



The Presbytery of Aberdeen and Shetland Code of Conduct

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

This Code of Conduct for all members of Presbytery is intended to assist you to carry out your duties with confidence and to protect you and the Presbytery from any allegations of misconduct. It is intended to assist the smooth working of Presbytery in order to fulfil the vision set for Presbytery.

Those who are recognised ministers and deacons within the bounds, commissioned elders, and appointed additional elders are also charity trustees for the Presbytery.

While those who are corresponding members of Presbytery are not charity trustees, it is expected that Church of Scotland members would also base their conduct in Presbytery on this Code, and that those who are non-Church of Scotland would make themselves aware of this Code.

This Code will be reviewed and issued annually. It is your responsibility to ensure your familiarity with the Code and that your actions comply with its provisions.

This Code is supplemental, with respect to those serving in recognised ministry roles, to the “Code of Professional Practice and Good Conduct for the Ministries of the Church of Scotland” (found in the Ministers’ Handbook¹).

1.2 Vision

The charitable purpose of Presbytery is the advancement of religion. Our vision is a Presbytery which, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, encourages and enables our congregations to re-imagine and renew their life and work for mission in the 21st century, worshipping and witnessing in a sustainable and mutually supportive network of Christian communities, using well-equipped spaces strategically located across the Presbytery, served and led by ministry teams, with the knowledge and skills needed to inspire and equip our members for service and discipleship.

2 Key Principles

2.1 Charitable Purpose

You have a duty, as charity trustees, to understand the purposes of Presbytery as outlined in the paper “The Purpose of Presbytery” (see Appendix 1).

2.2 Selflessness

You have a duty to take decisions solely in terms of the interests of the Presbytery. You must not act in order to gain financial or other material benefit for yourself, family or friends or for colleagues within the Presbytery.

2.3 Integrity and Honesty

You must not place yourself under any financial, or other, obligation to any individual or organisation that might reasonably be thought to influence you in carrying out your duties as a Presbyter. You must

¹ [Ministers-Handbook-2020.pdf \(churchofscotland.org.uk\)](#)

declare any interests relating to your duties as a Presbyter and take steps to resolve any conflict in a way that protects the interests of the Presbytery.

2.4 Accountability

You are accountable in the first instance to the Presbytery and, ultimately, to the General Assembly. You have a duty to consider issues on their merits, taking due account of the views of others, and must ensure that Presbyters use the resources for which they are responsible prudently and in accordance with the law.

2.5 Transparency and Confidentiality

You should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that you take. You should be prepared to give reasons for your decisions and restrict information only when there are clear and lawful reasons for doing so. When information has to be confidential, you are required to ensure that you respect this.

2.6 Leadership

You have a duty to promote and support these principles through your leadership and example as a Presbyter, and to maintain and strengthen trust and confidence in the integrity of Presbytery in the conduct of its business.

2.7 Mutual Respect

You should treat one another with respect, recognising the diversity amongst Presbyters, listening to, learning from, and nurturing one another.

3 Being An Effective Presbyter

3.1 Your Duties

- You have a duty to ensure that Presbytery works effectively to make informed decisions.
- You should attend Presbytery meetings and meetings of any Committee on which you have been appointed regularly or submit apologies if you cannot attend. If you cannot attend meetings for a period of six months or longer you should inform the Convener and Presbytery Clerk.
- You should prepare for meetings by reading papers, asking for clarification where anything is unclear and considering issues in advance, and give notice in advance to Committee Conveners of any question which is likely to require some research.
- You should actively engage in discussion, debate and voting in meetings, contributing in a considered and constructive way, listening carefully, challenging sensitively, and avoiding conflict.
- You should involve yourself actively in the work of Presbytery and accept a fair share of responsibility for that work.
- You should ensure that any potential, actual or perceived conflicts of interests are dealt with in accordance with the Conflict of Interest Policy (see Appendix 2).
- You should participate in collective decision-making, accept majority decisions, and not act individually unless authorised to do so, recognising that the option to record your dissent to a decision of Presbytery is always available.
- You should ensure that your Kirk Session is kept informed of the business of Presbytery, where that is appropriate.

- You should interact with the staff of the Presbytery in a respectful manner, recognising their role in serving the Presbytery, and not demanding more from them than that which is reasonably within their capacity to deliver (and see Section 7).

4 Social Media

4.1 Social Media Policy

The use of social media is welcome to facilitate the work of Presbytery. Presbytery has a Social Media Policy (see Appendix 3) and Presbyters have an obligation to follow this policy in order to protect themselves, Presbytery and the Church of Scotland.

5 Financial Issues

5.1 Expenses

Where expenses are reasonably and properly incurred by you as a result of a decision made by Presbytery, these expenses can be reclaimed from the Treasurer of the Presbytery. This should be done timeously and with a copy of any receipts.

5.2 Payment of Remuneration

You must comply with the statutory rules that remuneration can only be paid by a charity to its charity trustees and “connected persons” to them if certain conditions are met; these conditions are set out in Section 67 of the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005. Remuneration includes salary received from the charity or payment made for services provided to it. “Connected persons” include:

- a person married to, the civil partner of or living with the charity trustee;
- the child (including stepchild), parent, grandchild, grandparent, brother or sister of the charity trustee (or the spouse of such person);
- a company where the charity trustee or connected person has a substantial interest;
- a Scottish partnership where the charity trustee or the connected person is a partner.

5.3 Gifts and Hospitality

Note that “gift” includes benefits such as relief from indebtedness, loan concessions, or provisions of services at a cost below that charged to members of the public.

You must never canvass or seek gifts or exceptional hospitality in your capacity as a Presbyter. As a general guide, it is usually appropriate to refuse gifts and offers made to you in your capacity as a Presbyter with the exceptions outlined below. If a gift which falls outside these exceptions is received by you, then you must declare this to the Presbytery Clerk. Permissible gifts are:

- isolated gifts of a trivial character or inexpensive seasonal gifts (for guidance, accepting a gift with a value of more than £25 is normally viewed as inappropriate);
- normal hospitality associated with your duties and which would reasonably be regarded as inappropriate to refuse or hospitality provided by colleagues or congregations in the course of your duties;
- gifts received by you for the Presbytery; which are to be declared to the Presbytery Clerk and will be registered and held by the Presbytery Office or their location noted.

6 Confidentiality

6.1 Your Responsibilities

As a part of your work as a Presbyter there will be times when you will be required to treat discussions, documents, or other information in a confidential manner. In a Presbytery meeting that part of the meeting may be held “in private”, but there may be other times when confidentiality is required. You may, for instance, receive information of a private nature which is not yet public, or which it may not be intended to be public. You must always respect and comply with any requirement to keep such information private. If you need further information or guidance on this, you should seek clarification from the Presbytery Clerk or from the Convener or Vice-Convener of the relevant Committee.

7 Other Organisations

7.1 Representing Presbytery

You may be appointed by Presbytery to be a member of another body or organisation. If this is the case, then you are bound by the rules of conduct of that body or organisation and should also observe the rules of this Code in carrying out the duties of that body.

If that appointment includes becoming a trustee for another charity, then that will require you to assume the full duties and liabilities of a charity trustee of that other body, and when serving on that body, you will be required by law to act in its best interests.

7.2 Conflicts Between Bodies

It is possible that a decision or action of some other body could conflict with Presbytery policy and that an actual or perceived conflict arise for Presbytery-nominated trustees. If this should arise you are strongly advised to seek guidance on your responsibilities from the Presbytery Clerk in the first instance, the Solicitor of the Church of Scotland may also be able to offer guidance, but independent legal advice may be desirable if you so wish.

Where a conflict of interest is irreconcilable, you may have to resign from one of the bodies.

It is acceptable, of course, to be a charity trustee of a congregation and of a Presbytery. Furthermore one can also be a General Trustee or an Assembly Trustee of the national Church of Scotland.

8 Responsibilities To Staff

8.1 Guidance for Staff Interactions

- You should ensure that you have a clear understanding of the scope of authority delegated to members of staff.
- You should act fairly and in accordance with the principles of best practice in making decisions affecting the appointment, professional development, appraisal and discipline of staff.
- You should understand and accept the difference in roles between Presbyters on the one part and staff on the other, and respect the responsibility on the staff for the day to day carrying out of the work of Presbytery.
- You should not act to undermine staff by word or action.
- If you have concerns about the performance of a member of staff, this should be addressed to the appropriate person:

- for Presbytery Clerk to the Convener of the Business and Finance Committee;
- for Depute Clerk to the Vice-Convener of the Business and Finance Committee;
- for other staff members to the Presbytery Clerk.

9 Fit And Proper Persons Test

9.1 HMRC Requirements

Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) require the managers of a charity to be 'fit and proper persons'. Trustees, and others having the general control and management of the charity, are included in this definition. Although neither HMRC nor the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) require declarations of the managers of Designated Religious Charities, it would be sensible nonetheless to apply the same standards.

Trustees are therefore required to declare to the Presbytery Clerk any involvement in or conviction for:

- tax fraud;
- other fraudulent behaviour including misrepresentation and/or identity theft;
- attacks against or abuse of tax repayment system;
- being barred from acting as a charity trustee by a charity regulator or Court, or being disqualified from acting as a company director.

Trustees are also required to declare whether they:

- are an undischarged bankrupt;
- have granted a Protected Trust Deed;
- have an unspent conviction for (a) a crime of dishonesty; or (b) offence under the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005

Any such declaration will be reported to a Governance Group comprising Moderator, Presbytery Clerk (to whom correspondence should be sent), Convener and Vice-Convener of Business and Finance Committee, who will consider whether any steps have to be taken to protect the charitable status of the Presbytery.

10 Breaches Of This Code

10.1 Material Breaches or Complaints

If the Governance Group believe that there has been a material breach of this Code by a Presbyter, or if a complaint is made by another Presbyter or by an interested party alleging such a breach, the Governance Group will give consideration to this matter at the first reasonable opportunity.

10.2 Process

In the event that the Governance Group consider that there has been a breach of the Code justifying action being taken, it will take whatever action is required. Possible courses of action include:

- i. no further action required;

- ii. reprimand, which shall be an expression of disapproval of particular behaviour with counsel regarding future conduct;
- iii. removal of the Presbyter from a committee or group, either temporarily or permanently;
- iv. referral to a Complaints Committee for further investigation using the existing Complaints Procedure and Discipline legislation².

10.3 Appeal Process in Case of Outcomes 10.2 ii and iii

For the avoidance of doubt, an appeal process is already contained in the legislation that would be used under outcome 10.2 iv.

A Presbyter who is subject to such action will have the right of appeal to the Presbytery (via the Convener of the Visitation and Oversight Committee) on the following grounds:

- i. an error in law;
- ii. irregularity of process, including breach of the principles of natural justice;
- iii. decision influenced by incorrect material fact; and
- iv. the severity of any sanction imposed.

The Convener of the Visitation and Oversight Committee will determine how to handle any such appeal. This would initiate the setting up of a panel, hearing from the Presbyter and from the Governance Group before making a determination. Members of the Governance Group will take no part in determining the appeal.

If the Presbyter whose conduct is the subject of a complaint under these provisions is a member of the Governance Group, he or she shall immediately withdraw from active membership of the Governance Group until the matter is resolved. If it appears that the independence of the Governance Group may be compromised, the Presbytery may appoint other members to act for the time being in place of the Governance Group.

If there are any questions in relation to the processes set out above these should be addressed to the Presbytery Clerk.

Approved by Presbytery, 19 June 2021.

² Discipline Act (Act I 2019) (As amended by Act XII 2020)

Appendices

Appendix I The Purpose of Presbytery

1 What Is A Presbytery For?

1.1 History

The Reformers set out three marks of the Church which also are in the Articles – the Word is purely preached, the sacraments administered according to Christ's ordinance, and discipline rightly exercised.

In the later sixteenth and early seventeenth Church government was developed with a focus on these three marks. The Church of Scotland's Articles Declaratory (which might be described as its Constitution) says "its government is Presbyterian, and is exercised through Kirk Sessions; Presbyteries, and General Assemblies."

Presbytery was therefore developed as part of a system of Church government which prized good order. This can probably still be seen in the format of Presbytery life even today.

1.2 The Future

This is from the Radical Action Plan approved by the General Assembly of 2019:-

"Presbytery is the gathered life of the Church of Scotland in a particular area. It brings together, in a mutually accountable and supportive relationship, the recognised ministries and elders representing local Christian communities in parish, education, chaplaincy and national church administration.

In Presbytery the leaders of the local church come together to:

- *discern the Holy Spirit's leading of the Church in their context;*
- *respond appropriately to Christ's call to follow;*
- *oversee the work of the local church; and*
- *be responsible for discipline and good order."*

The same report went on to say of the "new" Presbyteries that would be created:

- *become the natural place to which resources, funding, and decision-making are devolved;*
- *be able to employ and deploy staff to meet regionally identified needs and opportunities (e.g. around buildings, finance, church planting, partnership and mission);*
- *have the capacity to retain and make better use of a higher proportion of the funds raised in the area for the mission of the local church;*
- *have the increased capacity to support and encourage those who are in recognised ministries or are office bearers, engendering resilience and the spirit to develop church life;*
- *free up time and energy for local mission including by reducing the administrative and legislative burden;*
- *have increased capacity to speak with a collective voice to other regional centres of influence in civic life;*

- *have the capacity to take risks and learn from mistakes; and need less input from the national offices, allowing a reduction in central spend, enabling increased devolution of funding and resources.*

2 What Should A Presbytery Do?

2.1 Charitable Purpose

The sole charitable purpose of the Presbytery is the advancement of religion. This finds expression in a number of different ways as set out below.

2.2 Mutual Support and Encouragement

The Presbytery should be a forum in which improved collegiality and team working can be encouraged, where Presbyters and congregations can be encouraged and supported, providing opportunities to come together to build relationships across the Presbytery.

2.3 Create, Maintain and Implement a Presbytery Plan

- The Plan should comply with Church Law.
- The Plan should be shaped by an agreed sense of purpose and direction.
- The Plan should be up to date through an annual review which is underpinned by up to date information about the Presbytery area.
- The Plan should be easily accessed by Presbyters and local church office bearers.
- The Plan should be a familiar document to those working with congregations in areas such as stewardship, buildings.
- When there needs to be significant change this should be handled openly and expeditiously.

2.4 Resourcing Congregations

Presbytery should provide resources or be able to point to resources for congregations and other expressions of local church life:

- preparation for and follow up of Local Church Review with a focus on mission;
- specialist advice in the care of church buildings;
- new forms of church life;
- guidance on the use of social media;
- finance, stewardship, charity governance, seeking of grants;
- Safeguarding training for volunteers and Kirk Sessions;
- good communications about Presbytery life and resources available;
- conflict resolution when things go wrong.

2.5 Pastoral Care

Presbytery has a duty of care to those who act in its name and who take extra responsibility within its structures and processes.

In particular it must provide pastoral care to parish ministers who do not have a minister of their own. Such pastoral care should offer choices in provision reflecting the differing needs of each individual.

Presbytery also must ensure provision of pastoral care to those involved in the discipline process.

2.6 Keeping Good Order

There should be people within the life of Presbytery with a good knowledge and understanding of Church Law who can ensure both detailed compliance and a shared understanding of what needs to be done.

This is done by ensuring that:

- a Clerk is appointed and an appropriate contract is in place;
- giving charity trustee training to new members;
- meetings are well prepared and the agenda, minutes, reports and deliverances are circulated well in advance;
- the Standing Orders are up to date and readily available;
- the Roll of Presbytery is continually updated and kept in accordance with GDPR;
- meetings are called in good time and in the correct way;
- Presbytery meetings are held in a space which is accessible, comfortable and appropriate;
- where appropriate congregations are cited to appear for their interests;
- the minute is accurately taken and properly approved as soon as possible;
- extract minutes and other correspondence is processed correctly and in good time;
- Presbytery records are safely kept and can be readily accessed by office bearers when required;
- the checking of congregations' rolls and records on an annual basis as required by GA legislation;
- the congregational annual accounts are attested by suitably qualified persons prior to their submission to OSCR;
- Presbytery's finances are fully monitored and that the accounts are independently examined;
- staff are on good contracts of employment, wages and other remuneration is regularly reviewed, lines of management are clear, annual appraisal is conducted.

2.7 Vacancies

As soon as a vacancy occurs or a date of demission, translation or removal has been agreed Presbytery must appoint from its own membership (or from the membership of another Presbytery through the provisions of Act 5 2001) an Interim Moderator for the Kirk Session(s).

Where the Presbytery Plan provides for a Minister to be called this right of call should be processed without delay in terms of Act 8 2003.

Where a Presbytery wishes to depart from the terms of the Plan e.g. to allow for a delay in the right of call then the Presbytery Plan must be suspended and the concerned congregation(s) cited for their interest.

In due course the Presbytery shall process the Call from a vacant congregation and make appropriate arrangements for the ordination/induction service having consulted with local parties.

The new Minister should be offered a warm welcome, a good introduction to Presbytery life and connections to the Presbytery's networks of support and information.

In the event of the right of call expiring Presbytery should give full consideration to the circumstances.

2.8 Superintendence

The Presbytery has general powers of superintendence over congregations, ministers and deacons serving within the bounds. In particular this is expressed in:

- a well-resourced Local Church Review process including thorough, supportive follow up;
- a trained committee to deal with complaints;

- Clerk and appropriate office bearers having a thorough understanding of the discipline process and appropriate mechanisms such as delegated authority to handle such matters correctly.

2.9 Interaction with National Church Agencies

These take at least two forms:

1. Where there is shared responsibility set out in GA legislation e.g. in the supervising of candidates for the Ministry, consent for major building works. In these matters Presbytery must ensure that it plays its required part with thoroughness.
2. When Presbytery is asked to respond to GA remits and in particular in Barrier Act procedure. Presbytery should always ensure that such responses are properly considered and timeously given.

2.10 Beyond the Church

Presbytery should be a means by which the local church can gain a collective voice to speak with civil authority, other denominations, other faith groups, the third sector.

Appendix 2

Conflicts of Interest

3 Conflict of Interest Policy

3.1 Introduction

Conflicts of interest affect all types and size of organisations. In the charity context, a conflict of interest can inhibit free discussion, and can lead to decisions which are not in the best interests of the charity and which are invalid or open to challenge. Conflicts of interest can also be damaging to a charity's reputation and to the public's confidence and trust in charities in general.

Charity trustees have a primary duty in terms of S.66 of the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005 to act in the best interests of the charity at all times.

Those who are recognised ministers and deacons within the bounds, commissioned elders, and appointed additional elders are also charity trustees for the Presbytery of Aberdeen and Shetland, Scottish Charity No SC013064, ("the Presbytery").

The Presbytery recognises that on occasion, trustees can find themselves in a situation that may give rise to conflicts of interest, whether potential or actual, perceived or alleged. Where trustees can identify a conflict and the Congregation can put in place measures to prevent the conflict affecting decision-making then the harmful effects of a conflict of interest can be prevented. The proper handling of conflicts of interest is an essential part of proper decision-making by trustees.

The Presbytery has accordingly developed this policy to provide guidance to all trustees regarding conflicts of interest in order to avoid any actual or potential conflicts of interest, perception of bias or misuse of authority, and to ensure and evidence that all decisions by individual trustees on behalf of the Presbytery are taken only in the best interests of the Presbytery at all times.

3.2 Scope and Purpose

The Presbytery is committed to ensuring that all of its trustees act in the best interests of the Presbytery at all times.

This policy aims to provide guidance to those involved in management and decision-making and seeks to ensure that the Presbytery can be seen to be acting in accordance with well recognised rules of good governance.

It is inevitable that conflicts of interest will arise. This policy aims to ensure that any conflict is identified and managed appropriately.

It is the responsibility of each individual to recognise situations in which he or she has a conflict of interest, or might reasonably be seen by others to have a conflict, to disclose that conflict to the appropriate person and to take such further steps as may be appropriate as set out in more detail under the procedure below.

If an individual is uncertain about how this policy might affect his or her activities or has any questions about its application, he or she should contact the Presbytery Clerk.

3.3 Conflict of Interest

3.3.1 What is a Conflict of Interest?

A conflict of interest is any situation in which a trustee's personal interests or loyalties could, or could be seen to, prevent the trustee from making a decision only in the best interests of the Presbytery.

A conflict of interest arises when the interests of a trustee (or a person closely connected to them, whether by family or business) are incompatible or in competition with the interests of the Presbytery. Such situations present a risk that trustees will make a decision based on external influences and that such a decision will not be in the best interests of the Presbytery.

The most common types of conflict include:

- **direct financial interest** – where there is, or appears to be, an opportunity for personal financial gain
- **indirect financial interest** – the financial gain of a close relative or close friend or business associate

The level of financial interest should not be a determining factor in deciding whether a conflict should be disclosed. The Presbytery expects disclosure of any financial interest, however small.

- **non-financial or personal conflicts** – a non-financial interest can take many forms and is generally one where there is, or appears to be, an opportunity for personal benefit, advantage or enhancement to prospects for the individual (direct), or similar gains to someone in their immediate family or a person with whom the individual has a close personal relationship (indirect)
- **conflicts of loyalties** – a particular type of conflict of interest in which a trustee's loyalty or duty to another person or organisation could prevent the trustee from making a decision only in the best interests of the Congregation.

3.3.2 Conflicts of Loyalties

A conflict of loyalty may arise where a trustee is also a charity trustee or member of another body (for example a community association) if that could (or could be seen to) interfere with their ability to make decisions only in the best interests of the Presbytery. In such circumstances, a trustee must act at all times only in the best interests of the Presbytery in carrying out their trustee role, regardless of how decisions made in that role may impact on the other body.

The interests of the Presbytery and such other body will often be consistent, or complementary, but it is inevitable that on occasion a conflict will arise. Whether a conflict of loyalty is of such low risk that the affected trustee can participate in the decision is a judgement for the trustees and will depend on the particular decision and circumstances of the case. It will often be the case that the potential damage that could be caused by any conflict is so minimal that it can be managed without any difficulty. The trustees must take all relevant factors into account and be ready to explain their approach if asked to do so.

The trustees must consider the issue of the conflict of interest so that any potential effect on decision making is eliminated. This may mean deciding that the conflict of interest is so serious that it can only effectively be prevented by removal, which is likely to mean the resignation of the

trustee. This will only be necessary if the conflict of interest is likely to recur frequently or otherwise poses high risks to effective decision making.

If the trustees decide that the conflict is not so serious as to require removal, they must prevent the competing interest/duty from affecting their decision. This is likely to mean that the affected trustee should withdraw from the meeting and from all aspects of the discussion, decision making and voting. The conflicted trustee should be given the opportunity before withdrawing from the meeting to provide any information necessary to help the remaining trustees make a decision in the best interests of the Presbytery.

Deciding that a conflict of interest is low risk, and that the affected trustee can participate in the decision, is a judgement for the trustees. It will depend on the particular decision and relevant circumstances. The trustees should take all relevant factors into account and be ready to explain their approach if asked. They should keep a proper record of their discussions and decision. The trustees should be satisfied that their handling of the matter is an appropriate way of demonstrating that their decision was made only in the best interests of the Presbytery.

3.3.3 Recognising and Disclosing Conflicts of Interest

All trustees are required to recognise and disclose activities that might give rise to conflicts of interest, or the perception of conflicts of interest, at the earliest opportunity. This allows the other trustees to consider the issue of the conflict of interest to ensure that any potential effect on decision-making is eliminated and to demonstrate that their decision was made only in the best interests of the Presbytery. If properly managed, activities can proceed as normal whilst at the same time upholding the trustees' obligations to the Presbytery, meeting regulatory and other external requirements and protecting the integrity and reputation of the Presbytery. By contrast, conflicts which are not managed effectively may jeopardise the Presbytery's public standing and may cause serious damage to the reputation of the Church and of the individuals concerned.

It is therefore the Presbytery's policy to ensure that when conflicts or perceived conflicts of interest arise they are acknowledged and disclosed.

There can be situations in which the appearance of conflict of interest is present even when no conflict actually exists. It is important for all trustees when evaluating a potential conflict of interest to consider how it might be perceived by others. The duty to declare a possible conflict applies to the perception of the situation as much as to the actual existence of a conflict. When deciding whether such an interest is present, trustees should ask themselves whether a reasonable member of the public, with knowledge of all of the relevant facts of the situation, would think that their judgement might be prejudiced or influenced by their private or personal interest. This is an objective test. Trustees must not decide whether they would take a decision without prejudice, but whether they could be seen as doing so.

There may, exceptionally, be circumstances in which a conflict cannot be satisfactorily managed. In such circumstances the trustees should remove the conflict by not proceeding with a proposed course of action; by proceeding in a different way so that the conflict does not arise; or by not appointing a particular trustee or requiring the resignation of a trustee.

3.4 Procedure

It is the duty of every trustee to disclose any conflict of interest or any circumstances that might reasonably give rise to the perception of conflict of interest.

The following procedure should be followed to ensure that conflicts of interest are identified at as early a stage as possible and that, once identified, action is taken to ensure that the conflict of interest

does not give rise to a situation where decisions are taken by trustees which are, or could be perceived as being, not in the best interests of the Presbytery.

3.4.1 Copy of Policy to be Provided

Potential and new trustees will be informed before they are appointed that they will be expected to adhere to this conflict of interest policy and a copy of the policy will be provided to them.

3.4.2 Disclosure

Any trustee who fails to disclose a potential, actual or perceived conflict of interest will have failed to comply with their statutory duty. Any failure to disclose a potential, actual or perceived conflict of interest is a serious issue and could result in the removal of the trustee.

- There is a standard agenda item at the beginning of each Presbytery meeting to declare any potential, actual or perceived conflicts of interest.
- A trustee should declare any interest which he or she has in an item to be discussed, at the earliest possible opportunity and before any discussion of the item itself. If a trustee is uncertain whether he or she is conflicted he or she should err on the side of openness, declaring the issue and discussing it with the other trustees.
- If a trustee is aware of an undeclared conflict of interest affecting another trustee they should notify the other trustees or the Moderator. All trustees have a collective responsibility to manage conflicts and to act clearly in the Presbytery's best interests.

3.4.3 Managing Conflicts of Interest

If a potential, actual or perceived conflict of interest is identified the trustees must act only in the best interests of the Presbytery. This means the trustees must consider the issue of the conflict of interest so that any effect this may have on good decision-making is eliminated.

In deciding whether a conflict of interest exists trustees must consider the following:

- Has the decision been taken in the best interests of the Presbytery?
- Does the decision protect the reputation of the Presbytery?
- What impression does the decision have on those outside the Presbytery?
- Can the trustees demonstrate that they have made the decision in the best interests of the Presbytery and independently of any competing interests?
- Does the presence of a conflicted trustee inhibit free discussion and influence the decision-making process in any way?

Where the trustees decide that there is a potential, actual or perceived conflict of interest the conflicted trustee should not participate in the decision-making process.

The conflicted trustee should withdraw from the meeting prior to discussion of the item, unless given permission by the Convener or Moderator to remain.

The conflicted trustee should be given the opportunity before withdrawing from the meeting to provide any information necessary to help the remaining trustees make a decision in the best interests of the Presbytery.

A conflicted trustee should not take part in any vote on the item which is the subject of the conflict.

3.4.4 Recording

In all instances where a potential, actual or perceived conflict of interest is disclosed at a trustees' meeting the minutes of the meeting should record the trustees' discussion and the decision taken. Interests should be declared at the start of a meeting if a trustee knows in advance that a relevant item will appear in the agenda.

If there is a discussion, the written record of the decision should include:

- the nature of the conflict;
- which trustees were affected;
- whether any conflicts of interest were declared in advance;
- an outline of the discussion;
- whether anyone withdrew from the discussion; and
- how the decision was taken in the best interests of the Presbytery.

3.5 Consequences of Breach

Where conflicts of interest are not identified or properly managed there can be serious consequences for both the affected trustee and the Presbytery. Decisions taken may not be valid and could be challenged, and can damage the reputation of the Church and the trust of the public.

If the circumstances are sufficiently serious, a failure to disclose a conflict of interest could therefore result in the removal of the conflicted trustee from the relevant Committee or Presbytery.

3.6 Review

This Policy will be reviewed by the Presbytery every three years.

Appendix 3 Social Media

4 Social Media Policy

4.1 Introduction

The Presbytery of Aberdeen and Shetland welcomes the use of social media as it provides easier ways for congregations to:

- communicate instantly with members, keeping them informed and updated;
- signpost involvement with the local community; and
- forge relationships with individuals and the wider community that build trust and understanding.

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and any online communication have the ability to achieve these outcomes but it is necessary to outline a few issues Presbyters should bear in mind when communicating online.

Websites and Social media pages should be up to date and current.

The Church of Scotland has produced detailed guidelines for Social Media use focussing on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.³

Choosing the right social media platform is important and involves consideration of who you are trying to reach and what you are trying to achieve.

Once you have chosen your platform you can start to create your congregational account.

Always ensure that there are two or more people who hold the login details and passwords for your social media accounts. If not, you will have to start from scratch when someone leaves.

4.2 Images

Ensure you use high quality, eye catching, non-watermarked images which fit the optimum size for each social media platform.

4.3 Facebook

Facebook is the most popular social networking site worldwide. Facebook offers three options; a profile, a page, or a group.

A profile represents a single individual and is for non-commercial use.

A page is a timeline for organisations and businesses.

Groups are effective in connecting family, peers, colleagues or people with a shared interest.

A Facebook page is recommended. A page will enable people to find you and explore the life of your congregation. This page can be used to advertise events and to share prayers, images, videos, thoughts and quotes.

³ <https://www.aberdeenshetlandpresbytery.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Social-Media-Guidelines.pdf>

You must already have a personal Facebook account that you can use to create a page. You will then become the admin of the page. You should then assign other people as admins and editors. You can remove yourself as an admin for the page later if you no longer wish your Profile to be attached to the church page.

4.4 Twitter

Twitter is often the first place news stories appear online. People also use Twitter to hold global conversations, make friends and build support for campaigns. Yet Twitter is one of the most difficult social platforms for congregations to maintain. Tweets fly so fast and furiously, that on average they have a lifespan of around 10 minutes. So how do congregations use Twitter effectively? If you want to keep up a Twitter profile, you will need to sustain a steady flow of tweets. This may seem overwhelming, but your congregation is potentially already producing enough content to be used.

When choosing your twitter username (also known as your handle), you are limited to 15 characters. It should be something relevant, unique and easy to remember. Usernames are preceded by the @ symbol (@ChurchScotland). If you are planning on setting up an Instagram account as well, you will want to check that the username is available on both platforms. Your display name (note: different from username) can be up to 50 characters and therefore you should be able to include your congregation's full name.

4.5 Instagram

Instagram, users can connect with a global community which shares millions of photos and videos every day. This social platform works best on your mobile phone, and it is a wonderful place to explore the world and find like-minded individuals. Instagram has become an indispensable social media outlet, particularly for engaging with young people.

4.6 Safeguarding

Adults should think twice and consider speaking to a parent before adding/following children under 16 on social media. Always obtain consent from parents before using images of children on social media. Congregations address this in different ways. Some have a blanket consent form which parents sign before their children take part in activities. Other congregations choose not to include photographs of children on their social media accounts at all. Consult the Church of Scotland safeguarding resources for further guidance.⁴

4.7 Personal View Sharing

Church of Scotland personnel are to be mindful of their status as a Minister, Deacon, Parish Worker or Elder of the Church of Scotland and for such reasons should consider carefully before engaging with local news agencies and on social media platforms ensuring that they consider that what they are sharing is appropriate.

4.8 Confidentiality

Be sensitive about confidentiality and the risk of intrusion. Social media does not change our fundamental understanding about confidentiality across the whole life of the Church. When telling a story about a situation which involves someone else, always ask yourself: is this my story to tell? Would it cause distress, inconvenience, upset or embarrassment to others if they found out you had shared in this way? If in any doubt, do not share it online.

⁴ <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/about-us/safeguarding-service>

4.9 Privacy and Security

Be mindful of your own security. Be careful about the personal details you share online. Assume anything you share about yourself is in the public domain. Do not assume anything electronic is secure. You might be able to delete or recall an email but there's no guarantee the recipient will. Equally, your privacy settings on your social media tools might mean only your accepted "friends" or "followers" can see the things you say, but there is no guarantee that they will not pass them on outside your trusted circles.