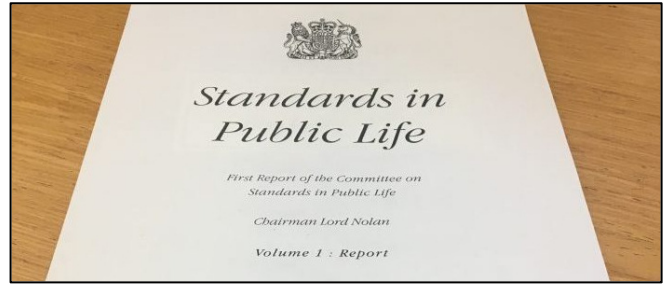


THE NOLAN PRINCIPLES

All parish and town councils must, by law, “*promote and maintain high standards of conduct by members and co-opted members*” of the council and are required to adopt a Code of Conduct that is consistent with the Seven Principles of Public Life: the so-called Nolan Principles.



So, what are the Nolan Principles and what do they mean? The principles were drawn up by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) under the chairmanship of Lord Nolan in 1995. Each principle has a definition set out, and these are kept under review by the CSPL to ensure they remain fit for purpose. They are updated from time to time.

The principles apply to all parish and town councillors in England, as they do to every unitary councillor and to every MP.

The seven principles and their associated definitions are:

Selflessness

Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.

Integrity

Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.

Objectivity

Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.

Accountability

Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

Openness

Holders of public office 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.

Honesty

Holders of public office should be truthful.

Leadership

Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour and treat others with respect. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

Any incidence of bad behaviour is clearly in breach of one or more of the Nolan Principles. For example, one councillor shouting at another councillor in a council meeting is failing to exhibit Leadership because shouting at someone is not treating them with respect. A councillor voting against providing a grant to a local charity because they don't like the person who runs it is failing to exhibit Objectivity. And so on. A council's Code of Conduct provides detailed rules for its councillors to follow, but if the councillors are cognisant of and compliant with the Nolan Principles then 99 times out of 100, they will be on the right side of the rules. It is a principles-based, not rules-based system.

The current CSPL chair, Lord Evans, has called for the government to strengthen the sanctions available under the Code of Conduct. In particular the CSPL has recommended the reintroduction of the power to suspend or disqualify a councillor for a serious breach of the Code. Without that ultimate deterrent the system lacks teeth. Lord Evans said recently "*The principles haven't changed but the polarised and unstable nature of British politics in recent years has placed them under great pressure,*" he said, adding "*The damage done to the trust and confidence that the public have in those in political and public life has been significant.*"

Parish and town councils should bring the Nolan Principles into the spotlight. Have a banner made up including the council's logo or crest and the seven Nolan Principles and pop it up at council meetings. Put the Nolan Principles in the header of your council's agenda. Make them highly visible on your council's website. Doing these things helps keep the Nolan Principles in councillors' minds and may, just may, make them think before they act.