

## **DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

### **COUNCIL**

**4<sup>th</sup> June 2014**

#### **Report of the Director of Legal Services**

#### **Code of Conduct for Members – Declarations of Interests**

##### **1. Purpose of the Report**

To enable the Council to consider an amendment to the Code of Conduct for Members.

##### **2. Information and Analysis**

The Standards Committee has now had the opportunity to consider the Motion relating to the registration of interests by Members which was approved by the Council on 9<sup>th</sup> April 2014; a copy of the report to the Committee, which met on 7<sup>th</sup> May, is attached at Appendix 1. The Standards Committee agreed that the appropriate way in which the Code of Conduct may be amended to reflect the Motion would be to add to paragraph 2(1) (iii) of the Code the relevant wording of the Motion so that it would read as follows (with the additional wording highlighted in italics):-

“(iii) Any trade union of which you are a member *and membership of pressure groups, the Freemasons or other influential bodies of which you are a member.*”

The Council is invited to have regard to the detailed information provided in the report to the Standards Committee, including its appendices, when considering this matter.

##### **3. Legal Considerations**

As is described in Appendix A, the Department for Communities and Local Government's Guide for Councillors, the Localism Act 2011 abolished the Standards Board regime and brought in new standards arrangements. The new standards arrangements that Parliament has

put in place mean, in the words of the guide, that it is largely for councils themselves to decide their own local rules. Within the requirements of the national rules, it is for the Council to determine what is to be entered in its Register of Members' Interests and the amendment to the Code set out in the Motion approved by the Council on the 9<sup>th</sup> April and supported by the Standards Committee is considered to be lawful.

**4. Other Considerations**

In preparing this report the relevance of the following factors have also been considered: prevention of crime and disorder, equality and diversity, human resources, environmental, health, property and transport considerations.

**5. Background Papers**

File held by the Director of Legal Services.

**6. Officer's Recommendation**

That the Council agrees to amend paragraph 2(a) (iii) of the Code of Conduct for Members in the way set out in the report.

**John McElvaney**  
**Director of Legal Services**

## Appendix 1

### DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

#### Standards Committee

7<sup>th</sup> May 2014

#### Report of the Director of Legal Services

#### Code of Conduct for Members – Declarations of Interests

##### 1. **Purpose of the Report**

To invite the Standards Committee to consider a proposal to amend the Council's Code of Conduct for Members to reflect a Motion approved by the Council on the 9<sup>th</sup> April 2014.

##### 2. **Information and Analysis**

At its meeting on the 9<sup>th</sup> April, the full Council considered the following Notice of Motion which had been received from Councillor Andy Botham:-

*“This Council believes that openness and transparency are an integral requirement of all elected members.*

*Members of the public and other elected members should always be fully aware of any interests a councillor holds when making decisions and debating issues.*

*To ensure that the integrity of this Council and its members are beyond accusation when acting on behalf of Derbyshire residents, it is proposed that the Members' register of interests be amended to include the requirement to declare membership of pressure groups, trade unions, the Freemasons or other influential bodies.”*

The Motion was approved by the Council and in keeping with the Constitution the Standards Committee is now invited to consider the proposed amendment to the Code of Conduct. The proposal will be considered further by the Council in the light of any recommendations agreed by the Committee.

For the purposes of considering the amendment to the Code to reflect the Motion, it is necessary to consider the terms of the Code and the proposed amendment in some detail. The Code has three levels of interests:-

- Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPIs) which must be registered, disclosed at meetings when appropriate and members are required to withdraw from meetings if they have a DPI.
- Personal Interests which must be registered and disclosed at meetings when appropriate.
- Other Interests which must be disclosed at meetings when appropriate.

The three levels of interest are set out below in more detail together with their relevance to the proposed amendment.

## **2.1 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPIs)**

These are defined by law and, for example, include paid employment and land ownership. DPIs must be entered on the Register of Interests, they must be disclosed at meetings as necessary and Members must withdraw from any meeting room where their DPI is being discussed unless they have been granted a dispensation. The membership of “pressure groups, trade unions, the Freemasons or other influential bodies” (as referred to in the Motion) are not DPIs and so no amendment to the Code arises in this respect.

## **2.2 Personal Interests**

These currently include any body:-

- exercising functions of a public nature;
- directed to charitable purposes; or
- one of whose principal purposes includes the influence of public opinion or policy (including any political party or trade union),

of which the Member is a governing member or in a position of general control or management.

As Members will recall, on the 11<sup>th</sup> December 2013 the Committee considered new government guidance relating to the membership of trade unions and, following approval by the Council on the 5<sup>th</sup> February

2014, the Code now requires Members to register and, where appropriate, disclose at meetings their membership of a trade union. So far as trade unions are concerned, the requirements to register and disclose interests now, therefore, apply whether or not Members are a governing member or in a position of general control or management of the trade union. In these circumstances, the element of the Motion which refers to trade unions may be treated as having been already dealt with.

The appropriate way in which the Code may be amended to reflect the Motion would be to add to paragraph 2(a)(iii) the relevant wording of the Motion so that it would read as follows (with the additional wording highlighted in italics):-

“(iii) Any trade union of which you are a member *and membership of pressure groups, the Freemasons or other influential bodies of which you are a member*”

This proposed amendment to the Code is returned to below under the heading “Issues for the Committee to Consider”.

### **2.3 Other Interests**

Although being a member of a pressure group, the Freemasons or other influential bodies does not at present, as described above, need to be registered, it may be necessary under the current Code for the interest to be disclosed at a meeting. The Code has a series of general obligations, including openness: “holders of public office should be as open as possible about all decisions and actions they take”. Therefore, if, for example, the County Council was making a decision relating to a land transaction with a body of that nature then a Member who was a member of that body would be expected to verbally disclose their interest at that meeting.

The effect of the Motion is to elevate certain Other Interests, i.e. those specified in the Motion (except for the membership of trade unions which has already been elevated) to the status of Personal Interests which would require them to be registered as well as disclosed.

### **3. Issues for the Committee to consider**

In considering the proposed amendment to the Code, the Committee may be mindful that the proposed new wording will be open to interpretation by individual Members who will have to decide for

themselves whether the bodies of which they are members may properly be regarded as pressure groups or as being influential. So far as the registration of interests is concerned, the position will be less clear cut, it could be said, than under the current terms of the Code. Having said that, as described above, Members are already under an obligation to exercise their discretion in relation to the disclosure (as distinct from registration) of Other Interests. Members will be assisted by the Department for Communities and Local Government's guide for councillors on "Openness and transparency on personal interests" (**see Appendix A**).

So far as the reference in the Motion to Freemasons is concerned, prior to the Council meeting, on the 4<sup>th</sup> April, an e-mail was received from the Communications Adviser of the United Grand Lodge of England, (**see appendix B**). The Committee should have regard to the observations made by the Communications Adviser but it is not considered that any points are made which would suggest that the Council's proposed amendment to Derbyshire's Code should not go ahead. The Italian case related to the rules of a regional public authority which required that nominations to public offices, for which the region was the appointing authority, required candidates to declare whether they were members of a Masonic or, in any event, a secret association. The absence of a declaration constituted a ground for refusing appointment. The County Council's proposals do not treat Freemasons differently from the members of other bodies which will be covered by the amendment to the Code and there is no question of Freemasons being in any way disadvantaged.

#### **4. Legal Considerations**

As is described in Appendix A, the Department for Communities and Local Government's guide for councillors, the Localism Act 2011 abolished the Standards Board regime and brought in new standards arrangements. The new standards arrangements that Parliament has put in place mean, in the words of the guide, that it is largely for councils themselves to decide their own local rules. Within the requirements of the national rules, it is for the Council to determine what is to be entered in its Register of Members' Interests and the amendment to the Code set out in the Motion approved by the Council on the 9<sup>th</sup> April is considered to be lawful.

#### **5. Other Considerations**

In preparing this report the relevance of the following factors have also been considered: prevention of crime and disorder, equality and

diversity, human resources, environmental, health, property and transport considerations.

**6. Background Papers**

File held by the Director of Legal Services.

**7. Officer's Recommendations**

That the Committee considers the proposed amendment to the Council's Code of Conduct for Members.

**John McElvaney  
Director of Legal Services**



Department for  
Communities and  
Local Government

## Openness and transparency on personal interests

A guide for councillors



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## The Guide

This guide on personal interests gives basic practical information about how to be open and transparent about your personal interests. It is designed to help councillors, including parish councillors, now that new standards arrangements have been introduced by the Localism Act 2011<sup>1</sup>.

### Why are there new rules?

Parliament has abolished the Standards Board regime and all the rules under it. It has done this because that centrally-imposed, bureaucratic regime had become a vehicle for petty, malicious and politically-motivated complaints against councillors. Rather than creating a culture of trust and openness between councillors and those they represent, it was damaging, without justification, the public's confidence in local democratic governance.

The new standards arrangements that Parliament has put in place mean that it is largely for councils themselves to decide their own local rules. It is essential that there is confidence that councillors everywhere are putting the public interest first and are not benefiting their own financial affairs from being a councillor. Accordingly, within the new standards arrangements there are national rules about councillors' interests:<sup>2</sup>

Such rules, in one form or another, have existed for decades. The new rules are similar to the rules that were in place prior to the Standards Board regime. Those rules, originating in the Local Government Act 1972 and the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, involved local authority members registering their pecuniary interests in a publicly available register, and disclosing their interests and withdrawing from meetings in certain circumstances. Failure to comply with those rules was in certain circumstances a criminal offence, as is failure to comply in certain circumstances with the new rules.

### Does this affect me?

Yes, if you are an elected, co-opted, or appointed member of:

- a district, unitary, metropolitan, county or London borough council
- a parish or town council
- a fire and rescue authority
- a transport or other joint authority
- a combined authority or an economic prosperity board
- the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority
- the Broads Authority

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<sup>1</sup> The Guide should not be taken as providing any definitive interpretation of the statutory requirements; those wishing to address such issues should seek their own legal advice.

<sup>2</sup> The national rules are in Chapter 7 of the Localism Act 2011 and in the secondary legislation made under the Act, particularly in The Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012 (S.I. 2012/1464).

- a National Park authority
- the Greater London Authority
- the Common Council of the City of London
- the Council of the Isles of Scilly

## How will there be openness and transparency about my personal interests?

The national rules require your council or authority to adopt a code of conduct for its members and to have a register of members' interests.

The national rules require your council's code of conduct to comply with the Seven Principles of Public Life, and to set out how, in conformity with the rules, you will have to disclose and register your pecuniary and your other interests. Within these rules it is for your council to decide what its code of conduct says. An illustrative text for such a code is available on the Department's web site.<sup>3</sup>

Your council's or authority's monitoring officer (or in the case of a parish council the monitoring officer of the district or borough council) must establish and maintain your council's register of members' interests. Within the requirements of the national rules it is for your council or authority to determine what is to be entered in its register of members' interests.

## What personal interests should be entered in my council's or authority's register of members' interests?

Disclosable pecuniary interests, and any other of your personal interests which your council or authority, in particular through its code of conduct, has determined should be registered.

Any other of your personal interests which you have asked the monitoring officer, who is responsible for your council's or authority's register of members' interests, to enter in the register.

As explained in the following section, your registration of personal interests should be guided by your duty to act in conformity with the seven principles of public life. You should ensure that you register all personal interests that conformity with the seven principles requires. These interests will necessarily include your membership of any Trade Union.

## What must I do about registering my personal interests?

Under your council's code of conduct you must act in conformity with the Seven Principles of Public Life. One of these is the principle of integrity – that '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

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/illustrative-text-for-local-code-of-conduct-2>

order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.<sup>4</sup>

Your registration of personal interests should be guided by this duty and you should give the monitoring officer who is responsible for your council's or authority's register of members' interests any information he or she requests in order to keep that register up to date and any other information which you consider should be entered in the register.

All sitting councillors need to register their declarable interests -- both declarable pecuniary interests, and other interests that must be declared and registered as required by your authority's code, or your duty to act in conformity with the Seven Principles of Public Life, such as your membership of any Trade Union. Any suggestion that you should tell the monitoring officer about your pecuniary interests only in the immediate aftermath of your being elected is wholly incompatible with this duty, with which you must comply.

If you have a disclosable pecuniary interest which is not recorded in the register and which relates to any business that is or will be considered at a meeting where you are present, you must disclose<sup>5</sup> this to the meeting and tell the monitoring officer about it, if you have not already done so, so that it can be added to the register. You must tell the monitoring officer within 28 days of disclosing the interest. For this purpose a meeting includes any meeting of your council or authority, of its executive or any committee of the executive, and of any committee, sub-committee, joint committee or joint sub-committee of your authority.

If you have a disclosable pecuniary interest which is not shown in the register and relates to any business on which you are acting alone, you must, within 28 days of becoming aware of this, tell the monitoring officer about it, if you have not already done so, so that it can be added to the register. You must also stop dealing with the matter as soon as you become aware of having a disclosable pecuniary interest relating to the business.

When you are first elected, co-opted, or appointed a member to your council or authority, you must, within 28 days of becoming a member, tell the monitoring officer who is responsible for your council's or authority's register of members' interests about your disclosable pecuniary interests. If you are re-elected, re-co-opted, or reappointed a member, you need to tell the monitoring officer about only those disclosable pecuniary interests that are not already recorded in the register.

## What are pecuniary interests?

A person's pecuniary interests are their business interests (for example their employment, trade, profession, contracts, or any company with which they are associated) and wider

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.public-standards.gov.uk/about-us/what-we-do/the-seven-principles/>

<sup>5</sup> If the interest is a sensitive interest you should disclose merely the fact that you have such a disclosable pecuniary interest, rather than the interest. A sensitive interest is one which the member and the monitoring officer, who is responsible for the register of members' interests, consider that disclosure of its details could lead to the member, or a person connected to the member, being subject to violence or intimidation.

financial interests they might have (for example trust funds, investments, and assets including land and property).

## Do I have any disclosable pecuniary interests?

You have a disclosable pecuniary interest if you, or your spouse or civil partner, have a pecuniary interest listed in the national rules (see annex). Interests of your spouse or civil partner, following the approach of the rules under the 1972 and 1989 Acts, are included to ensure that the public can have confidence that councillors are putting the public interest first and not benefiting the financial affairs of themselves or their spouse or civil partner from which the councillor would stand to gain. For this purpose your spouse or civil partner includes any person with whom you are living as husband or wife, or as if they were your civil partner.

## Does my spouse's or civil partner's name need to appear on the register of interests?

No. For the purposes of the register, an interest of your spouse or civil partner, which is listed in the national rules, is your disclosable pecuniary interest. Whilst the detailed format of the register of members' interests is for your council to decide, there is no requirement to differentiate your disclosable pecuniary interests between those which relate to you personally and those that relate to your spouse or civil partner.

## Does my signature need to be published online? Won't this put me at risk of identity theft?

There is no legal requirement for the personal signatures of councillors to be published online.

## Who can see the register of members' interests?

Except for parish councils, a council's or authority's register of members' interests must be available for inspection in the local area, and must be published on the council's or authority's website.

For parish councils, the monitoring officer who is responsible for the council's register of members' interests must arrange for the parish council's register of members' interests to be available for inspection in the district of borough, and must be published on the district or borough council's website.

Where the parish council has its own website, its register of members' interests must also be published on that website.

This is in line with the Government's policies of transparency and accountability, ensuring that the public have ready access to publicly available information.

## Is there any scope for withholding information on the published register?

Copies of the register of members' interests which are available for inspection or published must not include details of a member's sensitive interest, other than stating that the member has an interest the details of which are withheld. A sensitive interest is one which the member and the monitoring officer, who is responsible for the register of members' interests, consider that disclosure of its details could lead to the member, or a person connected to the member, being subject to violence or intimidation.

## When is information about my interests removed from my council's register of members' interests?

If you cease to have an interest, that interest can be removed from the register. If you cease to be a member of the authority, all of your interests can be removed from the register.

## What does having a disclosable pecuniary interest stop me doing?

If you are present at a meeting of your council or authority, of its executive or any committee of the executive, or of any committee, sub-committee, joint committee, or joint sub-committee of your authority, and you have a disclosable pecuniary interest relating to any business that is or will be considered at the meeting, you must not:

- participate in any discussion of the business at the meeting, or if you become aware of your disclosable pecuniary interest during the meeting participate further in any discussion of the business, or
- participate in any vote or further vote taken on the matter at the meeting.

These prohibitions apply to any form of participation, including speaking as a member of the public.

In certain circumstances you can request a dispensation from these prohibitions.

## Where these prohibitions apply, do I also have to leave the room?

Where your council's or authority's standing orders require this, you must leave the room. Even where there are no such standing orders, you must leave the room if you consider your continued presence is incompatible with your council's code of conduct or the Seven Principles of Public Life.

## Do I need a dispensation to take part in the business of setting council tax or a precept?

Any payment of, or liability to pay, council tax does not create a disclosable pecuniary interest as defined in the national rules; hence being a council tax payer does not mean that you need a dispensation to take part in the business of setting the council tax or precept or local arrangements for council tax support.

If you are a homeowner or tenant in the area of your council you will have registered, in accordance with the national rules, that beneficial interest in land. However, this disclosable pecuniary interest is not a disclosable pecuniary interest in the matter of setting the council tax or precept since decisions on the council tax or precept do not materially affect your interest in the land. For example, it does not materially affect the value of your home, your prospects of selling that home, or how you might use or enjoy that land.

Accordingly, you will not need a dispensation to take part in the business of setting the council tax or precept or local arrangements for council tax support, which is in any event a decision affecting the generally of the public in the area of your council, rather than you as an individual.

### When and how can I apply for a dispensation?

The rules allow your council or authority in certain circumstances to grant a dispensation to permit a member to take part in the business of the authority even if the member has a disclosable pecuniary interest relating to that business. These circumstances are where the council or authority considers that:

- without the dispensation so great a proportion of the council or authority would be prohibited from participating in that business as to impede the council's or authority's transaction of that business,
- without the dispensation the representation of different political groups dealing with that business would be so upset as to alter the likely outcome of any vote,
- the granting of the dispensation is in the interests of people living in the council's or authority's area,
- without the dispensation each member of the council's executive would be prohibited from participating in the business, or
- it is otherwise appropriate to grant a dispensation.

If you would like your council or authority to grant you a dispensation, you must make a written request to the officer responsible for handling such requests in the case of your council or authority.

### What happens if I don't follow the rules on disclosable pecuniary interests?

It is a criminal offence if, without a reasonable excuse, you fail to tell the monitoring officer about your disclosable pecuniary interests, either for inclusion on the register if you are a newly elected, co-opted or appointed member, or to update the register if you are re-elected or re-appointed, or when you become aware of a disclosable pecuniary interest which is not recorded in the register but which relates to any matter;

- that will be or is being considered at a meeting where you are present, or
- on which you are acting alone.

It is also a criminal offence to knowingly or recklessly provide false or misleading information, or to participate in the business of your authority where that business involves a disclosable pecuniary interest. It is also a criminal offence to continue working on a matter which can be discharged by a single member and in which you have a disclosable pecuniary interest.

If you are found guilty of such a criminal offence, you can be fined up to £5,000 and disqualified from holding office as a councillor for up to five years.

### Where can I look at the national rules on pecuniary interests?

The national rules about pecuniary interests are set out in Chapter 7 of the Localism Act 2011, which is available on the Internet here:

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/20/part/1/chapter/7/enacted>

and in the secondary legislation made under the Act, in particular The Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012 which can be found here:

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksl/2012/1464/contents/made>



## Annex A

### Description of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

If you have any of the following pecuniary interests, they are your disclosable pecuniary interests under the new national rules. Any reference to spouse or civil partner includes any person with whom you are living as husband or wife, or as if they were your civil partner.

- Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit or gain, which you, or your spouse or civil partner, undertakes.
- Any payment or provision of any other financial benefit (other than from your council or authority) made or provided within the relevant period in respect of any expenses incurred by you in carrying out duties as a member, or towards your election expenses. This includes any payment or financial benefit from a trade union within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992. The relevant period is the 12 months ending on the day when you tell the monitoring officer about your disclosable pecuniary interests following your election or re-election, or when you became aware you had a disclosable pecuniary interest relating to a matter on which you were acting alone.
- Any contract which is made between you, or your spouse or your civil partner (or a body in which you, or your spouse or your civil partner, has a beneficial interest) and your council or authority –
  - under which goods or services are to be provided or works are to be executed; and
  - which has not been fully discharged.
- Any beneficial interest in land which you, or your spouse or your civil partner, have and which is within the area of your council or authority.
- Any licence (alone or jointly with others) which you, or your spouse or your civil partner, holds to occupy land in the area of your council or authority for a month or longer.
- Any tenancy where (to your knowledge) –
  - the landlord is your council or authority; and
  - the tenant is a body in which you, or your spouse or your civil partner, has a beneficial interest.

- Any beneficial interest which you, or your spouse or your civil partner has in securities of a body where –
  - (a) that body (to your knowledge) has a place of business or land in the area of your council or authority; and
  - (b) either –
    - the total nominal value of the securities exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body; or
    - If the share capital of that body is of more than one class, the total nominal value of the shares of any one class in which you, or your spouse or your civil partner, has a beneficial interest exceeds one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that class.



**Shutt, Ann (Corporate Resources)**

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**From:** Susan Henderson <shenderson@ugle.org.uk>  
**Sent:** 04 April 2014 18:18  
**To:** Stephenson, Ian (Chief Executives); McElvaney, John (Corporate Resources)  
**Subject:** Derbyshire County Council - Register of Interests

To:  
Mr Ian Stephenson  
Chief Executive  
Derbyshire County Council  
County Hall  
Matlock  
Derbyshire  
DE4 3AG

For the Attention of Mr John McElvaney  
Director of Legal Services

Dear Sir

The intention of Derbyshire County Council to single out membership of Freemasonry as an interest requiring mandatory disclosure on your Councillors' register of interests has been drawn to our attention.

Please note that:

Derbyshire Council should be aware of that any requirement for Freemasons to disclose their membership is against the European Court of Human Rights rulings made in the case of Grande Oriente D'Italia di Palazzo Giustiniani v. Italy (No. 2) (application no. 26740/02). The ruling published on 31 May 2007 declared that "any requirement to declare is in violation of Article 11 (the right of lawful association) taken in conjunction with Article 14 (the right not to be discriminated against) of the European Convention on Human Rights. This was a case involving an Italian Grand Lodge that is the equivalent of the United Grand Lodge of England and an Italian local authority. The ECHR also ruled that Freemasonry does NOT fit the definition of a secret society.

We feel sure that Derbyshire County Council has the best of intentions and understand that your Department has perhaps simply not been made aware of the ECHR regulation. We realise it is also possible that the desire to single out Freemasonry has been initiated by a well-meaning but misinformed party and that the Council's intentions have been misreported in the media.

I have set out below some points that might be of interest to those considering this matter.

Should you wish for further information or have any questions about Freemasonry please do not hesitate to contact me, or Mike Baker, Director of Communications ([mbaker@ugle.org.uk](mailto:mbaker@ugle.org.uk)) at the same address. If you, any of your team, or anybody from the Council would like to visit our headquarters to discuss this matter, or meet with local Freemasons, we would be pleased to organise this. You might also like to look at our websites, where there is a great deal of information on Freemasonry, see links below.

I look forward to receiving your positive response.

Yours faithfully  
Susan Henderson (Miss)  
Communications Adviser - United Grand Lodge of England  
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**Further relevant points are that:**

1. Freemasonry is not "an influential body". It is a fundamental tenet of Freemasonry that neither individual Freemasons in their capacity as Freemasons nor Freemasonry as a body will ever under any circumstances make any statement on any matter of public policy whatsoever. Even the very discussion of politics and religion is banned in the Lodge. For this reason, singling out Freemasonry as an activity particularly relevant to "declaration of interest" is particularly unjust.
2. To liken Freemasonry to a lobbying body such as a trade union indicates a misunderstanding of what Freemasonry is.
3. The primary activity at a Freemasons' meeting is the participation in a one a series of ceremonies that are like one act plays. These are designed to impress upon the participants certain moral values. Each year, a new role or "office" is taken and the incremental level of involvement of the individual has the effect of developing public speaking skills and general confidence. The shared experience of taking part creates a friendly environment. The ceremonial part of the evening is usually followed by a meal of varying formality, depending on the occasion. Freemasons also meet for other optional social events as may take their interest. Most of these will be organised so that funds are raised for local charities.
4. Contrary to a common myth, Freemasons do not take any oath which encourages them to give any preference whatsoever to another Freemason. Freemasons do undertake a solemn obligation to obey the law of any land in which they reside and to be good citizens. This means that membership of Freemasonry should be an added assurance of a person's integrity – and should certainly not imply that such a membership should be treated more suspiciously than other social activities.
5. The much mythologised "secrets" consist of a few ceremonial signs and words used only within Degree Ceremonies. These signs are believed to have evolved from those used by mediaeval stonemasons working on the grand cathedrals and other buildings, who travelled the world seeking work. On arrival at a distant Lodge these stonemasons, or "operative" Freemasons, needed to be able to prove their right to entrance and their level (Degree) of craftsmanship. These could perhaps be viewed as the ancient equivalent of a pin number or membership number. Thus they are ceremonially bestowed on Freemasons as they go through the various "Degree" ceremonies (Entered Apprentice, Fellowcraft and Master Mason), as a mark of their progress. It is not permissible or meaningful to use these outside of the Lodge.
6. We positively encourage members to tell people about Freemasonry and, of course, they are free to do so at their own inclination, as with any other social activity. We object, however, to the effect of an unwarranted slur on Freemasonry in the eyes of all who see it singled out as an activity particularly warranting disclosure.
7. Membership of Freemasonry should be disclosed in the same way as any other non-political and non-commercial social activity or membership – that is, if and when it should be relevant to a matter under discussion, such as if planning permission was being discussed with regard to a Masonic building, or there was some matter under discussion relevant to an individual with whom one had acquaintance – in the same way that one would do with regard to membership of a golf club, or bird watching society.

8. Whilst members can come from all walks of life, nationalities, religions and occupations, only people of good reputation are accepted into Freemasonry.
9. Freemasons work to improve themselves and do good works in the community. The Freemasons' Grand Charity alone has given £57 million to national charities since 1981, in areas as diverse as medical research, support for vulnerable people and youth opportunities. Just recently, again, the our Grand Charity alone has just given £20,000 to the Red Cross for aid to UK flood victims, and individual Lodges and Provinces have given many thousands more.
10. Discrimination against Freemasonry is a trait a trait shared in common amongst the most oppressive regimes. Spain, Portugal, and Italy attempted to suppress Freemasonry after 1738. Bavaria followed in 1784; Austria, in 1795; Baden, in 1813; Russia, in 1822; Pakistan, in 1972. Masonic scholar Paul Bessel has noted that the language used by modern totalitarian regimes is similar to that used by some other modern critics of Freemasonry. Freemasonry was persecuted in all the communist countries.
11. Full information about Freemasonry is available from our website, [www.ugle.org.uk](http://www.ugle.org.uk), including our rule book (Book of Constitutions), which has been in the public domain since 1723.

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