

## Code of conduct for Council (and committee) members

### Role of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS)

1. The RCVS has statutory and Royal Charter functions; and, through the RCVS Trust (also known as RCVS Knowledge), charitable functions. These are set out more fully in the Charter; the Veterinary Surgeons Act (VSA) 1966; and the Trust's Memorandum and Articles of Association. See: <http://www.rcvs.org.uk/about-us/royal-charter-and-legislation>.

### Purpose of this Code

2. In order for the RCVS to command the confidence of all interested parties, it is necessary for the Council members to observe appropriate standards of conduct. The purpose of this Code is to help to ensure that high standards are met and that those who act in the name of the RCVS are beyond reproach in the way they conduct themselves and the business of the RCVS. The required standards are set out in this Code that applies to all members of Council upon appointment. Its provisions apply generally to those who sit on committees; sub-committees; working parties, etc.

### Principles

3. In performing their duties, Council members should observe the seven principles of public life ('The Nolan Principles'); namely:

**Selflessness:** holders of public office should take decisions solely in terms of the public interest;

**Integrity:** holders of public office should 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 benefit for themselves, their family or their friends. They must declare 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 for their decisions and actions to the public 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 doing so;

**Honesty:** holders of public office should be truthful;

**Leadership:** holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour and treat others with respect. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

## General guidelines

4. Council members are expected to:
  - a. Work in the best interests of the public, and of animal health and welfare and public health;
  - b. Respectfully listen to the voices of the professions, the public and other stakeholders, and reflect them in discussions where appropriate, ensuring they are put into context;
  - c. Neither be answerable to, nor represent, any group of individuals;
  - d. Support the College's vision and work towards the success of the College and its functions;
  - e. Live the College's values (diverse and inclusive; compassionate; forward thinking; straight talking);
  - f. Act at all times in a constructive, supportive and compassionate manner;
  - g. Exercise a duty of care to the staff employed by the College, working through the CEO and Registrar;
  - h. Recognise the importance of a collegiate atmosphere where robust discussion is welcomed in the formation of policy and multiple points of view are listened to and respected;
  - i. Respect and support the decisions made by Council when communicating externally;
  - j. Communicate College activities and positions to relevant stakeholders.

## Specific guidelines

5. Council members are responsible for ensuring that they have a clear understanding of their role and the role of the RCVS as set out in the VSA 1966, and the Royal Charters. Council Members are not elected or appointed to represent any constituency, and all have a responsibility equivalent to trustees for the governance of the College. This includes overall fiscal and legal responsibility. Having been elected or appointed, they have a responsibility to make themselves available for meetings of the Council and any committees, sub-committees, working parties, etc., to which they have been appointed (unless they are unable, with good reason, to do so); and to be diligent in reading papers and giving appropriate consideration to issues to ensure that they are making decisions on a fully informed basis.
6. Council members should follow the principles of mutual respect in all their activities and be prepared to accept that others may have equally strong views in good faith that differ from their own. Council members must uphold high standards of courtesy and respect in all Council debates and meetings. Council members should treat colleagues with respect and not engage in any behaviour towards any colleague or member of staff that might reasonably be interpreted as discriminatory, bullying or harassment.

## Collective responsibility

7. Council members are collectively responsible for the decisions, even if they have voted against, abstained from voting or were absent when the decision was made, and are expected to respect and support the collective decision, when communicating externally.

## Confidentiality

8. Council members must not disclose information that has been shared with them but designated by the RCVS as private or confidential. If members are in any way unsure if they can disclose information, then they should in the first instance seek advice from the President. If members

disagree with a classification of private or confidential then members should raise with the relevant Committee Chair / President

### **Conflicts of interest**

9. The '*Policy for managing conflicts of interest*' (see: <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/document-library/conflicts-of-interest-policy/>) requires all Council members to file a Declaration of Interest; to keep it up to date; and to declare any additional interests as necessary at each meeting and generally to comply with the requirements of the policy.

### **Communication**

10. Council members have a role in communicating with the public and the profession about what the RCVS does but should take care to ensure that what they say is accurate and consistent with established policies and procedures – if in doubt, they should consult the Communications Department. Any communication with the media on behalf of the RCVS must be discussed with the Communications Department in advance.
11. Council members have a responsibility to distinguish clearly when speaking or writing in any public forum, between the views of the RCVS and their personal views, or of any other organisation they may be affiliated with.

### **Enforcement**

12. Complaints that an RCVS Council member has breached this Code of Conduct should be made at the earliest opportunity to the RCVS President /Registrar, in accordance with the '*Policy for Dealing with Complaints about Council Members*'.

Agreed by Council 8 June 2023