

Officers' Code of Conduct

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INTRODUCTION

The public are entitled to expect the highest standards of conduct from all Council employees. This code incorporates points from existing laws, regulations and conditions of service for the guidance of all staff. The aim of the code is to help maintain and improve standards and protect employees from misunderstanding or criticism, it must be read and followed by all employees. This code is complementary to the Council's 'Policies and Staff Codes', copies of which are kept by Directors and Heads of Service for reference, as they give fuller details on some items. They can also be accessed via the Intranet

1. STANDARDS

- 1.1 Council employees are expected to give the highest possible standard of service to the public and provide appropriate advice and information to Councillors and fellow employees. Employees are expected to report any deficiency in the provision of service to the appropriate manager. They must report any impropriety or breach of rules or procedure to the manager concerned. Concerns about another Officer or Member can be raised through the Confidential Reporting Code

2. DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION

- 2.1 The law requires that certain types of information must be available to Members, auditors, government departments, service users and the public. Managers will advise their staff what information should be given and what is confidential. Personal information is generally considered to be confidential and anyone in doubt should check with their manager prior to providing information to contacts.
- 2.2 Employees should not use any information, obtained in the course of their employment, for personal gain or benefit, nor should they pass it to others who might use it in such a way. Any personal information from a Councillor should not be divulged without the Councillor's approval, except where required by law.

3. POLITICAL NEUTRALITY

- 3.1 Employees serve all Councillors and must ensure that their individual rights are respected.
- 3.2 Some employees may be required to advise political groups and must do so in ways which do not compromise their political neutrality.
- 3.3 Employees must follow every lawful expressed policy of the authority and must not allow their own personal or political opinions to interfere with their work.
- 3.4 Any political assistants, appointed in accordance with the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, are exempt from the standards set in 3.1 to 3.3 above.
- 3.5 Employees holding politically restricted posts are disqualified from membership of any local authority other than a Parish or Community Council and from being an MP or MEP. The Council will maintain a list of these posts and advise the postholders concerned.

4. RELATIONSHIPS

- 4.1 Councillors. - Mutual respect between employees and Councillors is essential. Close personal familiarity between employees and Councillors can damage the relationships and should be avoided.
- 4.2 The Local Community and Service Users. - Employees should always remember their responsibilities to the community and should ensure courteous, efficient and impartial service to all groups and individuals within it.
- 4.3 Contractors. - All relationships with external contractors, or potential contractors, should be made known to the appropriate manager. Orders and contracts must be awarded on merit, by fair competition against other tenders and no special favour should be shown. No part of the community should be discriminated against.

5. EMPLOYMENT MATTERS

- 5.1 Employees involved in appointments should ensure that these are made on the basis of merit and ability of the candidates. Employees should not

be involved in an appointment where they are related to an applicant or have a close personal relationship outside work with one.

- 5.2 Employees should not be involved in decisions relating to discipline, promotion or pay adjustment for any other employee who is a relative or partner.
- 5.3 Every candidate for any appointment must disclose in writing if they are related to any member or senior officer of the Council. A reference to this disclosure is included in the Application Form for Appointment, which must be completed by anyone applying for a post.

6. OUTSIDE COMMITMENTS

- 6.1 Employees should not undertake outside work if this would overlap with their official duties or cause a conflict of interest. Officers paid on or above Scale point 28 require written consent to take any outside employment, from their Director.
- 6.2 Any inventions, writings or drawings created in the course of an employee's normal duties are considered the 'intellectual property' of the Council and should not be passed on to another party without the permission of the employee's manager.

7. PERSONAL INTERESTS

- 7.1 Employees must declare to their Director and to the Head of Democratic Services any interests, financial or non-financial, which could bring about a conflict with the Council's interests.
- 7.2 Employees should declare to their Director and the Head of Democratic Services, membership of any organisation not open to the public, including any lodge, chapter, society trust or regular meeting, other than activities of a generally recognised religion.
- 7.3 Employees who join such an organisation during their employment with the Council must also disclose such memberships to their Director and the Head of Democratic Services.

- 7.4 Candidates for a post will not be asked and need not declare their membership of an organisation. However, candidates for all posts will be required to sign a declaration on their application form accepting the need to comply with this requirement, if they are subsequently employed by the Council.
- 7.5 Following the advice of the Employers Organisation, Freemasonry is an “organisation” for the purposes of para 7.2, 7.3 and 7.4.

8. EQUALITY ISSUES

- 8.1 All employees must comply with the Council’s Equal Opportunity Policy.
- 8.2 All members of the community, customers and other employees have a right to be treated with fairness and equity. The Council will not tolerate any discrimination on the grounds of gender, marital status, race, colour, creed, sexuality, nationality, ethnic or national origins or disability.

9. TENDERING ISSUES

- 9.1 Employees involved in tendering and dealing with contractors should be clear on the separation of client and contractor roles within the Council. Employees must follow the procedures and rules incorporated in the Council’s Financial Regulations, Financial Procedures and Rules of Procedure relating to Contracts. Senior officers who have a client and/or contractor responsibility must be aware of the need for accountability and openness.
- 9.2 Employees in client or contractor units must exercise fairness and impartiality when dealing with customers, suppliers, other contractors and sub-contractors.
- 9.3 Employees who have access to confidential information on tenders or costs, for either internal or external contractors, should not disclose that information to any unauthorised party.
- 9.4 Any employees contemplating a management buy-out should inform their manager as soon as they have formed an intent and withdraw from the contract awarding process.

- 9.5 Employees should ensure that no special favour is shown to current or former employees, or their partners, relatives or assistants, in awarding contracts to businesses run by or employing them in a managerial capacity.

10. CORRUPTION

- 10.1 Employees must be aware that it is a serious criminal offence for them to receive or give any gift, loan, fee, reward or advantage for doing, or not doing, anything or showing favour or disfavour to anyone in their official capacity. If an allegation is made, the employee would have to demonstrate that any such rewards have not been obtained corruptly.

11. USE OF FINANCIAL RESOURCES

- 11.1 Employees must ensure that they use public funds entrusted to them in a responsible and lawful manner. They should strive to ensure value for money to the community and avoid legal challenge to the authority.
- 11.2 Employees must comply with the Council's Financial Regulations and Financial Procedures to safeguard assets and the use of financial resources.
- 11.3 Employees should inform their Director, who will in turn inform the Director of Resources, the Head of Paid Service, the appropriate Director and Head of Internal Audit of any irregularity or suspected irregularity.
- 11.4 All employees will be issued with a copy of the Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy and the Confidential Reporting Code.

12. GIFTS AND HOSPITALITY

- 12.1 Employees should not accept significant personal gifts from contractors or suppliers. Small insignificant items of token value may be accepted, for example, calendars, pens and diaries. If there is any doubt, the gift should be politely and tactfully refused. If any significant gift is sent, this should be reported to their Director, who will advise if it may be kept or returned. All gifts and offers of gifts should be recorded in the register of

gifts and hospitality, which is held by the PA to your Director. Contract tender documents should prohibit gifts.

- 12.2 Employees should only accept offers of hospitality if there is a genuine need to impart information or represent the local authority in the community. Offers to attend social or sporting functions should be recorded and only be accepted when authorised by their Director and recorded in the register of gifts and hospitality, which is held by the PA to your Director.
- 12.3 When gifts or hospitality has to be declined, those making the offer should be courteously informed of the standards operating within the Council.
- 12.4 Acceptance by employees of hospitality at conferences and courses is acceptable where it is clear that the hospitality is corporate rather than personal and where the visit has been authorised. Where visits to inspect equipment or other items are required, employees should ensure the Council meets the cost of the visit to avoid jeopardising the integrity of any purchasing decision.
- 12.5 Fuller details on the Council's policy regarding gifts and hospitality are included in the Council's Staff Codes, which should be referred to for guidance when appropriate, via your line manager HR or the Intranet.

13. SPONSORSHIP - Giving and Receiving

- 13.1 When an outside organisation wishes to sponsor a local government activity, the basic conventions concerning acceptance of gifts and hospitality apply. Any staff involved in a sponsored activity are governed by the conventions outlined in Section 12 above.
- 13.2 Where the Council wishes to sponsor an event or service, no employee, partner or relative must benefit from the sponsorship in a direct way without there being a full disclosure to the appropriate Director of any such interest.
- 13.3 When the Council gives support in the community, through sponsorship, grant aid or other means, employees should ensure that impartial advice is given and there is no conflict of interest involved.