



BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CODE OF CONDUCT

Foreword

As Council employees, we all serve the public, directly or indirectly. We therefore have a particular responsibility to give of our best and remain fair and impartial in all our actions. This Code is intended to help you to do so.

The Code applies to employees of the Council at whatever level, including me as District Secretary, and all Senior Managers. It is our responsibility to abide by the Code and enable everyone to do so.

The Council wants its employees to behave in accordance with the Code's common sense guidelines and the legal framework. But it also wants us to show initiative and act in the best possible interest of the individual, and the Council's community and business interests. Only by doing this will we achieve our goals of providing cost effective, responsible services within a local democratic framework. I hope that you will find this guidance helpful.

Sue Nixon
Chief Executive

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CODE OF CONDUCT FOR COUNCIL EMPLOYEES

1. Introduction

This Code applies to Council employees.

The code covers a wide range of responsibilities, so some parts may not be relevant to you at present. The Code cannot cover every aspect of your employment. You must therefore ensure that you are familiar with those departmental procedures, Council Financial Regulations and Standing Orders which relate to your work.

We all have a difficult job in providing the best possible quality of service at a time when money is tight. We need employees to carry out their duties to the highest possible standards and behave considerately and responsibly.

2. Purpose and Status of the Code

The Code stresses the need to maintain the highest standards of service and conduct. It defines those standards. Much of the Code is common sense, which you will already be following in your day-to-day work. But please read the Code carefully as there may be points you are unaware of or do not fully appreciate.

Your conduct is important to external customers (that is, members of the public, businesses, voluntary organisations) and internal customers (other employees who rely on your work). You also have a duty to both kinds of customer in relation to health and safety. Any behaviour that falls below the standards defined in the Code is unacceptable. Consistent or serious breaches could lead to disciplinary action.

3. General Duty

The Council's reputation depends largely on the conduct of its employees. The Council therefore expects you to behave at all times with integrity and to contribute fully to the Council's efforts in delivering the highest possible standards of service.

4. Serving the Public

You should always be courteous and helpful when dealing with members of the public.

You should give members of the public information to which they are entitled about the services and activities of the Council.

You should assess impartially their need for any service and avoid personal prejudice in giving or refusing any service.

5. Handling Complaints

Whenever you can resolve a complaint immediately, do so.

Deal with complaints as quickly as possible in accordance with set procedures and in a courteous and sympathetic way.

If you have a role in investigating complaints, you must ensure that any unexpected delays, difficulties or poor quality of service are explained to the customer as courteously and sympathetically as possible.

If a complaint is very serious, you must report it to your Supervisor or Manager.

6. Political Impartiality

When carrying out your Council duties, you must always:

- a) behave in a politically impartial way;
- b) avoid doing anything which is influenced by your own political views or which might suggest that your actions are prompted by party political allegiance;
- c) ensure that your actions do not undermine Council decisions or policies;
- d) show equal and proper consideration to all Councillors whatever their political party.

Certain employees are prevented by law from taking part in political activities in their private time. These are:

- a) employees who are paid at spinal column point 44 or above or equivalent.
- b) employees, whatever their level of pay, who advise Committees regularly or who are authorised to speak on behalf of the Council to the press or other media.

You should consult your Head of Service if you are in any doubt about whether you fall into either group.

7. Trade, Skill and Professional Standards

You must give service or advice in accordance with your skills, knowledge and ability.

You must offer professional advice without fear or favour and advise your Head of Service if you were concerned about services which are putting people at risk or which fail to meet defined standards.

You must advise your Head of Service of any possible irregularity in procedures.

8. Confidentiality and Openness

In general, you should be open about Council services and how these are provided.

During their official duties, councillors have a general right of access to information. Exceptions include the personal circumstances of employees and individual members of the public as Council customers.

In particular circumstances, however, you are legally obliged to maintain confidentiality (e.g. data protection). It is important that you do so.

You should not use information obtained during your employment for personal gain or benefit. Nor should you pass it to others who might use it in such a way.

If you are involved in politics in your private time, you should not behave in a way that might confuse the public about whether you are acting as a Council employee

9. Disclosure of Relationships

If you are employed by the District Council you must disclose relationships you have with employees of the Council. All job applicants must disclose relationships that they have with existing employees when they apply for vacancies.

You must give the information to Personnel.

10. Contractors

In accordance with the law on declaring financial interests, you must tell the District Secretary about any relationship to contractors or potential contractors that could be seen as giving financial gain or advantage.

Contracts must be awarded on merit in fair competition against other tenders. No favouritism may be shown to businesses run by friends, partners or relatives. No discrimination may take place against particular individuals, groups or sections of the community.

11. Press and other Media

Officers authorised by The Council to give information to the press and other media must give only the facts of a situation, such as an explanation of Council policies, proposals or actions. They must not express an opinion in relation to these facts – this is for Councillors to do.

Employees not authorised to give information must observe the following points:

- a) if contacted by the press or other media you must be polite and courteous at all times but say clearly that you cannot give any information or comment whatsoever.
- b) You should, however, be as helpful as possible in finding out the nature of the enquiry and suggesting whom the press or media should contact for information.

Unless authorised to comment as opposed to giving factual information, no employee may make any comment about Council policies without approval from the District Secretary who will, if necessary, discuss the matter with relevant Councillors.

12. Equal Opportunities

The Council wishes to be recognised as an equal opportunities organisation both as a service provider and as an employer. It will achieve this through the actions of its employees and Councillors.

This means:

- a) You must give everyone, members of the public and employees, fair and equal opportunities in any service or work you perform.

- b) You must not allow your judgement or actions to be influenced by any form of personal prejudice.
- c) You should avoid laying down conditions or requirements that are not justifiable in relation to service provision or employment opportunities – for example, specifying unnecessary qualifications for jobs.

13. Dual Employment

Employees should not do work outside the Council that may conflict with their Council work.

If Officers wish to undertake other employment/paid projects, then they must notify their Head of Service, who will consider their request at Officers' Management Team.

14. Gifts and Hospitality

You must be especially careful about accepting any gifts, favours or hospitality from any person or any organisation having an interest in obtaining or providing services to the Council.

Offers to attend purely social or sporting functions must be accepted only when they are part of the life of the community or where the Council should be seen to be represented.

All accepted offers of hospitality must be properly authorised and recorded in your departmental register.

When hospitality offered by contractors has to be declined, you must courteously but firmly inform them of the procedures and standards operating in local government.

When receiving hospitality you must be sensitive to the timing of decisions for letting contracts and to any contractual disputes.

Acceptance of commercial sponsorship for attendance at relevant conferences and courses is acceptable, but only if your first get authorisation and if purchasing decisions are not compromised.

Where visits to inspect equipment etc are required, the Council will meet the cost of such visits where necessary. This is to avoid jeopardising the integrity of purchasing decisions. Normal refreshments on such visits may be accepted.

You should not accept significant personal gifts from contractors and service providers such as food, drink, cars, clothes and jewellery. Inexpensive calendars, diaries, blotting pads, pens etc (perhaps marked with the donor's name) are acceptable.

If in any doubt about whether you should accept a gift, it is best to refuse it. If you receive an unsolicited gift you should return it and report your action. This is safer than having the matter raised by someone else at a later date.

If you are offered something you consider to be beyond a good will gesture (that is, a bribe) you should tell your Supervisor or Manager, who has a duty to report the matter to your Head of Service.

15. Financial and Non-Financial Interests

In general you should not do anything that could not be justified if it were made public. Whenever you have any financial, private or personal interest in any matter in which you are involved at work, you must not allow it to influence in any way how you carry out your work.

Examples of interests include kinship, friendship, membership of an association or society receiving grant aid from the Council, school governorship, involvement with an organisation or pressure group that may oppose Council policies, and any other kind of relationship that could influence your judgement and give the impression that you might be acting from personal motives.

If you, or a member of your family or other person with whom you have a close personal relationship, have a financial interest in a contract which the Council has made or is going to make, you must declare this immediately in writing to your Head of Service.

If your financial or non-financial interest relates to any work that you are doing at the time, you must not deal with that work any more. You should ask your supervisor to give the work to someone else.

If you are at a meeting of a Committee or Sub-Committee of the Council when a contract in which you have an interest is to be considered, you must report this to the District Secretary or the Senior Officer present. You must not speak on any item in which you have an interest. This is a legal requirement and must be complied with.

You must register membership of any organisation closed to the public which requires formal membership and commitment of allegiance, and which has secrecy about rules, membership and conduct. Similarly, you must choose for your own protection to register interests, such as ownership of land and shares in a company. You should contact the District Secretary to record such interests.

16. Health and Safety

You must by law take reasonable care of the health and safety of yourself and other people, including your colleagues, who may be affected by anything you do at work.

You should not do anything intentionally or recklessly which might interfere with what is provided in the interests of health, safety and welfare.

You should not do any job in a way which might endanger yourself, your colleagues or any member of the public.

You should ensure that you are familiar with your department's health and safety policy and act in accordance with it.

17. Alcohol

Your consumption of alcohol, if any, must not at any time impair the level or quality of your work or cause a hazard to the health and safety of yourself, members of the public or colleagues.

At all times you are personally responsible for ensuring that your consumption of alcohol does not in any way conflict with your responsibilities at work or conditions of employment.

18. Equipment and Materials

Council facilities, equipment and materials – such as photocopier, telephone, petrol – should not be used for private purposes except as shown below.

Private use of photocopiers and telephones is allowed if:

- a) it does not reduce the quality of Council service;
- b) you obtain the express permission of your supervisor or manager;
- c) you pay for their use.

Council vehicles must be used for authorised purposes only. Unauthorised use of vehicles is not covered by insurance – you would be personally liable to pay damages in the event of an accident causing injury or damage or both.

19. Advice on the Code

If you are unsure about whether a part of the Code applies to you or unsure of the meaning of a part that does apply to you, it is essential that you speak to your manager.

If, after speaking to your manager, you remain unsure about how the Code applies to you then you must ask for further advice from the Personnel Section.

If you ask for clarification of the conduct expected of you, or if your manager thinks clarification would be helpful to you, it will be given as far as reasonably practicable.

Every effort will be made to ensure that you know what is expected of you to avoid misunderstanding, as this is in the best interests of both the Council and its employees.