

Norfolk VCSE System Leadership Group

Conflict of Interest Policy

Adopted October 2015
Date of next review: September 2016

Purpose

All members of the Norfolk VCSE System Leadership Group will strive to avoid any conflict of interest between the interests of the Group (and by extension the voluntary sector as a whole) on the one hand, and members' personal, professional, and business interests on the other. This includes avoiding actual conflicts of interest as well as the perception of conflicts of interest.

Conflicts of interest may arise where a member's personal, financial or other interests and/or loyalties conflict with those of the group, and/or of the wider sector. They may arise as a result of a member's substantive role elsewhere (for example, as a trustee or chief executive of an organisation), their individual circumstances or their membership of the System Leadership Group. Such conflicts can inhibit free discussion, result in decisions and actions that are not in the interests of the group, and risk the impression that the group has acted improperly.

The purpose of this policy is to protect the integrity of the Norfolk VCSE System Leadership Group's decision-making process, to enable stakeholders to have confidence in our integrity, and to protect the integrity and reputation of group members. The policy explains what is meant by the term conflict of interest, details measures that will be taken to prevent such conflicts occurring and outlines how any potential conflict of interest will be managed.

The establishment of a register of interests is part of the System Leadership Group's commitment to good governance.

Definitions and scope of policy

A conflict of interest is defined as:

"Any situation in which an individual's obligations to the Norfolk VCSE System Leadership Group differ from their obligations to any third party, from the member's personal interests or from those of his/her immediate family, whether financial or otherwise, and when those other obligations and interests may, or may be perceived, to influence the individual's performance of their obligations to the Norfolk VCSE System Leadership Group."

Members of the group must not:

- Use their membership of the group for personal gain and should act at all times in good faith.
- Accept gifts or favours offered by an external party.

The offer and acceptance of routine hospitality that is made to others as part of the conduct of normal business, for example the provision of lunch or accommodation at a meeting or

conference, is not in itself likely to fall within the remit of this policy. However, preferential or individual provision may do and should be declared if there is any doubt.

Declaration of Interests Procedure

Norfolk VCSE System Leadership Group asks its members to declare their interests and any gifts or hospitality received in connection with their role in the group.

Upon appointment each member will make a full, written disclosure of interests, such as relationships, and posts held, that could potentially result in a conflict of interest. This written disclosure will be kept on file and will be updated as appropriate. The contents will be published as part of the group's Register of Interests.

It is up to each member to decide if a conflict of interest could exist and, if so, to declare it. When deciding on such matters, consideration should be given to how things could appear to others and, in all cases, members should err on the side of caution, declaring an interest if there is any possibility that a conflict of interest exists.

A Declaration of Interests form is provided for this purpose. Interests will be recorded on the group's Register of Interests which will be maintained by the VCSE Engage lead partners and published alongside other material relating to the group.

Declarations of Interests will be updated annually by asking members to confirm that the information contained in the Declaration of Interest form is still valid. Any changes during the year will be entered as notified to the VCSE Engage lead partners. Members are responsible for notifying the partners of any changes as soon as possible.

Managing Conflicts of Interest

Given the nature of the SLG and its membership, potential conflicts of interest will inevitably arise. It is important that these are managed correctly, and that the whole group takes responsibility for doing so. The SLG cannot function unless it is, and is seen to be, operating in pursuit of its 'noble cause' rather than in the interests of its members. This is what system leadership is all about.

A completed Declaration of Interests form does not replace the need for members to declare relevant interests during the course of the business of a meeting if appropriate.

In the course of meetings or activities, members will disclose any interests in a discussion or decision where there may be a conflict between the group's best interests and the member's best interests or a conflict between the best interests of two organisations that the member is involved with.

At the discretion of the chair an individual may continue to be involved in any discussion where their interest results in insight that may be beneficial but must withdraw from any decision-making process.

All decisions under a conflict of interest will be recorded and reported in the minutes or other record of the meeting. The report will record:

- The nature and extent of the conflict
- An outline of the discussion
- The actions taken to manage the conflict

Raising concerns

Any member of the group or any outside party may raise a concern about a possible conflict of interest. This should be raised through the chair and officer in the first instance. If the concern relates to the chair or the officer, it can be raised through any member of the group.

Cases will be dealt with as they arise and will be considered by the full group. The individual who has raised a concern will be asked how they wish to proceed. Depending on the nature of the concern and the point at which it arises in the schedule of meetings, action may include:

- consideration by the whole SLG at the next meeting. The individual who has raised the concern will be invited to attend.
- a meeting of the chair, officer, member concerned and individual who has raised the concern. If the concern relates to the chair or officer, an alternative SLG member delegated by the full group will replace them for the purposes of this meeting.

In both cases the individual concerned will be welcome to bring someone to attend with them, and a written summary setting out the nature of the concern and the actions taken will be agreed with them and made public.

This policy is meant to supplement good judgment and members should respect its spirit as well as its wording.

Adoption: a draft of this policy was discussed at a meeting held on 22nd September at Signpost House in Dereham and formally agreed via email following that meeting.