code of Practice applies to all Community Relations Council Board Members. It is everyone's responsibility to ensure they are familiar with, and comply with, all the relevant provisions of this Code.

2. Key Principles of Public Life

- 2.1 The key principles upon which the Code of Practice are based on the Seven Principles of Public Life¹. These are:

Selflessness

You should take decisions solely in terms of the public interest.

Integrity

You must avoid placing yourself under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence you in their work. You should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for yourselves, your family, or your friends. You must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.

Objectivity

You must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.

Accountability

You are accountable to the public for your decisions and actions and must submit yourself to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

Openness

You should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.

¹ *Partnerships between Departments and Arm's Length Bodies: NI Code of Good Practice. Version 2 2022*

Honesty

You should be truthful.

Leadership

You should exhibit these principles in your own behaviour. You should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

- 2.2 These principles should inform the actions and decisions of all Board members.

3. General Conduct

Use of Public Funds

- 3.1 Board members have a duty to ensure the safeguarding of public funds² and the proper custody of assets which have been publicly funded.
- 3.2 Board members must carry out their fiduciary obligations responsibly – that is, take appropriate measures to ensure that Community Relations Council uses resources efficiently, economically and effectively, avoiding waste and extravagance. It will always be an improper use of public funds for public bodies to employ consultants or other companies to lobby Parliament, Government or political parties.

Allowances

- 3.3 Board members must comply with the rules set by Community Relations Council regarding remuneration, allowances and expenses. It is their responsibility to ensure compliance with the relevant HM Revenue and Customs' requirements concerning payments, including expenses.

Gifts and Hospitality

- 3.4 Board members must comply with the rules set out by Community Relations Council on the acceptance of gifts and hospitality (Annex 1).

Use of Community Relations Council Powers and Resources

- 3.5 Board members must not misuse Community Relation Councils powers or resources³ whether for personal gain, for political purposes or otherwise. Use of any Community

² This should be taken to include all forms of receipts from fees, charges and other sources

³ This includes facilities, equipment, stationery, telephony, IT and other services

Relation Councils powers or resources must be in line with Community Relation Council's rules on their usage.

Use and Disclosure of Information

- 3.6 Board members must not misuse information gained in the course of their work at the Community Relations Council for personal gain or for political purposes.
- 3.7 Board members must not disclose without authority any information which is confidential in nature or which is provided to them in confidence. This duty also continues to apply after Board members have left Community Relations Council. For these purposes, all information which is provided to Board members in the performance of their duties should be presumed to have been provided to them in confidence.

Political Activity of Board Members

- 3.8 On matters directly related to the work of Community Relations Council, Board members should not make party political statements or engage in any other political activity associated with the work of the Council.
- 3.9 Subject to the above, Board members may engage in political activity but should, at all times, remain conscious of their responsibilities as Board members and exercise proper discretion. Board members should inform the Chair or the CEO before undertaking any significant political activity.

Other Appointments

- 3.10 If a Board member wishes to take up new appointments during their term in office, they must inform the Chair.

4 Conflict of Interest

- 4.1 Board members must ensure that no conflict arises, or could reasonably be perceived to arise, between their public duties and their private interests, financial or otherwise.
- 4.2 Board members must comply with the rules of Community Relations Council on handling conflicts of interest. These require members to declare publicly any private interests which may, or may not be perceived to, conflict with their public duties. The rules also require Board members to remove themselves from discussion or determination of matters in which they have a financial interest. In matters in which Board members have a non-financial interest, they should not participate in the discussion or determination of a matter where the interest might suggest a danger of bias.
- 4.3 Board members must ensure that they are familiar with Community Relation Council's rules on handling conflicts of interests and that they comply with these rules.

- 4.4 Board members must ensure that their entry into Community Relations Council register of Board members' interests is accurate and up-to-date.

5. Responsibilities as a Board Member

- 5.1 Board members should work to the highest personal and professional standards and play a full and active role in the work of the Council. They should at all times act in good faith, responsibility and in the best interests of the Council.
- 5.2 Board members should deal with the public and their affairs fairly, efficiently, promptly, effectively and sensitively, to the best of their ability. They must not act in a way that unjustifiably favours or discriminates against particular individuals or interests.
- 5.3 Board members must comply with any statutory and administrative requirements relating to their posts.
- 5.4 Board members must not use, or attempt to use, their role at Community Relations Council to promote their personal interests to those of any connected person, firm, business or other organisation.
- 5.5 Board members should respect the principle of collective decision-making and corporate responsibility. This means that, once the Board has made a decision they should not seek to distance themselves from it in any of their dealings with others inside or outside Community Relations Council.
- 5.6 Communications between Community Relations Council and officials or Ministers at The Executive Office will normally be through the Chair or the Chief Executive. Before a Board member makes an individual approach to such an official or Minister, he or she should normally seek the agreement of the Chair.

6. Responsibilities Towards Colleagues

- 6.1 Board members will treat colleagues with courtesy and respect.
- 6.2 A Board member should not ask or encourage a colleague to act in a way which would conflict with the Code of Conduct.

7. Personal Liability of Board Members

- 7.1 As set out in Managing Public Money NI the Government has indicated that an individual Board member who acts honestly and in good faith will not have to meet out of his or her personal resources any personal civil liability which is incurred in the execution or the purported execution of his or her Board functions, save where the Board member has acted recklessly.
- 7.2 Legal proceedings initiated by a third party may be brought against Community Relations Council. In exceptional cases, proceedings (civil or, in certain circumstances, criminal) may be brought against the Chair or other individual Board members. For

example, a Board member may be personally liable if he or she makes a fraudulent or negligent statement which results in loss to a third party.

8. Concerns About Improper Conduct

8.1 If a Board member believes he / she is being required to act in a way which:

- is illegal, improper or unethical;
- is in breach of a professional code;
- may involve possible maladministration, fraud or misuse of public funds;
- is otherwise inconsistent with this Code;

he / she should either raise this matter, in the first instance, with the Chair.

ANNEX 1

Guidelines

Gifts, hospitality or other material benefits

We realise that the giving and receiving of gifts and hospitality as a reflection of friendship or appreciation where nothing is expected in return may occur, or even be commonplace, in our industry. This does not constitute bribery where it is proportionate and recorded properly.

No gift should be given nor hospitality offered by a Member or anyone working on our behalf to any party in connection with our business without receiving prior written approval from the Director of Finance, Admin & Personnel and the CEO.

Similarly, no gift nor offer of hospitality should be accepted by an employee or anyone working on our behalf without receiving prior written approval from the Director of Finance, Admin & Personnel and the CEO.

A record will be made of every instance in which gifts or hospitality are given or received.

As the law is constantly changing, this policy is subject to review and the Company reserves the right to amend this policy without prior notice.

ANNEX 2

Conflicts of Interest

In order to achieve the maximum degree of openness and impartiality, the Council maintains a register of interests of Council members and staff. The register is available for inspection at the Council's offices during normal office hours.

Members and staff are required to register their interests **on appointment, as and when any new interests arise, and thereafter, at the beginning of each new calendar year.** Where members and staff have no interests to declare, this should also be indicated. Throughout the year, new interests, gifts and hospitality should be submitted in writing to the Administrator. This additional information will be appended on your original declaration.

Where an interest which has been declared ceases for any reason, the declaration shall remain in force for a period of one year in order to preserve the spirit of openness and impartiality. The Council should be informed in writing when a previously declared interest ceases.

If you are completing a Declaration of Interests form for the first time, please declare memberships, employment, etc., of organisations receiving financial assistance from the Community Relations Council, taking account of six months preceding your appointment as a Council member of the Community Relations Council.

It is important that members and staff record any gifts, hospitality or other material benefits, in accordance with the guidelines included with this form.

A Declaration of Interest Form is available from the Human Resources Manager