

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR EMPLOYEES

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The public is entitled to expect the highest standards of conduct from all employees who work in local government.
- 1.2 This Code is based on a model produced by the Local Government Management Board and the Local Authority Associations. The Babergh and Mid Suffolk branch of UNISON and the Mid Suffolk branch of Unite have been consulted on this Code and has given its full support.
- 1.3 Throughout the Council many of the professional groups, and others, will have their own codes of practice which will be complementary to this Code. In addition, it may be necessary to introduce special procedures, rules etc for specific matters which will be issued to appropriate employees, as and when necessary.

2. Status of the Code

- 2.1 This Code has been adopted by Babergh District Council and Mid Suffolk District Council. It sets out the minimum standards that must apply. The aim of the Code is to lay down guidelines for employees which will help maintain and improve standards and protect them from misunderstanding or criticism.

3. Interpretation

- 3.1 In this Code unless the context otherwise requires the following expressions have the following meanings:

"Employees" means all persons employed under a contract of employment by Babergh District Council and Mid Suffolk District Council.

"Council" includes both Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils

"Councillor" includes both Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councillors.

"Contractor" includes contractors engaged by Babergh or Mid Suffolk District Council or the two Councils jointly.

4. Scope of the Code

- 4.1 The Code applies to all employees.
- 4.2 Inevitably some of the issues covered by the Code will affect senior, managerial and professional employees more than it will others. Activities carried out by employees acting on behalf of the Council as members of companies or voluntary organisations will be subject to the minimum standards within this Code.

5. Standards

- 5.1 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.
- 5.2 Employees will be expected to report directly to the Chief Executive or the relevant officer in the Senior Leadership Team or in exceptional circumstances through their trade union, and without fear of any recrimination:-
- (a) any deficiency in the standard or provision of any service;
 - (b) any breach of the policies, procedures, standing orders or financial regulations of the Council;
 - (c) any favouritism or discrimination shown to any person;
 - (d) any impropriety or misconduct.
- 5.3 Employees shall immediately bring to the attention of the Director (or in the case of a Director the Chief Executive) if they believe that there is an actual or potential conflict of interest between Babergh District Council and Mid Suffolk District Council or between roles and responsibilities which the Employee undertakes for each Council.

6. Disclosure of information

- 6.1 It is generally accepted that open government is best. The law requires that certain types of information must be available to Councillors, auditors, government departments, service users and the public. The Council may decide to be open about other types of information.

Employees must be aware of which information the Council is and is not open about, and act accordingly.

- 6.2 Employees must not use any information obtained in the course of their employment and which is not available to the general public, for personal gain or benefit, nor should they pass it on to others who might use it in such a way unless there is a legal requirement to do so. Any particular information received by an employee from a Councillor which is personal to that Councillor and does not belong to the authority must not be divulged by the employee without the prior approval of that Councillor, except where such disclosure is required or sanctioned by the law.

7. Political neutrality

- 7.1 Employees serve the Council as a whole. It follows that they must serve all Councillors and not just those of the controlling group (if there is one), and must ensure that the individual rights of all Councillors are respected.

- 7.2 Subject to any rules approved by the Council, employees may also be required to advise political groups. They must do so in ways which do not compromise their political neutrality. An Employee shall, therefore, be entitled to be accompanied by a colleague when advising any political group.
- 7.3 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.
- 7.4 Any Political Assistants appointed on fixed term contracts in accordance with the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 are exempt from the standards set out in paragraphs 7.1 to 7.3.

8. Relationships

8.1 Councillors

Employees are responsible to the 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 authority's work. Mutual respect between employees and Councillors is essential to good local government. However close personal familiarity between employees and individual Councillors can damage the relationship and prove embarrassing to other employees and Councillors and, wherever reasonable and possible, should be avoided.

8.2 The Local Community and Service Users

Employees must always remember their responsibilities to the community they serve and ensure courteous, efficient and impartial delivery of services to all groups and individuals within that community as defined by the policies of the Council.

8.3 Contractors

If there is likely to be a conflict of interest, employees must make known in writing to their Director all relationships of a business or private nature with existing or potential Council contractors known to the employee. Orders and contracts must be awarded on merit, by fair competition against other tenders, where appropriate, and no special favour must be shown to potential contractors (particularly those run by, for example, friends, partners or relatives) in the tendering process. No part of the community should be improperly or illegally discriminated for or against.

- 8.4 Employees who, in the course of their job, 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 (or their senior staff), must declare that relationship in writing to their Director.

9. Appointments and other employment matters

- 9.1 Employees involved in appointments must ensure that these are made on the basis of merit. There is a strong risk of illegality if an employee makes an appointment 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 must not be involved in appointments where they are related to an applicant, or have a close personal relationship outside work with him/her.
- 9.2 Similarly, employees must not be involved in decisions relating to discipline, promotion or pay adjustments of any employee who is a relative, partner, etc.

10. Outside Commitments

- 10.1 The NJC Scheme of Conditions of Service for APT&C staff states at Section 7, paragraph 70(b) on Official Conduct:

"An officer's off-duty hours are his personal concern but he should not subordinate his duty to his private interests to put himself in a position where his duty and his private interests conflict. The employing authority should not attempt to preclude officers from undertaking additional employment, but any such employment must not, in the view of the authority, conflict with or react detrimentally to the authority's interests or in any way weaken public confidence in the conduct of the authority's business."

(This quotation applies equally to women).

The national conditions of service for chief officers and those for chief executives also mirror the above points.

- 10.2 All employees have conditions of service which require them to obtain written consent from their manager to take any outside employment. All employees must be clear about their contractual obligations and should not take outside employment which conflicts with either Council's interests. Employees can appeal their manager's decision in writing to the relevant director.
- 10.3 The Council will not consent to employees engaging in any other business which would result in plans or drawings prepared by them outside their official duties with the Council, being presented with applications for determination by the Council or its Directors.
- 10.4 Employees must adhere to any Council rules on the ownership of intellectual property created during their employment - this could include patents, copyrights, trademarks and other intellectual property.

11. Personal interests

- 11.1 Employees must declare in writing to their Director any financial or non-financial interests which could reasonably be considered to conflict with the Council's interests.
- 11.2 Employees must declare in writing to their Director membership of any organisation not open to the public without formal membership, and with commitment of allegiance, and which has secrecy about rules or membership or conduct (eg. the freemasons, some friendly societies etc.).
- 11.3 The Director will treat any such declarations in confidence and will only disclose them in appropriate situations.
- 11.4 For the avoidance of doubt declarations must be made under clause 11.1-11.3 above if the interest conflicts with either or both Babergh or Mid Suffolk District Council's interests.

Note: The Local Government Act 1972 provides that if employees know that a contract in which they have a financial interest is before the Local Authority, they must give notice of that interest to the Local Authority.

12. Equality issues

- 12.1 Employees must ensure that any Council policies relating to equality issues are complied with in addition to the requirements of the law. All members of the community, customers and other employees have a right to be treated with fairness and equity.

13. Separation of Roles During Tendering

- 13.1 Employees involved in the tendering process and dealing with contractors must be clear on the separation of client and contractor roles in the Council. Senior employees who have both a client and contractor responsibility must be aware of the need for accountability, separation of activity as appropriate, and openness.
- 13.2 Employees in contractor or client units must exercise and display fairness and impartiality when dealing with all customers, suppliers, contractors and sub-contractors.
- 13.3 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.

- 13.4 Employees contemplating a management buyout, or otherwise considering tendering for Council work, should, as soon as they have formed a definite intent, inform their Director in writing and withdraw from the contract awarding processes.
- 13.5 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 a business run by them or a business employing them in a senior or relevant managerial capacity.

Note: Attention is also drawn to the Council's Standing Orders on Contracts and the Financial Regulations.

14. Corruption

- 14.1 It is a serious criminal offence for employees 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. If a substantiated allegation is made it is for the employees to demonstrate that any such rewards, given or received, have not been corruptly obtained.

15. Use of Financial Resources

- 15.1 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 any action, which by its nature, could lead to a legal challenge against the Council.

16. Hospitality and Gifts

- 16.1 The NJC Scheme of Conditions of Service for APT&C staff states at paragraph 70(a) on Official Conduct:

"The public is entitled to demand of a local government officer conduct of the highest standard and public confidence in his integrity would be shaken were the least suspicion to arise that he could in any way be influenced by improper motives."

(This quotation applies equally to women).

- 16.2 Employees should only accept offers of hospitality if there is a genuine need to impart information or represent the Council in the community (including the business 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 Council should be seen to be represented. They should be properly authorised and recorded in the Council's Gifts and Hospitality Register.

- 16.3 When hospitality has to be declined those making the offer should be courteously but firmly informed of the procedures and standards operating within the Council.
- 16.4 When receiving authorised hospitality employees should be particularly sensitive as to its timing in relation to decisions which the Council may be taking affecting those providing the hospitality.
- 16.5 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; such hospitality does not need to be recorded. In receiving such corporate hospitality employees must ensure 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.
- 16.6 Employees should only accept gifts in accordance with the following guidance:
- (i) There can be little doubt that the acceptance of gifts by Council employees from persons who have, or may seem to have, dealings with the Council would be viewed with suspicion by the general public and would make the employee concerned and the Council extremely vulnerable to criticism. Therefore an employee should tactfully refuse any personal gift which is offered to him/her or to a member of his/her family by, or indirectly attributable to, any person who has, or may have, dealings of any kind whatsoever with the Council.
 - (ii) The only exception to this rule is small gifts; i.e. items of a value up to £10.00. In such cases, however, whilst the gift may be accepted, it must be entered into the Gifts and Hospitality Register.
 - (iii) If there is any doubt about whether a gift may be accepted, the gift should be politely and tactfully refused.
 - (iv) Employees are reminded that, under the provisions of Sections 1 17 of the Local Government Act 1972, officers employed by a Local Authority 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 (currently). It is also an offence under the Bribery Act 2010 to offer, promise or give a financial or other advantage in respect of the award or performance of a contract.

- (v) In the event of an employee receiving a gift without warning (this would include bequests under a will for example) which does not fall within the exception mentioned in (ii) above, this should be reported immediately to the Chief Executive who, in consultation with the Chairman of the appropriate Committee, will decide whether the gift should be retained by the employee, returned or forwarded to some charitable or other deserving cause.

17. Sponsorship - Giving and Receiving

- 17.1 Where an outside organisation wishes to sponsor or is seeking to sponsor a Council 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.
- 17.2 Where the Council wishes to sponsor an event or service, special care must be taken to ensure that if any benefit accrues to employees, partners, spouses or relatives, full disclosure is made under the hospitality procedure above before the venture is pursued. 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 conflicts of interest avoided.