

# **Selsey Community Forum**



## **Conflicts of Interest Policy**

### **Aim**

There is nothing immoral or illegal in Conflicts of Interest *per se*. They are absolutely normal and inevitable in individuals and groups who are enthusiastic, active and dynamic in their interests – exactly the kind of people who make good charity Trustees and volunteers.

Impropriety and illegality only come in when what would otherwise be entirely legitimate Conflicts of Interest are not properly declared, acknowledged and managed.

This Policy refers to any case where a member of staff, a volunteer or a Trustee's personal interest might contradict the interest of the Selsey Community Forum. This is an unwanted circumstance as it may have heavy implications on the person's judgement and commitment to the Forum, and, by extension, to the realisation of the charity's goals.

This Policy outlines the guidelines regarding conflict of interest and the responsibilities of everyone in resolving any such discrepancies.

### **Why Conflicts of Interest occur**

This can be due to deliberate exploitation of the situation by one party for their personal benefit.

By "deliberate exploitation" is meant that the party concerned knows (or, at least, suspects) that what they are doing is wrong/immoral/illegal but carries on doing it anyway. Such deliberate exploitation is clearly totally unacceptable, is often illegal (particularly in a charity situation if charitable funds are being diverted away from the charitable activities for which they were donated) and must be stopped as soon as it is recognised.

More commonly, it can be due to people being unaware of the legal environment in which they are operating and so act in an improper (perhaps even illegal) way under the misapprehension that they are doing the right thing in the best interests of the charity.

It is, therefore, vitally important that all members of staff, volunteers and Trustees take a very open approach to declaring any Conflicts of Interest that they think they might have ("If in doubt, declare it" is a good maxim) and are very accepting and supportive of the Conflicts of Interest declared by others (including other volunteers, members of staff, as well as Trustees). A well maintained Register of Conflicts of Interest is the best defence against suspicions or accusations of impropriety against individual.

### **Scope**

This conflict of interest policy applies to all prospective or current members of staff, volunteers and Trustees of the Forum, as well as independent contractors and persons acting on behalf of the Forum.

### **Policy elements**

The relationship of the Forum with its staff, volunteers and Trustees should be based on mutual trust and the charity is committed to preserve the interests of people under its realm.

Conflict of interest may occur whenever a person's interest in a subject may lead them to actions, activities or relationships that undermine the charity placing it at a disadvantage.

### **What is a conflict of interest?**

This situation may take many different forms that include, but are not limited to, conflict of interest examples:

- Members of staff, volunteers or Trustees' ability to use their position with the charity to their personal advantage. This can include:
  - Direct financial gain or benefit to the individual;
  - Indirect financial gain;
  - Non-financial gain;
  - Conflict of loyalties
- Members of staff, volunteers or Trustees engaging in activities that will bring direct or indirect profit to a competitor
- Members of staff, volunteers or Trustees using connections obtained through the charity for their own private purposes
- Members of staff, volunteers or Trustees using charity equipment or means to support an external business
- Members of staff, volunteers or Trustees acting in ways that may compromise the charity's legality (e.g. taking bribes or bribing representatives of other organisations)

The possibility that a conflict of interest may occur can be addressed and resolved before any actual damage is done. Therefore, when a member of staff, volunteer or Trustee understands or suspects that a conflict of interest exists, they should bring this matter to the attention of their manager or the Chair of the Trustees so corrective actions may be taken.

The responsibility of resolving a conflict of interest starts with the manager. All conflicts of interest will be resolved as fairly as possible. The Chair of the Board has the responsibility of the final decision when a solution cannot be found.

In general, members of staff, volunteers and Trustees are advised to refrain from letting personal and/or financial interests and external activities come into opposition with the charity's fundamental interests.

### **Disciplinary Consequences**

In cases when a conflict of interest is deliberately concealed or when a solution cannot be found, disciplinary action may be invoked up to and including termination.

### **Other Matters**

All staff and volunteers are to be provided with appropriate induction training and a handbook providing information and guidance on Selsey Community Forum's Policies. This policy should be read in conjunction with Selsey Community Forum's Staff Policy and Code of Conduct.

Reviewed and Approved by Trustees: October 2023

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Mike Nicholls, Chair, Selsey Community Forum