

Declaration of Interest: Recommended Code of Practice

Preamble

1. The Business Committee recommends that all members of the General Synod adhere to the code of practice set out in this document, which concerns the declaration of interest by members of the General Synod in any business transacted by the Synod, during each group of sessions.
2. The Committee has drawn up this code because it believes that with the increasing scrutiny of those engaged in public life, there is a legitimate expectation that the members of the Synod - which is a body with legislative and other functions set out in its Constitution - should conform to the Seven Principles of Public Life (promoted by the Committee on Standards in Public Life – see overleaf). In particular, the sixth Principle states:

'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.'

3. The Committee recognizes that the specific rules applicable to a conflict of interest on the part of trustees of charities do not apply to the members of the General Synod, as it is not a charity.
4. Declarations of interest are desirable because they disclose factors which may be relevant to the way in which a member's arguments may be heard and evaluated by other members. As the House of Lords Code of Conduct puts it, the practice of declaring a relevant interest 'is necessary in order that [the] audience may form a balanced judgement of the arguments.' Members who contribute to debates or other Synod business should therefore declare any interest which could reveal a conflict of loyalty, or which could otherwise affect other members' ability to form a balanced judgement of their arguments.
5. The Business Committee takes the view, in the light of the factors set out above, that (a) Synod members should declare relevant interests; and (b) they should declare them orally at the beginning of their contribution to any item of business on the Synod's agenda.

Code

6. Members should consider the need to make an oral declaration of the following, when contributing to the Synod's debates:
 - (a) financial interests, whether direct or indirect, in any matter which is under consideration by the Synod (for example, shareholdings or other financial interests in organisations which may be materially affected by the decisions of the Synod);

(b) personal non-financial interests, including those which arise from membership of, or holding office in Church and other bodies (such as acting as a trustee or office-holder of any body whose affairs are likely to be affected by the decisions that the Synod takes).

7. Members should declare any interest which might reasonably be thought to influence what they say and do and which is relevant to the issue under debate.
8. Members may also consider the need to declare the financial, or personal non-financial, interests of close family members.

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The Seven Principles of Public Life

The Committee believes that 'Seven Principles of Public Life' should apply to all in the public service. These 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.

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.