



Suffolk Parent Carer Forum Conflict of Interest Policy

Suffolk Parent Carer Forum is committed to ensuring its decisions and decision-making processes are, and are seen to be, free from personal bias and do not unfairly favour any individual connected with the organisation.

A conflict of interest arises when the best interests of an individual are, or could be, different from the best interests of the organisation itself. This policy sets out the guidelines for members, staff and volunteers to follow in order to protect both the organisation and the individuals involved from any appearance of impropriety.

This policy and procedure are designed to ensure that any conflict of interest or potential conflict a member, employee or volunteer of SPCF might have, is declared and dealt with so as to ensure that the organisation operates in line with best practice.

Policy Statement

It is the organisation's policy to:

1. Ensure every individual understands what constitutes a conflict of interest and that they have a responsibility to recognise and declare any conflicts that might arise for them.
2. Document the conflict and the action(s) taken to ensure that the conflict does not affect the decision making of the organisation.

Types of conflicts of interest

1. "Conflicts of Interest" arise where there is a conflict between the official responsibilities of an individual and any other interests that particular individual may have, e.g. where an individual could be seen to be influencing organisational matters for actual or potential personal benefit. Such a conflict arises, for instance, when an individual is in a position to influence, directly or indirectly, decisions in ways that could lead to gain for them, their family or others to the detriment of the organisation's integrity.
2. Conflicts of interest may also include "Conflicts of Commitment" which exist when the external activities of an individual are so substantial or demanding in terms of time and/or attention so as to interfere with their responsibilities to the organisation. Conflicts of this type primarily involve questions of obligations and effort, but may often be tied to financial remuneration or other inducements and as such may also constitute a conflict of interest.

Declaration of Interests

1. The organisation requires all committee, staff and volunteers to declare their interests, including any gifts or hospitality received in connection with their role in Suffolk Parent Carer Forum by writing to the Chair of Operations as soon as they recognise a potential conflict situation may exist. The Chair must declare any interests to the Trustees.

2. If an employee or volunteer is unsure as to what to declare, or whether/when their declaration should be updated, they should err on the side of caution and discuss the matter with their line manager in the first instance. The overriding principle is that if in doubt, disclose.
3. If an individual fails to declare an interest that is known to the organisation, the Chair of Operations will declare that interest in order to avoid or manage a potential conflict situation for the organisation.

Managing contracts

1. Members, employees and volunteers who have a conflict of interest, are not permitted to be involved in managing or monitoring a contract in which they have an interest.
2. Monitoring arrangements for such contracts will include provisions for an independent challenge of bills and invoices, and termination of the contract if the relationship is unsatisfactory.

Guidance for Service Users

1. Service users, or the carer of someone who uses the organisation's services, should not be involved in decisions that directly affect the service that they, or the person they care for, receive. Individuals should declare their interest at the earliest opportunity and withdraw from any subsequent discussion. The same applies if they face a conflict for any other reason.
2. Individuals may, however, participate in discussions from which they may indirectly benefit, for example where the benefits are universal to all users, or where the benefit is minimal.

Guidance for SPCF Team Members

1. A conflict of interest may arise in the following circumstances where a member or their relative:
 - Is also a member, trustee, owner or employee of another company/organisation which stands to gain financially or otherwise from decisions made by a group which the member attends on behalf of forum.
Is also a member, trustee, owner or employee of another group or organisation which enables them to influence strategic decisions in relation to children and young people and their families in Suffolk.
 - Is also a member, trustee, owner or employee of another organisation with similar objectives, particularly one with which there may be perceived to be any element of competition. It should be stressed that it is acceptable for a member to have other such interests. These interests need to be declared so that they can be taken into account to ensure there is no conflict arising.
2. When a member identifies that they have a potential conflict of interest they must:
 - Declare it as soon as they become aware of it.
 - Ensure it is entered in the Conflict of Interest Register (ongoing conflicts), and/or minuted in the appropriate papers (one-off conflicts).
 - Not take part in any SPCF team discussions relating to the matter.
 - Not take part in any decision-making related to the matter.
 - Not be counted in the quorum for decision-making related to the matter.

3. Members are obliged to declare any interests at the beginning of any meeting organised by the forum and this will be minuted accordingly.
4. Attendees at the meeting will be asked if they would like to discuss the conflict of interest issue further, and the member in question may be asked to leave the meeting while this discussion takes place.
5. The minutes of the SPCF team meeting will state that there was a declared conflict, that the member left the room (or the reason they were asked to stay), that the member took no part in discussion or decision-making on the matter, and that the meeting was quorate (not counting the affected member). There will also be a note regarding any other actions taken to manage the conflict.
6. If there is split opinion, the team present in the meeting will be invited to vote. In the event of a hung vote, the Chair of Trustees will have the final say. The member in question will then be informed of the outcome and must abide by the decision reached.
7. A member with a declared interest will not be allowed to vote on any item to which their conflict of interest relates, nor will their attendance count towards a quorum at the meeting in question. The member will not normally be asked to leave the meeting whilst the item in question is being discussed, but may be asked to withdraw if the Chair considers that their presence may unduly influence the outcome of a decision.
8. If a member is unsure what to declare, they should discuss the matter with the Chair for confidential guidance.
9. If a member fails to declare an interest which is known to other forum members, then they will declare it and an investigation will be undertaken by the officers to review any meetings attended or decisions that have been made that may have been compromised because of any unknown conflict. At the conclusion of the investigation, the Chair and any one other officer will announce the findings and confirm any actions required. The Chair and officer's decision is final and must be complied with.
10. In the event that the investigation involves the Chair, then the investigation will be carried out by the Chair of Trustees and one of the other Trustees. Their findings, conclusion and decision are final and must be complied with.
11. The officers will discuss conflicts of interest issues when a forum member is considering standing for election as an officer or local representative role, a subgroup of the organisation, or a strategic/operational group which the member wants to join as a representative of the organisation, including grant panels and/or tenders. The officers' decision is final and must be complied with.
12. The organisation will provide, on an annual basis, all members with a form on which they will declare any interest which is likely to conflict with their duty as a member of the organisation.

Agreement

I have received a copy of the Conflict of Interest Policy and I have read, understood and agree to follow its content.

Signed:

Date:

Print: