

OFFICERS' CODE OF CONDUCT

THE EMPLOYEE CODE

1. Introduction

(a) This Code has been drawn up broadly in line with the Local Government Management Board's draft Code of Conduct.

(b) The public is entitled to expect the highest standards of conduct from all employees who work for local government and to expect that their conduct should never be influenced by improper motives.

(c) This Code has been formulated to provide a set of standards of conduct expected of employees at work and the link between that work and their private lives.

(d) The Code takes into account the requirements of the law and the provisions on official conduct in the appropriate national conditions of service.

(e) The Code applies to all Council employees. Those employees involved in processing applications for services or resources, licences or statutory consents and those involved in the procurement of goods and services need to pay particular attention to the Code.

(f) Any alleged breaches of the Code may be dealt with under the Council's disciplinary procedure.

(g) If employees are in any doubt about any of the provisions of the Code they should seek advice from their Chief Officer.

2. Standards

Employees are expected to give the highest possible standard of service to the public, and where it is part of their duties, to provide appropriate advice to other employees and Members with impartiality. Employees should bring to the attention of the management any deficiency in the provision of service and must report any impropriety or breach of procedure to their senior Officer.

3. Disclosure of Information

(a) The law requires that certain types of information must be available to Members, auditors, government departments, service users and the public.

(b) Under the Local Government Act 1972 the public have a right to see certain information. In most circumstances these rights are related to Committee/Board reports and background documents.

(c) Employees must not use any information obtained in the course of their employment for personal gain or benefit, or pass it onto others who might use it in such a way.

(d) Only employees authorised by their Chief Officer to do so may talk to the Press, or otherwise make public statements on behalf of their department. Any employee contacted by the Press should pass it to their senior officer who will in normal circumstances refer the matter to the Corporate Communications Division who will deal with it.

(e) If employees consider that the non-disclosure of certain information is contrary to the wider public interest, they should advise their Chief Officer or the Chief Executive of the information and the issues concerned.

4. Political Neutrality/Activity

(a) Employees serve the Council as a whole. It follows, therefore, that they must serve all Members not just Members of any controlling group, and must ensure that the individual rights of all Members are respected.

(b) Some senior employees will be expected, within the Council's guidelines, to advise political groups. These employees have a duty to advise minority groups as well as the controlling group.

(c) Some employees, who are normally those in more senior positions, are in politically restricted posts and by law are prevented from taking part in certain political activities outside their work. Employees who are in this position should have been told of this in writing and of the rules for claiming exemption, but any employee who is in any doubt about their position should contact their Chief Officer.

(d) If an employee is in any doubt about whether an activity is political activity and covered by these rules they should seek advice from their Chief Officer.

(e) It is important that all employees are aware of their position in terms of political activity because if these statutory provisions are breached this may constitute a breach of the Contract of Employment which may be dealt with under the Council's disciplinary procedure.

(f) Employees, whether or not politically restricted, must follow every lawful policy of the Council and must not allow their own personal or political opinions to interfere with their work.

5. Relationships

(a) Members

Some employees are required to give advice to Members as part of their job and mutual respect between employees and Members is essential to good local government.

(b) The Local Community and Service Users

Employees must always remember their responsibilities to the community they serve and ensure courteous, efficient and impartial service delivery to all groups and individuals within the community.

(c) Contractors

All relationships with contractors or potential contractors must be made known to the appropriate Manager. Orders and contracts must be awarded in line with the Council's financial regulations.

Employees who engage or supervise contractors or have an official relationship with contractors and have previously had or currently have a relationship in a private or domestic capacity, must declare that relationship to the appropriate manager.

6. Outside Commitments

(a) An employee's off-duty hours are their personal concern but they must not place themselves in a position where their employment and private interests conflict. The Council would not wish to preclude employees unreasonably from undertaking additional work unless that work conflicts with or detrimentally affects the Council's interests or in any way weakens public confidence in the conduct of the Council's business, or in any way affects the ability to fulfill the Contract of Employment.

(b) However, Officers above Scale 6 are expected to devote the whole of their paid employment work to the Council and must not engage in any other business or take up any other additional appointment for financial gain without the agreement in advance of their Chief Officer.

(c) If agreement is given employees must be made aware that no outside work of any sort should be undertaken in the workplace and use of facilities, e.g. telephones, photocopying is forbidden. Breach of this provision may result in a disciplinary offence.

7. Personal Interests

(a) Employees must declare to their line manager, non-financial interests that they consider could bring conflict with the Council's interests (e.g. acting as a school governor within schools maintained by the Council, involvement with an organisation receiving grant aid from the Council, membership of an NHS Trust Board, involvement with an organisation or pressure group which may seek to influence their authority's policies). Membership of a trade union is exempted from this requirement.

(b) Employees must declare any financial interest, which could conflict with the Council's interests.

(c) Employees who have an interest, financial or non-financial, should not involve themselves in any decision on allocation of Council services or resources from which they, their friends or family might benefit, and should ensure that the matter is referred

immediately to their line manager (e.g. allocation of Council housing or assessment of housing benefit).

8. Equality Issues

Employees have an obligation to ensure that policies relating to equality issues as agreed by the Council are complied with, as well, of course, as the requirements of the law. All members of the local community, customers and other employees have a right to be treated with fairness and equity.

9. Separation of Role During Tendering

(a) Employees should be clear on the separation of client and contractor roles within the Council. Senior employees who have both a client and contractor responsibility must be aware of the need for accountability and openness.

(b) Employees in contractor or provider units must exercise fairness and impartiality when dealing with all customers, suppliers, other contractors and sub-contractors.

(c) Employees who are privy to confidential information on tenders or costs for either internal or external contractors must not disclose that information to any unauthorised party or organisation.

(d) Employees must ensure that no special favour is shown to current or recent former employees or their partners, close relatives or associates in awarding contracts to businesses run by them or employing them in a senior or relevant managerial capacity.

10. Corruption

It is a criminal offence for an employee to receive or give any gift, loan, fee, reward or advantage for doing or not doing anything or showing favour or dis-favour to any person in their official capacity. It is for the employee to demonstrate that any such rewards have not been corruptly obtained.

11. Use of financial resources

Employees must ensure that they use public funds entrusted to them in a responsible and lawful manner, ensuring value for money to the local community and avoiding legal challenge to the Council.

12. Gifts and Hospitality

(a) The Local Government Act 1972 forbids acceptance by any Local Government Officer of any fee or reward other than proper remuneration and contravention of this provision is a criminal offence.

(b) Officers should be aware of the Bribery Act 2010.

(c) The offers of gifts to Officers from persons who have or may seek to have dealings with the authority should be viewed with extreme caution. Officers should consider how the acceptance of such a gift would be viewed by a member of the public. Officers are personally liable for all decisions connected with the acceptance of gifts or hospitality and for avoiding the risk of damage to public confidence in local government.

(d) The only exceptions to this rule are small gifts of nominal value:-

- given by way of trade advertisements to a wide range of people, e.g. inexpensive calendars, diaries, tape measures and similar articles for use at work.
- on the conclusion of a courtesy visit, for example to a factory or other premises.

(e) Any hospitality given or received by Officers should be justified as in the public interest. The hospitality given should be on a scale appropriate to the occasion.

(f) Offers of hospitality must be refused where a suggestion of improper influence is possible. Special care must be taken where hospitality is offered by a person having or seeking business with, or a decision from, the Council.

(g) Each Officer who is offered a gift or hospitality shall, before any action is taken, discuss the offer with his/her line manager, except in the case of gifts or hospitality of a nominal value.

(h) In the case of the Chief Executive, before any action is taken, he will discuss the offer with the Corporate Director – Chief Executive's Delivery Unit or in their absence, Director – Legal & Democratic Services.

(i) Each Chief Officer shall maintain a gift and hospitality register. This register shall record:-

- what gift/hospitality was offered and to whom;
- by whom it was offered;
- when and with whom the offer was discussed;
- the decision whether or not to accept the gift/hospitality.

(j) In the event that it is decided it would be inappropriate to accept the gift/hospitality, the officer to whom it was offered will inform the offer or accordingly, explaining the reasons for refusal.

13. Use of services, etc. of firms dealing with the Council

(a) If any Officer has good reason to believe that any offer of preferential terms is designed to promote a firm's interest in its dealings with the Council, then the offer should be refused and the matter treated as if a gift had been offered. The above Standing Orders would then apply.

(b) Caution should be exercised by officers using services offered by firms which they know have dealings with the Council. Officers must ensure that goods or services bought from such firms are at a price readily available to the public.

14. Sponsorship - Giving and Receiving

(a) Where an outside organisation wishes to sponsor or is sought to sponsor a local government activity, whether by invitation, tender, negotiation or voluntarily the basic conventions concerning acceptance of gifts or hospitality apply. Particular care must be taken when dealing with contractors or potential contractors.

(b) Where the authority wishes to sponsor an event or service neither an employee nor any partner, spouse or relative must benefit from such sponsorship in a direct way without there being full disclosure to an appropriate manager of any such interest. Similarly where the Council through sponsorship, grant aid, financial or other means, gives support in the community, employees must ensure that impartial advice is given and that there is no conflict of interest involved.

15. Confidentiality

As an Officer of the Council you will occasionally acquire information which has not been made public and is confidential. You should not disclose this information to the public without the express approval of your Chief Officer. You should never disclose any information to personally advance yourself or someone known to you, or to the disadvantage or discredit of the Council or anyone else.