



GATESHEAD CODE OF CONDUCT FOR COUNCILLORS

Sheena Ramsey, Chief Executive

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report recommends to Council a new Code of Conduct to comply with the standards provisions in the Localism Act 2011 (the Act) and to reflect recommendations made by the Committee on Standards in Public Life.

NEW CODE OF CONDUCT

2. The Localism Act 2011 requires local authorities to have a local Member Code of Conduct. On 30 January 2019, the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) published its report, Local Government Ethical Standards: A review by the Committee on Standards on Public Life. The report made a number of recommendations to improve ethical standards in local government, including the introduction of an updated model code of conduct that should be voluntary and one local authorities can adapt.
3. The Local Government Association (LGA) led on the development of a model code recommended by CSPL and on 23 December 2020, LGA published a Model Member Code of Conduct, following its June 2020 consultation on a draft version of the code. The Council's Audit and Standards Committee inputted into the LGA consultation. The LGA has stated that its Model Code of Conduct can act as a template for councils to adopt or adapt.
4. The Code of Conduct sets out the conduct that is expected of local authority members and specific obligations that establish instances where action will be taken. It has been designed to protect local authorities' democratic role, encourage good conduct and safeguard the public's trust in local government.
5. The Council must maintain a committee to advise on standards issues, decide on alleged breaches and sanctions or a combination of these. In Gateshead this is the responsibility of the Audit and Standards Committee. Part of the committee's role is to advise and make recommendations to Council on the Code of Conduct.
6. The Audit and Standards Committee have over a number of meetings and in members working group reviewed the LGA model code and have produced an adapted version of the model code with the Gateshead specific amendments including a preamble and introductory paragraphs. These additions are very much there to set the scene and articulate that councillors in Gateshead aspire to meet the highest possible standards of ethical behaviour and conduct. The preamble now includes a statement that members not only comply with the letter of the code but also the spirit of the code.

7. It is obviously important that councillors understand the implications of the new code and the other standards arrangements. A training package for the code is being developed which will provide members with not only an overview of the rules but also practical examples of how the code should work in practice.

RECOMMENDATION

8. Council is asked to approve the following;
 - (i) the new code of conduct at Appendix 1.