

Part 4

Appendix C - Officers Code of Conduct

1. Standards

- 1.1 Local government employees are expected to give the highest possible standards 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. Disclosures 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 County Council 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 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 County Council, 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 County Council as a whole. It follows they must serve all councillors and not just those of the controlling group, and they must ensure that the individual rights of all councillors are respected.

- 3.2 Subject to the County Council'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 County Council 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 the above paragraphs on political neutrality.

4. **Relationships**

4.1 **Councillors**

Employees are responsible to the County Council 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 County Council'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 County Council.

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 who 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. 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 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, partner, etc.

6. Outside commitments

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 County Council's interests.

Employees should follow the County Council'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 conflict with the County Council's interests.
- 7.2 Employees must declare, to an appropriate manager, any financial interests which could conflict with the County Council's interests.

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 and equality.

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 County Council. 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 to corruptly 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 County Council.

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 County Council 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 County Council.

- 12.3 Employees should not accept significant personal gifts from contractors and outside suppliers, although the County Council may wish to allow employees to keep insignificant items of token value such as pens, diaries, etc.
- 12.4 When receiving authorised hospitality, employees should be particularly sensitive as to its timing in relation to decisions that the County Council 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 County Council gives consent in advance; and where the County Council is satisfied that any purchasing decisions are not compromised. Where visits to inspect equipment, etc, are required, employees should ensure that the County 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 County 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 County Council, 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.