



# Office of the Complaints Commission

## The Seven Principles of Public Life

**Selflessness :** Holders of public office should take decisions solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends.

**Integrity :** Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might influence them in the performance of their official duties.

**Objectivity :** In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.

**Accountability :** Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.

**Openness :** Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.

**Honesty :** Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.

**Leadership :** Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.

## Elements of Best Practice

Best practice, subject always to proportionality for smaller organisations, includes:

### Appointments

- a publicly available written appointments process;
- job descriptions and person specification;
- the use of advertisement and/or consultation with interested bodies and other forms of canvassing;
- the encouragement of nominations (including self-nominations);
- the sifting of candidates by a nominations committee;
- defined terms of appointment after which reappointment should not be automatic.

### Openness



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- making the agendas and minutes of governing body meetings widely available, together with board papers where this will not inhibit frankness and clarity;
- publicising forthcoming meetings and summarising decisions in a newsletter or through some other user-friendly method;
- holding an open annual meeting at which board members can be questioned by the public and press;
- setting up more specialised consultation bodies for important interest groups;
- publishing an annual report which includes information on the role and remit of the body, its plans or strategy; the membership of the board; and where further information can be obtained;
- publishing audit reports;
- making publications available as widely as possible, for example by sending them to interested parties and putting them in local public libraries.

### Codes of conduct

- a statement of the aims and values of the body;
- statements of the obligations of the body towards its customers, staff, community, and other interested parties;
- information about the body's approach to openness and arrangements for acquiring information about its activities;
- procedures for handling inquiries and complaints;
- procedures for raising complaints with an independent body.

### Whistleblowing

- a clear statement that malpractice is taken seriously in the organisation and an indication of the sorts of matters regarded as malpractice;
- respect for the confidentiality of staff raising concerns if they wish, and the opportunity to raise concerns outside the line management structure;
- penalties for making false and malicious allegations;
- an indication of the proper way in which concerns may be raised outside the organisation if necessary.

*Lord Nolan, Committee on Standards in Public Life, 1996*