

Ercall Magna Parish Council

CODE OF CONDUCT

This document was created from the Model provided by TWC and will be reviewed in 2025.

Adopted Telford and Wrekin Council - Councillor Code of Conduct

The role of councillor across all tiers of local government is a vital part of our country's system of democracy. It is important that as councillors we can be held accountable and all adopt the behaviours and responsibilities associated with the role. Our conduct as an individual councillor affects the reputation of all councillors. We want the role of councillor to be one that people aspire to. We also want individuals from a range of backgrounds and circumstances to be putting themselves forward to become councillors.

As councillors, we represent local residents, work to develop better services and deliver local change. The public have high expectations of us and entrust us to represent our local area; taking decisions fairly, openly, and transparently. We have both an individual and collective responsibility to meet these expectations by maintaining high standards and demonstrating good conduct, and by challenging behaviour which falls below expectations.

Importantly, we should be able to undertake our role as a councillor without being intimidated, abused, bullied or threatened by anyone, including the general public.

This Code has been designed to protect our democratic role, encourage good conduct and safeguard the public's trust in local government.

Introduction

The Local Government Association (LGA) has developed this Model Councillor Code of Conduct, in association with key partners and after extensive consultation with the sector, as part of its work on supporting all tiers of local government to continue to aspire to high standards of leadership and performance. It is a template for councils to adopt in whole and/or with local amendments.

All councils are required to have a local Councillor Code of Conduct.

The LGA will undertake an annual review of this Code to ensure it continues to be fit-for-purpose, incorporating advances in technology, social media and changes in legislation. The LGA can also offer support, training and mediation to councils and councillors on the application of the Code and the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and the county associations of local councils can offer advice and support to town and parish councils.

Definitions

For the purposes of this Code of Conduct, a “councillor” means a member or co-opted member of a local authority or a directly elected mayor. A “co-opted member” is defined in the Localism Act 2011 Section 27(4) as “a person who is not a member of the authority but who

- a) is a member of any committee or sub-committee of the authority, or;
- b) is a member of, and represents the authority on, any joint committee or joint sub-committee of the authority;

and who is entitled to vote on any question that falls to be decided at any meeting of that committee or sub-committee”.

For the purposes of this Code of Conduct, “local authority” includes county councils, district councils, London borough councils, parish councils, town councils, fire and rescue authorities, police authorities, joint authorities, economic prosperity boards, combined authorities and National Park authorities.

Purpose of the Code of Conduct

The purpose of this Code of Conduct is to assist all councillors in modelling the behaviour that is expected of them, to provide a personal check and balance, and to set out the type of conduct that could lead to action being taken against them. It is also to protect them, the public, fellow councillors, local authority officers and the reputation of local government. It sets out general principles of conduct expected of all councillors and specific obligations in relation to standards of conduct. The LGA encourages the use of support, training and mediation prior to action being taken using the Code. The fundamental aim of the Code is to create and maintain public confidence in the role of councillor and local government.

General principles of councillor conduct

Everyone in public office at all levels, all who serve the public or deliver public services, including ministers, civil servants, councillors and local authority officers; should uphold the Seven Principles of Public Life, also known as the Nolan Principles.

Building on these principles, the following general principles have been developed specifically for the role of councillor.

In accordance with the public trust placed in councillors, on all occasions:

- they act with integrity and honesty
- they act lawfully
- they treat all persons fairly and with respect; and
- they lead by example and act in a way that secures public confidence in the role of councillor.

In undertaking the role:

- they impartially exercise all responsibilities in the interests of the local community
- they do not improperly seek to confer an advantage, or disadvantage, on any person
- they avoid conflicts of interest
- they exercise reasonable care and diligence; and
- they ensure that public resources are used prudently in accordance with the local authority's requirements and in the public interest.

Application of the Code of Conduct

This Code of Conduct applies as soon as they sign the declaration of acceptance of the office of councillor or attend their first meeting as a co-opted member and continues to apply until they cease to be a councillor.

This Code of Conduct applies to when they are acting in the capacity as a councillor which may include when:

- they misuse the position as a councillor or their actions would give the impression to a reasonable member of the public with knowledge of all the facts that they are acting as a councillor;

The Code applies to all forms of communication and interaction, including:

- at face-to-face meetings
- at online or telephone meetings
- in written communication
- in verbal communication
- in non-verbal communication
- in electronic and social media communication, posts, statements and comments.

Councillors are also expected to uphold high standards of conduct and show leadership at all times when acting as a councillor.

This Code will **not** apply in relation to their private life **unless** they make reference to their position as a Councillor. For example, if you operate a private social media account but reference your work as a Councillor, show pictures of you acting in your role as Councillor or otherwise make it clear that you are a Councillor, then this Code will apply to your social media activity.

The Monitoring Officer has statutory responsibility for the implementation of the Code of Conduct, and Councillors are encouraged to seek advice from the Monitoring Officer on any matters that may relate to the Code of Conduct. Town and Parish councillors are encouraged to seek advice from their Clerk, who may refer matters to the Monitoring Officer.

You are also expected to fulfil the role of corporate parent and ensure that appropriate steps are taken to protect all children, young people and vulnerable adults living, working or in education within the Council's area and, where necessary, refer any matters that **might** amount to a safeguarding concern to Family Connect at the earliest opportunity.

Standards of Councillor Conduct

This section sets out the obligations, which are the minimum standards of conduct required of a councillor. Should conduct fall short of these standards, a complaint may be made against the councillor, which may result in action being taken.

Guidance is included to help explain the reasons for the obligations and how they should be followed.

General Conduct

1. Respect

As a Councillor:

1.1 They treat other Councillors and members of the public with respect.

1.2 They treat local authority employees, employees and representatives of partner organisations and those volunteering for the local authority with respect and respect the role they play.

Respect means politeness and courtesy in behaviour, speech, and in the written word. Debate and having different views are all part of a healthy democracy. A councillor, can express, challenge, criticise and disagree with views, ideas, opinions and policies in a robust but civil manner. They should not, however, subject individuals, groups of people or organisations to personal attack.

In any contact with the public, you should treat them politely and courteously. Rude and offensive behaviour lowers the public's expectations and confidence in councillors.

In return, they have a right to expect respectful behaviour from the public. If members of the public are being abusive, intimidatory or threatening they are entitled to stop any conversation or interaction in person or online and report them to the local authority, the relevant social media provider or the police. This also applies to fellow councillors, where action could then be taken under the Councillor Code of Conduct, and local

authority employees, where concerns should be raised in line with the local authority's councillor- officer protocol.

2. Bullying, harassment and discrimination

As a councillor:

2.1 they do not bully any person.

2.2 they do not harass any person.

2.3 they promote equalities and do not discriminate unlawfully against any person.

The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) characterises bullying as offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, an abuse or misuse of power through means that undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient. Bullying might be a regular pattern of behaviour or a one-off incident, happen face-to-face, on social media, in emails or phone calls, happen in the workplace or at work social events and may not always be obvious or noticed by others.

The Protection from Harassment Act 1997 defines harassment as conduct that causes alarm or distress or puts people in fear of violence and must involve such conduct on at least two occasions. It can include repeated attempts to impose unwanted communications and contact upon a person in a manner that could be expected to cause distress or fear in any reasonable person.

Unlawful discrimination is where someone is treated unfairly because of a protected characteristic. Protected characteristics are specific aspects of a person's identity defined by the Equality Act 2010. They are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

The Equality Act 2010 places specific duties on local authorities. Councillors have a central role to play in ensuring that equality issues are integral to the local authority's performance and strategic aims, and that there is a strong vision and public commitment to equality across public services.

3. Impartiality of officers of the council

As a councillor:

3.1 they do not compromise, or attempt to compromise, the impartiality of anyone who works for, or on behalf of, the local authority.

Officers work for the local authority as a whole and must be politically neutral (unless they are political assistants). They should not be coerced or persuaded to act in a way that would undermine their neutrality. Councillors can question officers in order to understand, for example, their reasons for proposing to act in a particular way, or the content of a report that they have written. However, they must not try and force them to act differently, change their advice, or alter the content of that report, if doing so would prejudice their professional integrity.

4. Confidentiality and access to information

As a councillor:

4.1 They do not disclose information:

- a. given to them in confidence by anyone**
- b. acquired which they believe, or ought reasonably to be aware, is of a confidential nature, unless**
 - i. they have received the consent of a person authorised to give it;**
 - ii. they are required by law to do so;**
 - iii. the disclosure is made to a third party for the purpose of obtaining professional legal advice provided that the third party agrees not to disclose the information to any other person; or**
 - iv. the disclosure is:**
 - 1. reasonable and in the public interest; and**
 - 2. made in good faith and in compliance with the reasonable requirements of the local authority; and**
 - 3. or they have consulted the Monitoring Officer prior to its release.**

4.2 They do not improperly use knowledge gained solely as a result of the role as a councillor for the advancement of themselves, friends, family members, employer or business interests.

4.3 They do not prevent anyone from getting information that they are entitled to by law.

Local authorities must work openly and transparently, and their proceedings and printed materials are open to the public, except in certain legally defined circumstances. Councillors should work on this basis, but there will be times when it is required by law that discussions, documents and other information relating to or held by the local authority must be treated in a confidential manner. Examples include personal data relating to individuals or information relating to ongoing negotiations.

5. Disrepute

As a councillor:

5.1 They do not bring the role or local authority into disrepute.

A Councillor is trusted to make decisions on behalf of the community and their actions and behaviour are subject to greater scrutiny than that of ordinary members of the public. They should be aware that actions might have an adverse impact on them, other councillors and/or the local authority and may lower the public's confidence in them or the local authority's ability to discharge its functions. For example, behaviour that is considered dishonest and/or deceitful can bring the local authority into disrepute.

Councillors should be aware that their behaviour in a personal capacity may result in action being taken under this Code of Conduct if they are identified as being a Councillor whilst behaving in a manner which is in breach of the Code of Conduct or if they give members of the public the impression that they are a councillor despite acting in a personal capacity. One exception to this is where they are found guilty of certain criminal offences which would preclude them from being a councillor or would bring the role of councillor into disrepute regardless of whether they had identified themselves as a Councillor.

A councillor is able to hold the local authority and fellow councillors to account and are able to constructively challenge and express concern about decisions and processes undertaken by the council whilst continuing to adhere to other aspects of this Code of Conduct.

6. Use of position

As a councillor:

6.1 They do not use, or attempt to use, the position improperly to the advantage or disadvantage of themselves or anyone else.

The position as a member of the local authority provides certain opportunities, responsibilities, and privileges, and Councillors make choices all the time that will impact others. However, they should not take advantage of these opportunities to further their own or others' private interests or to disadvantage anyone unfairly.

7. Use of local authority resources and facilities

As a councillor:

7.1 they do not misuse council resources.

7.2 they will, when using the resources of the local authority or authorising their use by others:

- a. act in accordance with the local authority's requirements; and**
- b. ensure that such resources are not used for political purposes unless that use could reasonably be regarded as likely to facilitate, or be conducive to, the discharge of the functions of the local authority or of the office to which I have been elected or appointed.**

Councillors may be provided with resources and facilities by the local authority to assist in carrying out their duties as a councillor.

Examples include:

- office support
- stationery
- equipment such as phones, and computers
- transport
- access and use of local authority buildings and rooms.

These are provided to help councillors carry out the role as a councillor more effectively and are not to be used for business or personal gain. They should be used in accordance with the purpose for which they have been provided and the local authority's own policies regarding their use.

8. Complying with the Code of Conduct

As a Councillor:

8.1 They undertake Code of Conduct training provided by my local authority.

8.2 They cooperate with any Code of Conduct investigation and/or determination.

8.3 They do not intimidate or attempt to intimidate any person who is likely to be involved with the administration of any investigation or proceedings.

8.4 They comply with any sanction imposed on me following a finding that I have breached the Code of Conduct.

It is extremely important for councillors to demonstrate high standards, to have actions open to scrutiny and for them not to undermine public trust in the local authority or its

governance. Any concerns about the local authority's processes in handling a complaint should be raised with the Clerk or Monitoring Officer.

Protecting your reputation and the reputation of the local authority

9. Interests

As a councillor:

9.1 They register and disclose my interests.

Section 29 of the Localism Act 2011 requires the Monitoring Officer to establish and maintain a register of interests of members of the authority.

Councillors need to register your interests so that the public, local authority employees and fellow councillors know which interests might give rise to a conflict of interest. The register is a public document that can be consulted when (or before) an issue arises. The register also protects Councillors by allowing them to demonstrate openness and a willingness to be held accountable. They are personally responsible for deciding whether or not to disclose an interest in a meeting, but it can be helpful for them to know early on if others think that a potential conflict might arise. It is also important that the public know about any interest that might have to be disclosed when making or taking part in decisions, so that decision making is seen by the public as open and honest. This helps to ensure that public confidence in the integrity of local governance is maintained.

Councillors should note that failure to register or disclose a disclosable pecuniary interest as set out in **Table 1**, is a criminal offence under the Localism Act 2011.

Appendix B sets out the detailed provisions on registering and disclosing interests. If in doubt, anyone should always seek advice from the Clerk or Monitoring Officer.

10. Gifts and hospitality

As a councillor:

10.1 They do not accept gifts or hospitality, irrespective of estimated value, which could give rise to real or substantive personal gain or a reasonable suspicion of influence on my part to show favour from persons seeking to acquire, develop or do business with the local authority or from persons who may apply to the local authority for any permission, licence or other significant advantage.

10.2 They register with the Clerk any gift or hospitality with an estimated value of at least £25 within 28 days of its receipt.

10.3 They register with the Clerk any significant gift or hospitality that I have been offered but have refused to accept.

Appendices

Appendix A – The Seven Principles of Public Life

The principles are:

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 disclose 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.

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.

Appendix B – Registering interests

Within 28 days of becoming a member or when re-elected or re-appointed to office a Councillor must register with the Clerk / Monitoring Officer the interests which fall within the categories set out in **Table 1 (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests)** which are as described in “The Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012”. They should also register details of other personal interests which fall within the categories set out in **Table 2 (Nonpecuniary Interests.)**

“Disclosable Pecuniary Interest” means an interest of a Councillor, or a partner if they are aware of your partner's interest, within the descriptions set out in Table 1 below.

"Partner" means a spouse or civil partner, or a person with whom they are living as husband or wife, or a person with whom they are living as if you are civil partners.

1. They must ensure that register of interests are kept up-to-date and within 28 days of becoming aware of any new interest, or of any change to a registered interest, notify the Monitoring Officer.
2. A ‘sensitive interest’ is as an interest which, if disclosed, could lead to the councillor, or a person connected with the councillor, being subject to violence or intimidation.
3. Where they have a ‘sensitive interest’ they must notify the Clerk or Monitoring Officer with the reasons why they believe it is a sensitive interest. If they agree they will withhold the interest from the public register.

Non participation in case of Disclosable Pecuniary Interest

4. Where a matter arises at a meeting which directly relates to a Disclosable Pecuniary Interests as set out in **Table 1**, they must disclose the interest, not participate in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless they have been granted a dispensation. If it is a ‘sensitive interest’, they do not have to disclose the nature of the interest, just that they have an interest. Dispensation may be granted in limited circumstances, to enable them to participate and vote on a matter in which they have a disclosable pecuniary interest.

Disclosure of Non-Pecuniary Interests

5. Where a matter arises at a meeting which **directly relates** to a non pecuniary interest (as set out in **Table 2**), they must disclose the interest. They may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting but otherwise must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless they have been granted a dispensation. If it is a ‘sensitive interest’, they do not have to disclose the nature of the interest.

6. Where a matter arises at a meeting which **directly relates** to a financial interest or well-being (and is not a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest set out in Table 1) or a financial interest or well-being of a relative or close associate, they must disclose the interest. They may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting. Otherwise they must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless they have been granted a dispensation. If it is a ‘sensitive interest’, they do not have to disclose the nature of the interest.

7. Where a matter arises at a meeting which **affects** –
- a. a Councillors own financial interest or well-being;
 - b. a financial interest or well-being of a relative, close associate; or
 - c. a body included in those who need to disclose under non-pecuniary interests as set out in **Table 2**

they must disclose the interest. In order to determine whether they can remain in the meeting after disclosing the interest the following test should be applied

8. Where a matter **affects** a financial interest or well-being:
- a. to a greater extent than it affects the financial interests of the majority of inhabitants of the ward affected by the decision and;
 - b. a reasonable member of the public knowing all the facts would believe that it would affect the view of the wider public interest

They may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting. Otherwise they must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless they have been granted a dispensation.

If it is a ‘sensitive interest’, they do not have to disclose the nature of the interest.

9. Where they have a personal interest in any business of the authority and they have made an executive decision in relation to that business, they must make sure that any written statement of that decision records the existence and nature of the interest.

Table 1: Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

This table sets out the explanation of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests as set out are

Subject	Description
Employment, office, trade, profession or vocation	Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for

	<p>profit or gain. [Any unpaid directorship.]</p>
Sponsorship	<p>Any payment or provision of any other financial benefit (other than from the council) made to the councillor during the previous 12-month period for expenses incurred by him/her in carrying out his/her duties as a councillor, or towards his/her election expenses.</p> <p>This includes any payment or financial benefit from a trade union within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992.</p>
Contracts	<p>Any contract made between the councillor or his/her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the councillor is living as if they were spouses/civil partners (or a firm in which such person is a partner, or an incorporated body of which such person is a director* or a body that such person has a beneficial interest in the securities of*) and the council</p> <p>—</p> <p>(a) under which goods or services are to be provided or works are to be executed; and</p> <p>(b) which has not been fully discharged.</p>
Land and Property	<p>Any beneficial interest in land which is within the area of the council.</p> <p>'Land' excludes an easement, servitude, interest or right in or over land which does not give the councillor or his/her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the councillor is living as if they were spouses/ civil partners (alone or jointly with another) a right to occupy or to receive income.</p>
Licenses	<p>Any licence (alone or jointly with others) to occupy land in the area of the council for a month or longer</p>

Corporate tenancies	<p>Any tenancy where (to the councillor's knowledge) —</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) the landlord is the council; and (b) the tenant is a body that the councillor, or his/her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the councillor is living as if they were spouses/ civil partners is a partner of or a director* of or has a beneficial interest in the securities* of.
Securities	<p>Any beneficial interest in securities* of a body where—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) that body (to the councillor's knowledge) has a place of business or land in the area of the council; and (b) either— <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) the total nominal value of the securities* exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body; or (ii) 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 the councillor, or his/ her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the councillor is living as if they were spouses/civil partners has a beneficial interest exceeds one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that class.

* 'director' includes a member of the committee of management of an industrial and provident society.

* 'securities' means shares, debentures, debenture stock, loan stock, bonds, units of a collective investment scheme within the meaning of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 and other securities of any description, other than money deposited with a building society.

Table 2: Non-Pecuniary Interests

They have a personal interest in any business of your authority where it relates to or is likely to affect:

- a) any body of which they are in general control or management and to which they are nominated or appointed by the authority
- b) any body
 - (i) exercising functions of a public nature
 - (ii) any body directed to charitable purposes or
 - (iii) one of whose principal purposes includes the influence of public opinion or policy (including any political party or trade union)
- c) A matter that ***directly relates*** to a financial interest or well-being (and is not a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest set out in Table 1) or a financial interest or well-being of a relative or close associate,
- d) A matter that ***affects***:-
 - a. their own financial interest or well-being;
 - b. a financial interest or well-being of a relative, close associate; or
 - c. a body included in those they need to disclose under nonpecuniary interests as set out in this **Table 2**

Appendix C – the Committee on Standards in Public Life

The LGA has undertaken this review whilst the Government continues to consider the recommendations made by the Committee on Standards in Public Life in their report on [Local Government Ethical Standards](#). If the Government chooses to implement any of the recommendations, this could require a change to this Code.

The recommendations cover:

- Recommendations for changes to the Localism Act 2011 to clarify in law when the Code of Conduct applies
- The introduction of sanctions
- An appeals process through the Local Government Ombudsman
- Changes to the Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012
- Updates to the Local Government Transparency Code
- Changes to the role and responsibilities of the Independent Person
- That the criminal offences in the Localism Act 2011 relating to Disclosable Pecuniary Interests should be abolished

The Local Government Ethical Standards report also includes Best Practice recommendations. These are:

Best practice 1: Local authorities should include prohibitions on bullying and harassment in codes of conduct. These should include a definition of bullying and harassment, supplemented with a list of examples of the sort of behaviour covered by such a definition.

Best practice 2: Councils should include provisions in their code of conduct requiring councillors to comply with any formal standards investigation and prohibiting trivial or malicious allegations by councillors.

Best practice 3: Principal authorities should review their code of conduct each year and regularly seek, where possible, the views of the public, community organisations and neighbouring authorities.

Best practice 4: An authority's code should be readily accessible to both councillors and the public, in a prominent position on a council's website and available in council premises.

Best practice 5: Local authorities should update their gifts and hospitality register at least once per quarter, and publish it in an accessible format, such as CSV.

Best practice 6: Councils should publish a clear and straightforward public interest test against which allegations are filtered.

Best practice 7: Local authorities should have access to at least two Independent Persons.

Best practice 8: An Independent Person should be consulted as to whether to undertake a formal investigation on an allegation, and should be given the option to review and comment on allegations which the responsible officer is minded to dismiss as being without merit, vexatious, or trivial.

Best practice 9: Where a local authority makes a decision on an allegation of misconduct following a formal investigation, a decision notice should be published as soon as possible on its website, including a brief statement of facts, the provisions of the code engaged by the allegations, the view of the Independent Person, the reasoning of the decision-maker, and any sanction applied.

Best practice 10: A local authority should have straightforward and accessible guidance on its website on how to make a complaint under the code of conduct, the process for handling complaints, and estimated timescales for investigations and outcomes.

Best practice 11: Formal standards complaints about the conduct of a parish councillor towards a clerk should be made by the chair or by the parish council, rather than the clerk in all but exceptional circumstances.

Best practice 12: Monitoring Officers' roles should include providing advice, support and management of investigations and adjudications on alleged breaches to parish councils within the remit of the principal authority. They should be provided with adequate training, corporate support and resources to undertake this work.

Best practice 13: A local authority should have procedures in place to address any conflicts of interest when undertaking a standards investigation. Possible steps should include asking the Monitoring Officer from a different authority to undertake the investigation.

Best practice 14: Councils should report on separate bodies they have set up or which they own as part of their annual governance statement and give a full picture of their relationship with those bodies. Separate bodies created by local authorities should abide by the Nolan principle of openness and publish their board agendas and minutes and annual reports in an accessible place.

Best practice 15: Senior officers should meet regularly with political group leaders or group whips to discuss standards issues.