

## SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC LIFE: CHANGES TO DEFINITIONS

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. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

### What's changed?

#### The changes are as follows:

1. The definition of **selflessness** has been considerably shortened. The second part of the original definition – about not taking decisions solely for the benefit of yourself, friends or family – has now been included under 'integrity'. This, as the first principle, now means that the opening statement is short and to the point and reinforces the notion of people in public life acting solely in the public interest.
2. By contrast **integrity** has now been expanded to include the wording relating to personal benefit. It also now has a specific statement about the need to declare and resolve any relationships. This underpins the importance of the need to declare interests and, where necessary, remove oneself from the decision-making process to protect the public good.
3. The definition of **objectivity** has been expanded to define what is meant by taking a decision 'on merit' – that is it should be evidence-based, avoid discrimination and be unbiased.
4. The definition of **accountability** remains largely unchanged, though there has been a slight adjustment to the wording.
5. The definition of **openness** has been strengthened, with a much greater emphasis on information being withheld only where there are clear legal reasons to do so. Previously, it had merely stated that one should be as open as possible and restrict information only when the wider public interest demands it. Since the original definition was drawn up, the 'transparency landscape' has clearly changed with the advent of the Freedom of Information and Data Protection Acts which now set out a much clearer legal framework within which to operate.
6. The definition of **honesty** has undergone the most radical change. This had previously been defined in terms of declarations of interest, and therefore overlapped with 'selflessness' and 'integrity'. However, its definition now relates to truthfulness – in line with public understanding of what they felt was meant by the principle of 'honesty'.
7. The definition of **leadership** has been widened. It is now no longer simply about leading by example but places greater emphasis not only on active promotion of standards but also on actively challenging poor behaviour.

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In its recent report *Standards matter: a review of best practice in promoting good behaviour in public life*, the Committee on Standards in Public Life has re-defined some of the definitions of the seven principles of public life. This follows research with the public into whether the principles, first articulated in 1996, were still valid and, if so, whether the 1996 definitions reflected public understanding of what was meant by each principle.

Under the Localism Act 2011, your Code of Conduct must be based on the seven principles. In some cases, authorities have included the definition of the principles as part of their preamble to the Code, so may wish to update their Codes to reflect these revised definitions in due course, though it should not have any direct impact on the types of behaviour which are caught under a local Code.

The revised principles are as follows:

<b>Principle</b>	<b>Revised description</b>
Preamble	The principles of public life apply to anyone who works as a public office-holder. This includes all those who are elected or appointed to public office, nationally and locally, and all people appointed to work in the civil service, local government, the police, courts and probation services, NDPBs, and in the health, education, social and care services. All public office-holders are both servants of the public and stewards of public resources. The principles also have application to all those in other sectors delivering public services.
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.