

Code of Conduct and Conflict of Interest Policy Guidelines for Members of the Avon Pension Fund Local Pension Board

Status of this document

The Terms of Reference for the Board set out:

- the Board's code of conduct requirement; and
- the Administering Authority's conflict of interest policy for the Board (the Conflict Policy):

Duties of the Board

7. The Board should at all times act in a reasonable manner in the conduct of its purpose. In support of this duty Board members should be subject to and abide by the code of conduct for Board members.

Conflicts of interest

54. All members of the Board must declare to the Administering Authority on appointment and at any such time as their circumstances change, any potential conflict of interest arising as a result of their position on the Board.

55. A conflict of interest is defined as a financial or other interest which is likely to prejudice a person's exercise of functions as a member of the Board. It does not include a financial or other interest arising merely by virtue of that person being a member of the Scheme.

56. On each appointment to the Board and following any subsequent declaration of potential conflict, the Administering Authority shall ensure that any potential conflict is effectively managed in line with the internal procedures of the Administering Authority, the requirements of the [2013] Act, the requirements of the Code and the requirements of Relevant Legislation on conflict of interest for Board members.

This policy should be reviewed annually.

Objectives of this document

1. To set out the principles and internal procedures that the Administering Authority and all Board Members are expected to follow in order to comply with the Terms of Reference, relevant legislation, codes of practice, government guidance and public law principles.
2. To ensure that all Board members are aware of their duty to act independently and carry out their roles to a high ethical standard.
3. To set out procedures for identifying, monitoring and managing potential conflicts to ensure they do not become actual or perceived conflicts of interest.
4. To ensure that a Register of Member Interests is kept, reviewed and published.
5. To remove any perception that the actions of a Board member have been influenced by a conflict of interest.
6. To ensure that public confidence in the governance of the Fund is maintained.

Definitions used in this document

“2011 Act”	The Localism Act 2011 (as amended from time to time)
“2013 Act”	The Public Service Pensions Act 2013 (as amended from time to time)
“Administering Authority”	The administering authority for the Fund, Bath & North East Somerset Council. The Administering Authority is the scheme manager for the purposes of the 2013 Act.
“Board”	The Avon Pension Fund Local Pension Board
“Code”	The Pensions Regulator’s Code of Practice no. 14: Governance and administration of public service pension schemes (as amended from time to time)
“Committee”	The Avon Pension Fund Committee
“Conflict Policy”	The conflict of interest policy of the Board set out in the Terms of Reference (as amended from time to time)
“Councillor”	An elected or co-opted member of a local authority
“Declaration of Interest Form”	The form used to declare Relevant Interests as amended from time to time, currently as attached to this document at Appendix 1
“Fund”	The Avon Pension Fund within the LGPS, managed and administered by the Administering Authority
“Relevant Interest”	Any company directorship, trusteeship, other post (whether remunerated or not), financial interest or personal interest belonging to a Board member or a Board member’s spouse, civil partner or cohabitee, where such interest is likely to be affected by, or relevant to, the work of the Board.
“Register of Member Interests”	The register of member interests kept by Democratic Services to record Relevant Interests. Democratic Services is the Board Secretary for the purposes of the Terms of Reference
“Regulations”	The Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations 2013 (as amended from time to time)
“Scheme Advisory Board”	The Local Government Pension Scheme Advisory Board set up under section 7 of the 2013 Act
“Shadow SAB Guidance”	Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS): Guidance on the creation and operation of Local Pension Boards in England and Wales

1. Code of Conduct for Board members

Government guidance on conduct of local pension board members

The Scheme Advisory Board provides advice to administering authorities and local pension boards in relation to the effective and efficient administration and management of the LGPS and their pension funds. The Scheme Advisory Board's predecessor was the Shadow Scheme Advisory Board. The Shadow Scheme Advisory Board published the Shadow SAB Guidance. If the Scheme Advisory Board adopts the Shadow SAB Guidance, the Administering Authority and the Board must have regard to it under section 7(3) of the 2013 Act. In any event, the Administering Authority and the Board should have regard to the Shadow SAB Guidance to assist with the effective and efficient administration and management of the Fund. Section 7 of the Shadow SAB Guidance deals with conduct of local pension board members.

Code of Conduct

Board members must have regard to the "Seven Principles of Public Life" (also known as the Nolan Principles). As members of a publicly-funded body involved in the discharge of public business, all Board members must comply with these principles in the exercise of their functions. The principles require the highest standards of conduct.

The Seven Principles of Public Life are:

Selflessness - Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other 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 seek to 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 it.

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.

Information provided to a Board member in the course of his or her duties is confidential and must only be used for the purposes of the Board. Board members must not disclose any information given to them in confidence without the written consent of a person who is authorised to give it, or unless required by law to do so. Board members must seek the advice of Democratic Services before disclosing any information given in confidence.

Board members should not accept any personal gifts or hospitality from any individual or organisation (including contractors and/or outside suppliers) which has or may have a specific interest in the work of the Board.

Regulation 107 of the 2013 Regulations allows Councillors to sit on a local pension board in certain circumstances. Councillors are subject to the separate code of conduct adopted by their local authority in accordance with the 2011 Act. This separate statutory requirement will continue to apply to any Board members who are Councillors in addition to the code of conduct above.

2. Conflict of Interest Policy

What is a Conflict of Interest?

The 2013 Act makes it a legal requirement that members of local pension boards do not have a conflict of interest. Section 5(5) of the 2013 Act defines a conflict of interest as;

A financial or other interest which is likely to prejudice the person's exercise of functions as a member of the board (but does not include a financial or other interest arising merely by virtue of membership of the scheme or any connected scheme)

A conflict of interest may arise when a member of a local pension board:

- must fulfil their legal duty to assist the Administering Authority; and
- at the same time has:
 - a separate personal interest (financial or otherwise); or
 - another responsibility in relation to that matter,

giving rise to a possible conflict with their first responsibility as a local pension board member.

A possible conflict could also arise due to a member's partner, family member or close associate having a specific responsibility or interest in a matter.

The key issue for a Board member is to consider whether they are subject to a conflict of interest which prevents them from acting entirely independently in their capacity as Board member. It is recognised that from time to time a person may have interests or responsibilities which are not aligned with their responsibilities as a Board member, but these do not prevent the person from fulfilling their responsibilities as a Board member. This situation may occur when the separate interest is sufficiently immaterial and so does not conflict with the member's first obligation to the Board.

Relevant Legislation

The Regulations effect the requirements of section 5 of the 2013 Act in relation to the LGPS.

Regulation 108 of the Regulations states:

108 Local pension boards: conflict of interest

(1) Each administering authority must be satisfied that any person to be appointed as a member of a local pension board does not have a conflict of interest.

(2) An administering authority must be satisfied from time to time that none of the members of a local pension board has a conflict of interest.

(3) A person who is to be appointed as a member of a local pension board by an administering authority must provide that authority with such information as the authority reasonably requires for the purposes of paragraph (1).

(4) A person who is a member of a local pension board must provide the administering authority which made the appointment with such information as that authority reasonably requires for the purposes of paragraph (2).

Regulations 108(1) and (3) prohibit conflicts and require information from each Board member at the time of their appointment, and regulations 108 (2) and (4) deal with the same requirements during office.

Regulation 107 allows for Councillors to sit on a local pension board in certain circumstances. The 2011 Act imposes a legal obligation on Councillors to disclose certain pecuniary interests in a register maintained by their local authority's monitoring officer. This separate statutory requirement will continue to apply to any Board members who are Councillors in addition to the relevant legislation, codes of practice and government guidance referred to in the Conflict Policy and these guidelines. Nothing in the Conflict Policy or these guidelines in any way supersedes or replaces the separate statutory requirements for Councillors.

The Pensions Regulator's Code: Conflicts of Interest

The Pensions Regulator has responsibility for regulatory oversight of the governance and administration of public service pension schemes, including the LGPS. The Pensions Regulator has published guidance in the Code. Paragraphs 61 to 89 of the Code deal with conflicts of interest.

Other Guidance on Conflicts of Interest

The Administering Authority and the Board should have regard to the Shadow SAB Guidance to assist with the effective and efficient administration and management of the Fund. Section 7 of the Shadow SAB Guidance deals with conflicts of interest.

Policy Guidelines

1. Identifying and monitoring Conflicts of Interest

The Board must:

- identify, monitor and manage dual interests and responsibilities which are or have the potential to become actual or perceived conflicts of interest. In determining how to manage conflicts of interest the Board must comply with the 2013 Act, the Regulations, the Code and other relevant guidance from the Pensions Regulator, the Conflict Policy and these guidelines;
- ensure that conflicts of interest are considered at every Board meeting;
- ensure that a report is sent to the Administering Authority after each Board meeting and at other times upon the Administering Authority's reasonable request detailing declared interests and mitigation action taken;
- ensure that Democratic Services (the Board Secretary) is notified at the earliest opportunity of any declared interests;
- seek further advice from Democratic Services wherever the Board has any doubt about the duties set out in these guidelines;

- consider obtaining legal advice when assessing any option to prevent a potential conflict of interest becoming detrimental to the conduct or decisions of the Board.

All Board members must:

- be familiar with the Conflict Policy, these guidelines, relevant legislation, the Code and the Shadow SAB Guidance;
- be conscious of the need to be open about potential, perceived and actual conflicts;
- before appointment to the Board, disclose to Bath & North East Somerset Council all Relevant Interests using the
Declaration of Interest Form;
- during office, disclose to the Board all Relevant Interests as soon as they arise by submitting the Declaration of Interest Form to Democratic Services;
- during any meeting of the Board, disclose any Relevant Interest to the Board prior to the commencement of the Board's discussion of that matter. This requirement applies regardless of whether the interest is already recorded in the Register of Board Members' Interests. In cases of exceptional sensitivity, a Board member may make a notification of a Relevant Interest to the Chair of the Board rather than to the full Board;
- provide any information reasonably requested by the Administering Authority in connection with the Authority's duty to ensure that conflicts of interest do not exist.

Democratic Services (the Board Secretary) will:

- record declared interests in the Register of Member Interests;
- ensure that the Register of Member Interests (as updated from time to time) is published on the Board's webpage on the Administering Authority's website;
- ensure that the Register of Member Interests (as updated from time to time) is circulated to all Board members for review prior to each Board meeting;
- ensure that all Board meetings open with a standing item titled Declarations of Interest. This will allow Board members to notify existing and new Relevant Interests, so that potential conflicts can be considered for each agenda item and managed as set out below;
- minute any disclosure by a Board member made during a Board meeting together with all decisions of the Board relating to that disclosure;
- ensure that all Board meetings include a standing item titled Forward Work Plan, to consider decisions to be taken and work to be carried out by the Board over the next year. This will allow mitigations to be put in place so that potential conflicts can be managed as set out below.

The Administering Authority must:

- be satisfied that no potential Board member has a conflict of interest at appointment;
- be satisfied that no Board member has a conflict of interest during office;
- use an appointment process which considers all applications from potential Board members prior to approval in order to ensure that no conflict exists. The potential for a conflict to arise at some point in future will not in itself be reason to exclude an individual from membership of the Board, unless the Administering Authority considers that the likelihood of a conflict arising is so high or

the conflict itself is likely to arise persistently and frequently enough that it is likely to compromise an individual's ability to participate meaningfully on the Board;

- keep this document under regular review.

2. Managing Conflicts of Interest

In the event that the Board is of the view that a potential conflict of interest may become an actual or perceived conflict in respect of one or more of its members, the Board must determine the appropriate mechanism for managing that conflict. The approach taken will depend on the nature and extent of the potential conflict. Some possible methods for the management of potential conflicts are given below:

- Requiring that the Board member for whom the conflict exists takes no part in discussions or votes in respect of the matter for which they are conflicted, or leave the meeting;
- If practical, the Board member may relinquish or divest themselves of a personal interest which is the source of a conflict of interest with their Board responsibilities;
- If the conflict is likely to persist and continue in such a way that it is likely limit a Board member's meaningful participation in the Board, that member should consider resigning from their position.

The Administering Authority may remove any Board member where it considers there is an actual or potential conflict of interest which is impractical to manage.

3. Perceived Conflicts of Interest

Board members should be aware that even if no actual conflict of interest exists, it is important to guard against the perception among, for example, Scheme members, the Pensions Regulator, elected members or the general public that a real conflict of interest exists.

If there is the possibility that a perceived conflict of interest may exist, it should be managed by the Board in the same way as a real conflict of interest.

4. Confidential Information

A Board member may, by virtue of their employment by an employing authority within the Fund, have access to confidential information about their employer.

A Board member is not obliged to reveal this information as part of their role on the Board.

However, if an affected Board member considers that the information to which they are party may:

- a) adversely affect the Fund or an employer within the Fund;
- b) reasonably cause the Board to interpret a decision by the Pension Committee differently or act in a different way were the information to be known at the time; and
- c) the information will not be made available to the Board through some other means within such time as the Board is able fully to act upon it,

that Board member shall withdraw from all discussion in relation to that issue and notify the Board that a conflict of interest exists. The details of the conflict need not be disclosed.

This scenario may occur where a Board member is aware of legally confidential negotiations around, for example, the takeover of a Fund employer which may radically alter that business and have a corresponding effect on its participation in the Fund or the size of its liabilities.

5. Adviser and Officer Conflicts

The Board will be supported and advised by officers of the Fund in its day to day business. Similarly the Board may, if appropriate, seek independent or professional advice, for example legal advice or governance advice.

The Board must be confident that the advice it receives from officers and advisers is independent and truly in the best interests of the Fund. For this reason officers and advisers giving advice to the Board must also declare any situation where a potential, perceived or actual conflict exists, in order that it can be appropriately managed.

6. Examples of conflicts of interest

The following are intended to be examples of potential conflicts for illustrative purposes. The list is not exhaustive and is not intended to provide all the scenarios in which a conflict of interest may arise.

Example 1

There may be situations where a member of a local pension board who is also an officer for the relevant administering authority or some other employer in the LGPS pension fund faces conflicting priorities by virtue of their two roles. For example, as a local pension board member they may make or scrutinise a decision which requires the use of greater employer resource in order to improve the administration and efficiency of the relevant fund. However, at the same time they may be facing departmental pressure to cut budgets and spend less on pension administration matters.

Example 2

A local pension board is reviewing a decision by an administering authority to levy an additional charge under the Regulations to a group of employers whose poor performance in carrying out their statutory functions in respect of the LGPS has caused the administering authority additional costs. Any employer representative on the local pension board who is employed by an employer who falls into this category would need to declare their interest and the resulting conflict of interest would need to be managed.

Example 3

It is possible that a scheme member representative is also employed by a firm to whom an LGPS pension fund's administration has been outsourced. Such a member is likely to face a conflict of interest when the performance of that company in respect of their administration performance is discussed.

Example of where a declared interest may not constitute a conflict of interest

A representative on a local pension board holds shares in a company that provides outsourced pension administration services as part of a varied portfolio. The shares are valued at a few hundred pounds and the company's value is many tens of millions. The local pension board is reviewing the decision to outsource the relevant LGPS pension fund's administration staff to that company.

In this case the local pension board may consider that on grounds of materiality, no conflict of interest exists. The local pension board is not responsible for the decision and the impact of the outsourcing will have no effect on the company's share price. The local pension board member in question should, however, still declare their interest.

Appendix 1: Declaration of Interest Form

I,

a member of the Avon Pension Fund Local Pension Board (the “Board”) give notice that I, and to the best of my knowledge my spouse, civil partner, person with whom I live as husband or wife, or person with whom I live with as a civil partner have the following Relevant Interests as defined in the Committee’s conflict of interest policy guidelines (Please state none where appropriate)

1. Employment, office, trade, profession or vocation

You should disclose any employment, office (e.g. director or trustee), trade, profession or vocation carried on whether or not for profit or gain, including the name and address of the employer/appointor.

Member

Spouse/Civil Partner/Cohabitee

2. Contracts

You should detail any current contract under which goods or services are to be provided or works are to be executed and where any other party to the contract may be affected by the work of the Board.

Member

Spouse/Civil Partner/Cohabitee

2. Securities

You should detail any beneficial interest in securities which may be a Relevant Interest where either the total nominal value of the securities exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital, or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of any class of shares issued.

Member

Spouse/Civil Partner/Cohabitee

3. Disclosure of Gifts and Hospitality

You should reveal the name of any person from whom you have received a gift or hospitality with an estimated value of at least £50 which you have received in your capacity as a member of the Board.

Date of receipt of Gift/Hospitality	Name of Donor	Reason and Nature of Gift/Hospitality

4. Other Interests which may be Relevant Interests under the Committee's Conflict of Interest Policy Guidelines

Member

Spouse/Civil Partner/Cohabitee

5. Changes to Registered Interests

I understand that I must notify the Board Secretary at the earliest opportunity of any changes or additions to my Relevant Interests.

Signed:

Board Member

Date: