

Dear Candidate

MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT & SOCIAL MEDIA CODE OF PRINCIPLES

I am writing to you on behalf of the Council's Standards and Ethics Committee, which has statutory responsibility for promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct within the Council. The purpose of this letter is to make you aware of the standards of conduct required of all those who are successfully elected to the office of Councillor.

High standards of conduct are essential to maintain public trust and confidence in local democracy. The standards required of Councillors, based on the principles of public life first set out by Lord Nolan in 1995, are found in the statutory Members' Code of Conduct - [Members Code of Conduct.pdf \(moderngov.co.uk\)](https://www.moderngov.co.uk/members-code-of-conduct)

Among other things, the Code requires members to show respect and consideration for others, not to discriminate against, bully or harass people or disclose confidential information, to declare conflicts of interest and relevant gifts or hospitality, not to misuse Council resources and not to conduct yourself in a manner which could reasonably be regarded as bringing the Council into disrepute.

Whilst caselaw makes clear that robust political debate and freedom of expression must not be censored, the Standards and Ethics Committee wishes to reiterate the importance of maintaining high standards, and the consideration which should be given to power imbalances which exist in society.

Any complaint that a Member has failed to comply with the Members' Code of Conduct may be investigated by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales, and if a Member is found to have breached the Code, a number of sanctions may be imposed, including suspension and, for the most serious breaches, disqualification from the office of Councillor.

Social media has become a common feature in many misconduct complaints, as it is now routinely used by many Councillors to engage with their communities, and presents particular opportunities and challenges. The Council has, therefore, developed a Members' Social Media Code, which aims to help Members to comply with their duties under the Members' Code of Conduct - [Annex 1 - Members Social Media Code of Principles.pdf \(moderngov.co.uk\)](https://www.moderngov.co.uk/annex-1-members-social-media-code-of-principles.pdf) This provides that:

- Members should treat everyone with respect and consideration. Whilst legitimate criticism is part of democratic accountability, criticism should be fair, constructive and courteous, and Members should not post comments which may be regarded as malicious, aggressive, disrespectful or bullying.
- Members' comments should treat everyone equally, without discrimination, in particular, against groups with 'protected characteristics' under equality laws (ie. age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation) or Welsh language speakers.
- Members are expected to participate in robust political debate, but should refrain from making, or acting in any way which encourages, unfair or inaccurate public criticisms of the authority or its councillors or officers doing their jobs. Policies may be criticised, without making unnecessary personal comments.
- Members' comments should reflect views which they honestly hold. They should refrain from making misleading comments.

- Information given should be factually correct and not misleading. Members should make all reasonable efforts to verify the factual accuracy of the information they post.
- Members should be accountable for their comments, including 'liking' or sharing comments made by others, and are also responsible for making all reasonable efforts to monitor and edit any third-party comments made via their platforms.
If a Member engages a personal assistant (or any other third party) to manage a social media account and or post social media comments or responses on their behalf, the Member must make them aware of the contents of this Code of Principles, and make all reasonable efforts to ensure they fully understand, and are committed to adhering to it.
- Members should try to make sure they have sufficient information about a subject before commenting on it and make all reasonable efforts to fully read and understand the substance of information before they 'like' or share it.
- Members should openly identify themselves as a Councillor and should not post anonymous comments or use false accounts. For the avoidance of doubt, this does not prevent Members from posting comments on community pages, as long as the Member is openly identifiable.
- Members must take care to avoid disclosing any confidential, exempt or personal information, without clear authorisation or consent from any individuals concerned.

You'll note that both the Members' Code of Conduct and the Members' Social Media Code are incorporated in the Council's Constitution, published online. Training on these important issues will be provided for all successfully elected Councillors following the elections.

The Committee is asking all candidates, whether they are already Councillors or not, to adhere to the provisions of the Members' Code of Conduct and the Members' Social Media Code, in the interests of upholding the principles of public life and ensuring a fair and honest election.

YF

Chairperson
Standards and Ethics Committee
Cardiff Council