

Section 2 - Employees' code of conduct

Local Employees/Officers' Code of conduct, consistent with a model code yet to be issued by the Secretary of State, will be inserted here in due course.

1.0 Standards

1.1 Local government 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 councillors and fellow employees with impartiality. Employees will be expected, through agreed procedures and without fear of recrimination, to bring to the attention of their immediate supervisor any deficiency in the provision of service. Employees must report to their immediate supervisor or the Director of Personnel any impropriety or breach of procedure.

2.0 Disclosure of Information

2.1 It is generally accepted that open government is best. The law requires that certain types of information must be available to members, auditors, government departments, service users and the public.

2.2 Committee agendas and most reports and background papers are required by law to be available for public inspection. Detailed guidance is available from the Director of Legal and Democratic Services. Obstruction of a Member of the public who wishes to exercise these rights is a criminal offence.

2.3 No employee shall communicate to the public the proceedings of any 'closed' Committee or meeting associated with the business of any Committee, nor the content of any document relating to the authority, unless required by law or expressly authorised by the Chief Executive to do so. Employees making unauthorised communications shall render themselves liable to disciplinary action.

2.4 Employees should follow any specific ground rules adopted by the authority in relation to commercially sensitive information, particularly with regard to Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT).

2.5 Employees should not use any information obtained in the course of their employment for personal gain or benefit, nor should they pass it on to others who might use it in such a way. Any particular information received by an employee from a councillor which is personal to that councillor and does not belong to the authority such as details of her/his marital/domestic arrangements, should not be divulged by the employee without the prior approval of that councillor, except where such disclosure is required or sanctioned by the law.

3.0 Political Neutrality

3.1 Employees serve the authority as a whole. It follows they must serve all councillors and not just those of the controlling group, and must ensure that the individual rights of all councillors are respected.

3.2 Subject to the authority's conventions, employees may also be required to advise political groups. They must do so in ways which do not compromise their political neutrality.

3.3 Employees, whether or not politically restricted, 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 Should the authority decide to appoint political assistants in accordance with the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 these employees would be exempt from the standards set in paragraphs 3.1 to 3.3.

4.0 Relationships

4.1 **Councillors** - Employees are responsible to the authority through its senior managers. For some, their role is to give advice to councillors and senior managers and all are there to carry out the authority's work. Mutual respect between employees and councillors is essential to good local government. Close personal familiarity between employees and individual councillors can damage the relationship and prove embarrassing to other employees and councillors and should therefore be avoided.

4.2 **The Local Community and Service Users** - Employees should always remember their responsibilities to the community they serve and ensure courteous, efficient and impartial service delivery to all groups and individuals within that community as defined by the policies of the authority.

4.3 **Contractors** - All relationships of a business or private nature with external contractors or potential contractors, should be made known to your immediate supervisor and shall be recorded in a book to be kept for that purpose by the Chief Executive which shall be available for inspection by Members of the Council. Orders and contracts must be awarded on merit by fair competition against other tenders, and no special favour should be shown to businesses run by, for example, friends, partners or relatives in the tendering process. No part of the local community should be discriminated against.

4.4 Employees who engage or supervise contractors or have any other official relationship with contractors and have previously had or currently have a relationship in a private or domestic capacity with contractors, should declare that relationship to their immediate supervisor and this should be recorded in the book kept for that purpose by the Chief Executive.

5.0 Appointment and Other Employment Matters

5.1 Employees involved in appointments should ensure that these are made on the basis of merit. It would be unlawful for an employee to make an appointment which was based on anything other than the ability of the candidate to undertake the duties of the post. In order to avoid any possible accusation of bias, employees should not be involved in an appointment where they are related to an applicant, or have a close personal relationship outside work with him or her. Where a Senior Officer has power to engage an employee he or she shall not appoint any relative to such a position without first referring the proposed appointment to the Committee concerned.

5.2 Similarly, employees should not be involved in decisions relating to discipline, promotion or pay adjustments for any other employee who is a relative, partner, etc.

6.0 Outside Commitments

6.1 Some employees have conditions of service which require them to obtain written consent to take any outside employment. All employees should be clear about their contractual obligations and should not take outside employment which conflicts with the authority's interests. Employees are advised to discuss any such issues with their immediate supervisor. Apart from those employees whose conditions of service require them to obtain written consent to take any outside employment, it is not intended that employees be prevented from taking outside employment except where such employment would conflict with the authority's interests.

6.2 Employees should have regard to the ownership of intellectual property or copyright arising out of and during the course of their employment and act in accordance with any rules of the authority which may be in force.

7.0 Personal Interests

7.1 Employees must declare to their immediate supervisor any non-financial interests that they consider could bring about conflict with the authority's interests.

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7.3 In the case of any matter under consideration by the Council or any other application to the Council where employees or any close relative have a personal interest, whether pecuniary or otherwise, they should, if such matter or application falls to be dealt with by the Department in which they are employed, inform their immediate supervisor of their interest as soon as they become aware of the matter or application concerned. The immediate supervisor must

then ensure that all aspects of the matter or application are conducted or supervised by an employee more senior to the individual who has declared the personal interest. On no account must employees be directly involved in the processing of any matter or application in which they or any close relative have a personal interest.

7.4 The definition of a close relative shall be as set out in the Supplemental Conditions of Service for APT & C Staff (Appendix H). A copy of the Supplemental Conditions is available for inspection in your Department.

7.5 Employees should declare to their immediate supervisor membership of any organisation not open to the public without formal membership and commitment of allegiance and which has secrecy about rules or membership or conduct.

7.6 Any declarations referred to in Section 7 shall be recorded in a register kept for that purpose by the employees Chief Officer for inspection by Members of the Council.

8.0 Equality Issues

8.1 All local government employees should ensure that policies relating to equality issues as agreed by the authority are complied with in addition to the requirements of the law. All members of the local community, customers and other employees have a right to be treated with fairness and equality.

9.0 Separation of Roles During Tendering

9.1 Employees involved in the tendering process and dealing with contractors should be clear on the separation of client and contractor roles within the authority. Senior employees who have both a client and contractor responsibility must be aware of the need for accountability and openness and at time discretion and confidentiality.

9.2 Employees in contractor or client units must exercise fairness and impartiality when dealing with all customers, suppliers, other contractors and sub-contractors, in accordance with any policies and rules determined by the Council, particularly in relation to Compulsory Competitive Tendering.

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

9.4 Employees contemplating a management buyout should, as soon as they have formed a definite intent, inform their immediate supervisor and withdraw from the contract awarding processes.

9.5 Employees should 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.

10.0 Use of Financial Resources

10.1 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 for the Council and to the local community and to avoid legal challenge to the authority.

11.0 Corruption

11.1 Employees must be aware that it is a serious criminal offence for them corruptly to receive or give any gift, loan, fee, reward or advantage for doing, or not doing, anything or showing favour, or disfavour, to any person in their official capacity. If charged with this offence it is for the employee to demonstrate that any such rewards have not been corruptly obtained.

11.2 Rewards corruptly obtained will put your job at risk and are punishable by up to seven years' imprisonment.

12.0 Gifts and Hospitality

12.1 There can be little doubt that the acceptance of gifts by employees from persons who have, or may seek to have, dealings with their authority would be viewed by the public with grave suspicion and would make the employee concerned and the Council extremely vulnerable to criticism. An employee should, therefore, tactfully refuse any personal gift which is offered to him/her or a close relative by, or indirectly attributable to any person or body who has, or may have, dealings of any kind whatsoever with the Council or, who has applied, or may apply, to the Council for any planning or other kind of decision.

12.2 The only exceptions to this rule are:

- (a) small gifts of only token value often given by way of trade advertisements to a wide range of people, e.g. calendars, diaries, tape measures and similar articles of use in the workplace; or
- (b) small gifts of only token value given on the conclusion of a courtesy visit, e.g. to a factory or other premises

12.3 If there is any doubt about whether a gift may be accepted the gift should be politely and tactfully refused.

12.4 Employees are reminded that under provisions of Section 117 of the Local Government Act 1972, they are forbidden under the colour of their office and employment to accept any fee or reward other than their proper remuneration and any person who contravenes this provision would be liable, on summary conviction, to a fine not exceeding £2,500. (Subject to review).

12.5 In the event of an employee receiving a gift without warning, which does not fall in any of the exceptions mentioned above, this should immediately be reported to a Chief Officer who will be responsible for deciding whether the gift should be returned.

12.6 If any employee becomes aware that he/she has been included as the beneficiary in the Will of a client, for whom the Council offers or used to offer a service where there is a connection with the employee's work, the above rules apply.

12.7 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 purely social or sporting functions should be accepted only when these are part of the life of the community or where the authority should be seen to be represented. They should be properly authorised and recorded in a register kept for that purpose by the employee's Chief Officer.

12.8 When hospitality has to be declined those making the offer should be courteously but firmly informed of the procedures and standards operating within the authority.

12.9 When receiving authorised hospitality employees should be particularly sensitive as to its timing in relation to decisions which the authority may be taking affecting those providing the hospitality.

12.10 Acceptance by employees of hospitality through attendance at relevant conferences and courses is acceptable where it is clear the hospitality is corporate rather than personal, where the authority gives consent in advance and where the authority is satisfied that any purchasing decisions are not compromised. Where visits to inspect equipment etc. are required, employees should ensure that the authority meets the cost of such visits to avoid jeopardising the integrity of subsequent purchasing decisions.

12.11 Employees must refuse offers of hospitality where any suggestion of improper influence would be inferred. Special caution is necessary where hospitality is offered by a person or body having or seeking business with, or a decision from the authority, particularly where the offer is to an individual employee.

12.12 Concerning offers of hospitality there should be no cause for concern if the offer is made by another non-commercial public body but in all other cases offers of hospitality must be treated with caution.

12.13 Hospitality should only be accepted where it is on a scale appropriate to the circumstances, reasonably incidental to the occasion and not extravagant and where it is apparent that no cause could reasonably arise for adverse criticism about the acceptance of hospitality.

13.0 Sponsorship - Giving and Receiving

13.1 Where an outside organisation wishes 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.

13.2 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 their immediate supervisor of any such interest. Similarly, where the authority through sponsorship, grant aid, financial or other means, gives support in the community, employees should ensure that impartial advice is given and that there is no conflict of interest involved.

13.3 Any declaration of an interest will be recorded in a register kept for that purpose by the employee's Chief Officer. The register will be available for inspection by Members.

14.0 Interpretation

14.1 Any interpretation of this Code should be determined by the Director of Personnel after consultation with the Executive Member for Resource, Lead Member for Human Resources and Opposition spokespersons.

15.0 Disciplinary Action

15.1 Any serious contravention of this Code may result in disciplinary proceedings.

16.0 Grievance Procedure

16.1 An employee who has a grievance arising from the interpretation of the Code shall have access to the Council's Grievance Procedure.

16.2 Any officer or Member who has been involved in an interpretation of the Code which results in a grievance arising should not be involved in the consideration of that grievance.

17.0 Application of Code

The Code embodies general guidance for all employees of the Council. It is recognised, however, that specific arrangements may be made at Departmental level to address circumstances/situations encountered by certain employees