

(Comment about the Consultation)

Standards Regime Consultation: Bingley Town Council Comment

Bingley Town Council fully supports *The Committee on Standards in Public Life's* decision to hold a consultation into the improvement of **“codes of conduct for local councillors; Investigating alleged breaches fairly and with due process; Enforcing codes and imposing sanctions for misconduct; Declaring interests and managing conflicts of interest; and Whistleblowing.”**

The consultation is an opportunity to evaluate current standards and practice within local authorities and to ascertain where improvements can be made. It is also an opportunity to address the shortfalls in local authorities. Bingley Town Council is fully supports any positive steps and action that seeks to achieve higher standards within local authorities.

(Comment on the Consultation Questions)

Standards Regime Consultation: Bingley Town Council Comment

Bingley Town Council is a relatively new local authority and consequently our responses to questions may be limited, certain questions have also been omitted for the same reason.

Codes of conduct

- a. Are local authority adopted codes of conduct for councillors clear and easily understood? Do the codes cover an appropriate range of behaviours? What examples of good practice, including induction processes, exist?

Bingley Town Council's code of conduct for councillors is clear and is easily understood. Our code covers behaviour ranging from intimidation to bullying. Although councillors are aware of the code of conduct, in terms of good practice, mandatory inductions and annual meetings separate from the Full Council meeting would be a good introduction to our local authority to improve understanding.

- b. A local authority has a statutory duty to ensure that its adopted code of conduct for councillors is consistent with the Seven Principles of Public Life and that it includes appropriate provision (as decided by the local authority) for registering and declaring councillors' interests. Are these requirements appropriate as they stand? If not, please say why.

Yes.

Sanctions

- c. Are existing sanctions for councillor misconduct sufficient?

No. The response to misconduct is often too slow and unless the misconduct is of a criminal nature, the sanctions do not go far enough to deter councillors from committing an act of misconduct. In so far as we understand, unless a councillor is voted out of office there are limits to the type of sanctions that can be imposed.

- i. What sanctions do local authorities use when councillors are found to have breached the code of conduct? Are these sanctions sufficient to deter breaches and, where relevant, to enforce compliance?

Bingley Town Council could enforce sanctions on a councillor who has breached the code of conduct by removing them from a specific committee, or Town Council representative appointment with a community organisation (e.g. Town Council representative on the local Chamber of Trade). It is our view that sanctions such as these, are insufficient to deter breaches or enforce compliance with the code.

- ii. Should local authorities be given the ability to use additional sanctions? If so, what should these be?

Yes, however we would encourage the standards regime to explore additional types of sanctions that would be legally permissible and appropriate to implement, which local authorities may adopt. The only added comment on this is that additional sanctions should aim to be more substantial in their outcomes.

Declaring interests and conflicts of interest

- d. Are existing arrangements to declare councillors' interests and manage conflicts of interest satisfactory? If not please say why.

Yes.

- i. A local councillor is under a legal duty to register any pecuniary interests (or those of their spouse or partner), and cannot participate in discussion or votes that engage a disclosable pecuniary interest, nor take any further steps in relation to that matter, although local authorities can grant dispensations under certain circumstances. Are these statutory duties appropriate as they stand?

Yes.

- ii. What arrangements do local authorities have in place to declare councillors' interests, and manage conflicts of interest that go beyond the statutory requirements? Are these satisfactory? If not, please say why.

Bingley Town Council's Standing Orders provides clear guidance on the obligations of councillors and provides guidance with regards to conflicts of interest. We view these as satisfactory.

Intimidation of local councillors

- e. What is the nature, scale, and extent of intimidation towards local councillors?

There has been a relatively high degree of intimidation and bullying towards councillors on social media and via email. The intimidation is of unsettlingly, offensive and disruptive nature. It should be noted that this level of intimidation has been especially directed towards female councillors.

- i. What measures could be put in place to prevent and address this intimidation?

This is a difficult question and suggestive measures should be explored by the Standards Regime to provide advice and guidance on effective measures.