



Northern Ireland Audit Office

MEDIA RELEASE

Mr Kieran Donnelly, the Comptroller and Auditor General, today published a good practice guide for public sector bodies on how to identify and manage conflicts of interest.

Mr Donnelly said **“Staff and board members of public bodies must discharge their duties in a manner that is honest, fair and unbiased. Consequently, public bodies must ensure that conflicts of interest are identified and managed in a way that safeguards the integrity of staff and board members and maximises public confidence in an organisation’s delivery of public services.”**

This Guide seeks to provide clear and simple advice for staff drafting and implementing conflict of interest policies. It should also help Board members and staff in key positions to recognise when they have a conflict of interest and how they should act when such a situation arises.

The main aim of the guide is to promote high standards in public life and especially to follow the key characteristics of propriety as defined in the ‘Seven Principles of Public Life’ known as the Nolan Principles. These seven principles underpinning public life are: Selflessness; Integrity; Objectivity; Accountability; Openness; Honesty; and Leadership. A key observation in the tenth report by the Committee on Standards in Public Life states ‘the Registration and Declaration of Interests by public office holders that may constitute or may be perceived to constitute a conflict of interest is one of the cornerstones of probity in public life.

One of the key messages in the Guide is that a perception of a conflict of interest can be just as significant as an actual conflict of interest.

The Guide includes case studies of different types of conflicts of interest. Examples include where officials or board members:

- Use their position for direct financial gains for themselves, a relative or a close friend.
- Take part in decisions that could lead to the appointment of a friend or relative.
- Are involved in the award of a contract or grant where the applicant is connected to the individuals.
- Carry out business, on behalf of the public sector organisation, with their own or a relative’s company.
- Own shares or work for another business that has dealings with the public body.
- Accepts offers of gifts, hospitality or other benefits from actual or potential contractors or suppliers.

The Guide sets out a range of strategies for managing conflicts of interest and the circumstances where particular strategies are most suitable and least suitable. For the most serious conflicts public officials and board members may either have to relinquish the private interest that is creating the conflict or resign from their position in the public sector organisation.

THIS STATEMENT IS ISSUED ON THE STRICT UNDERSTANDING THAT IT IS NOT FOR PUBLICATION OR BROADCAST BEFORE 00.01 hrs ON THURSDAY 26 MARCH 2015

Notes for Editors

1. The Comptroller and Auditor General is Head of the Northern Ireland Audit Office (the Audit Office). He, and the NIAO, are totally independent of Government. He certifies the accounts of Government Departments and a range of other public sector bodies. He has statutory authority to report to the Assembly on the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which departments and public bodies use their resources. His reports are published as Assembly papers.
2. This report is available on the Audit Office website at www.niauditoffice.gov.uk. The report is embargoed until 00.01 hrs on Thursday 26 March 2015.
3. Background briefing can be obtained from the Audit Office by contacting Eddie Bradley (028 9025 1011) or Colette Kane (028 9025 1064).