



# **SOUTH NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL**

## **Part 13 – Officers’ Code of Conduct**

## **Code of Conduct**

### **Introduction**

The public is entitled to expect the highest standards of conduct from all employees who work for local government. This Code outlines existing laws, regulations and conditions of service and provides further guidance to assist local authorities and their employees in their day-to-day work. The Code is produced in the light of the challenges that employees face in the new and more commercially orientated environment.

### **Status of the Code**

The Code is voluntary for local authorities to adopt but sets out the minimum standards that should apply. The aim of the Code is to lay down guidelines for local government employees which will help maintain and improve standards and protect employees from misunderstanding or criticism.

The Code has been approved by the local authority associations in England and Wales and the Local Government Management Board (LGMB) in consultation with other relevant bodies.

### **Who the Code is Aimed At**

The Code applies to all local government employees in England and Wales.

Inevitably some of the issues covered by the Code will affect senior, managerial and professional employees more than it will others. The Code is intended to cover all employees under a contract of employment within local government, including office holders such as registrars. Activities carried out by employees acting as members of companies or voluntary organisations should be subject to the minimum standards within this Code.

## **1. 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 the appropriate level of management any deficiency in the provision of service.

Employees must report to the appropriate manager any impropriety or breach of procedure.

## **2. 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. The authority itself may decide to be open

about other types of information. Employees must be aware of which information their authority is and is not open about and they should act accordingly.

- 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 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 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. 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 Political assistants appointed on fixed term contracts in accordance with the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 are exempt from the standards set in paragraphs 3.1 to 3.3.

## **4. 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 the appropriate manager. 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 the appropriate manager.

## **5. 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 the case of applicants with a known disability that would affect their ability to perform the job, advice should be sought from Personnel on possible reasonable adjustments that should be considered to facilitate employment by the Council so as to ensure compliance with legal requirements.. 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.
- 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 or partner.

## **6. 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.
- 6.2 Employees should follow their authority's rules on the ownership of intellectual property or copyright created during their employment.

## **7. Personal interests**

- 7.1 Employees must declare to an appropriate manager any non-financial interests that they consider could bring about conflict with the authority's interests.
- 7.2 Employees must declare to an appropriate manager any financial interests which could conflict with the authority's interests.
- 7.3 Employees should declare to an appropriate manager 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.

## **8. 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, dignity and equity.

## **9. 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.
- 9.2 Employees in contractor or client units must exercise fairness and impartiality when dealing with all customers, suppliers, other contractors and sub-contractors.
- 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 the appropriate manager 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. Corruption**

- 10.1 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 an allegation is made it is for the employee to demonstrate that any such rewards have not been corruptly obtained.

## **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 local community and to avoid legal challenge to the authority.

## **12. Hospitality**

- 12.1 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.

- 12.2 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.
- 12.3 Employees should not accept significant personal gifts from contractors and outside suppliers, although the authority may wish to allow employees to keep insignificant items of token value, for example pens or diaries.
- 12.4 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.
- 12.5 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 Council meets the cost of such visits to avoid jeopardising the integrity of subsequent purchasing decisions.

### **13. Sponsorship - Giving and Receiving**

- 13.1 Where an outside organisation wishes to sponsor or is seeking 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 Council 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 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.