

OXFORD CITY COUNCIL
EMPLOYEE CODE OF CONDUCT

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1. POLICY STATEMENT

The public is entitled to expect the highest standards of conduct from all Council employees. Your role is to serve the Council in delivering services to the local community, providing advice and implementing its policies. In performing your duties, you must act with integrity, honesty, impartiality and objectivity.

You are accountable to, and owe a duty to, the Council. You must act in accordance with the principles set out in this Code, recognising the duty of all public sector employees to discharge public functions reasonably and according to the law for the benefit of the community that you serve.

2. STATUS AND SCOPE OF THE CODE

- 2.1 This Code of Conduct applies to all employees and must be observed at all times. The Code also sets out the applicable standards of conduct required by all Council workers including agency staff, consultants and casuals.
- 2.2 It replaces any previous rules on conduct and complements the Council's Constitution, policies and procedures.

3. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Employees

- 3.1 Employees are expected to:-

- observe and meet the standards of conduct set out in this Code,
- ensure they seek advice at an early stage if they are uncertain about of the points covered in this Code or associated Policies and Procedures,
- observe the required standards of conduct of any professional association or society that they are members of in relation to their work.

Managers

- 3.2 In addition to the expectations above managers are expected to:-

- hold employees to account for the observance of standards of behaviour set out in this Code,
- assist employees seeking advice on any points referred to in this Code,
- respect any requirement imposed by an employee's membership of a professional association or society in relation to their work.

4. PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC LIFE

4.1 Employees are expected to abide by the following principles:-

- Selflessness: Employees should take decisions solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family or friends.
- Integrity: Employees should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might influence them in the performance of their duties.
- Objectivity: Employees should make choices on merit, including when they make appointments, award contracts or recommend people for awards or benefits.
- Accountability: Employees are accountable for their decisions and actions and must co-operate fully with any appropriate scrutiny.
- Openness: Employees should be as open as possible about all decisions and actions they take. They should be prepared to give reasons for their decisions and should not unnecessarily restrict information that is not confidential.
- Honesty: Employees must declare any private interests relating to their employment and take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.
- Leadership: Employees should lead by example in promoting and supporting these principles.

5. THE COUNCIL'S CONSTITUTION

5.1 The Council and its employees must act in accordance with its own Constitution and the law. While you may not use the Constitution in your day-to-day work it is a useful reference for all matters relating to the composition and functions of the Council and rules about members and committee meetings.

5.2 The following policies and rules are contained in the Constitution:-

- Finance Rules
- Contract Rules
- Employment Rules
- Whistle Blowing Policy
- Code on Councillor/Officer Relations
- Planning Code of Practice

6. RELATIONSHIPS

Elected Members

6.1 Mutual respect between employees and Members is essential to good government. Employees must comply with the Council's Protocol on Member/Officer Relations, which is contained in the Constitution and is available on the Council's website.

Our Customers

- 6.2 Employees should always ensure courteous, efficient and impartial service delivery to all groups and individuals incorporating the principles outlined in the Council's Corporate Plan, which is available on the Intranet.

Contractors

- 6.3 If you believe you have a financial interest (whether directly or indirectly) in a contract which has been, or is proposed to be, entered into with the Council, you must give notice to the Chief Executive under the provisions of Section 117 of the Local Government Act 1972. It is a criminal offence not to do so.
- 6.4 All contracts must be awarded in accordance with the Council's Contract rules, which are contained in the Constitution and are available on the Council's website.

7. POLITICAL NEUTRALITY

- 7.1 You serve the Council as a whole. It follows you must serve all members and not just those of any single political group, and must ensure that the individual rights of all members are respected. Some employees may also be required to advise political groups. You must do so in such a way that it does not compromise your political neutrality.
- 7.2 Most senior posts (grade spinal column Point 44 and above and some other specified posts) are politically restricted under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. Employees who hold a politically restricted post may not participate in any formal political activity. Such employees are unable to stand for elected office as a Councillor, Member of Parliament (MP) or Member of the European Parliament (MEP). In addition they cannot take part in the following activities:
- Writing or speaking publicly in a way which appears to be designed to affect public support for a political party;
 - Canvassing at any election on behalf of a political party, or at elections of Councillors, MPs or MEPs.
 - Holding office in a political party.
- 7.3 Employees holding politically restricted posts (except statutory postholders) can apply for an exemption from the restriction. Further information is available in the Guidance for Managers and Employees on Political Restrictions.
- 7.4 Whether or not your post is politically restricted, you must not allow your own personal or political opinions to interfere with your work and you cannot stand for election as a Councillor for Oxford City Council.

8. PROPER USE OF COUNCIL RESOURCES

- 8.1 The Council is responsible for the efficient use of the public resources it controls including financial resources, equipment and its employees. You must not use Council premises, property, vehicles or other Council facilities unless authorised to do so. You must not do work that is not Council work of any sort in Council premises or by using Council equipment or materials, or during the Council's time.

Some facilities, such as photocopying, may be made available to employees for private use on agreed terms and with prior approval.

- 8.2 All employees have a duty to abide by the highest standards of probity in dealing with financial issues. You should assist the Council in discharging its obligations to follow proper accounting practices and to secure best value. You must operate within the required accounting standards and timetables to ensure that all the Council's transactions, material commitments and contracts and other essential accounting information are recorded completely, accurately and on a timely basis.
- 8.3 You are required to ensure that Auditors are given access at all reasonable times to premises, personnel, documents and assets that the auditors consider necessary for the purposes of their work. You are obliged to provide the auditors with any information and explanations that they seek in the course of their work.

9. USE OF TECHNOLOGY, TELEPHONES, INTERNET AND EMAIL

- 9.1 If you use computers at work you must ensure you are familiar and comply with the Council's policy on Information Technology Security. This is available on the Intranet.
- 9.2 All employees must comply with the Council's Policy on the Use of Email and the Internet, which is available on the Intranet.
- 9.5 Work telephones including mobile phones should not be used for private telephone calls except in cases of emergency. Pay telephones are available in some office buildings and these should normally be used for private telephone calls. Use of personal mobile phones should be limited to emergencies during working time.
- 9.6 If you use a mobile phone for work purposes (Council or privately owned) you must make sure you only use it when it is lawful and safe to do so. Further information on the use of mobile phones for work is available in the Drivers Handbook, which is available on the Intranet.

10. INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

- 10.1 All creative designs, writings, drawings and inventions you produce which are directly related to your employment remain the property of the Council. Specific requirements may be set out in an employee's terms of employment, job description and those arising from an instruction from a manager or other authorised representative of the Council.

11. COPYRIGHT

- 11.1 It is your responsibility to ensure that copyright is not breached when making copies from newspapers and other materials:
- Copies of newspaper materials may only be made by council employees within the conditions of the Newspaper Licensing Agency;
 - Copies of other materials may not be made unless you have permission from the holder of the copyright, and you can only photocopy copyright items if they are single copies for private study or research for non-commercial use.

12. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 12.1 You must be aware of the Council's objective to protect the environment and you are required to consider sustainability issues when undertaking your duties, including the procurement of goods and services. In particular you should seek opportunities to improve and promote energy conservation, advocate recycling and waste minimisation, reduce pollution and support positive Council initiatives to improve the environment. You should limit travel on Council business to that which is unavoidable and walk, cycle or use public transport if possible.

13. WHISTLE BLOWING

- 13.1 The Council is committed to the highest standards of openness, probity and accountability.
- 13.2 If you have concerns or you become aware of any activities that you believe are illegal, improper, unethical or in some other way inconsistent with this Code, or the Council's Constitution, policies and procedures, you should report these in accordance with the Council's Whistle Blowing Policy, which is contained in the Constitution and is available on the Council's website.

14. PREVENTION OF FRAUD & CORRUPTION

- 14.1 The Council is committed to eliminating all forms of fraud and corruption, whether committed by employees, Members or the public who come into contact with the Council. All employees must comply with the Council's Avoiding Fraud and Corruption Policy, which is available on the Intranet.
- 14.2 If you have any concerns or suspect that a fraudulent or corrupt practice has happened or is happening or you are approached in an inappropriate manner you should report these in accordance with the Avoiding Fraud and Corruption Policy.

15. PREVENTION OF MONEY LAUNDERING ACTIVITY

The Council has a Money Laundering Policy and a Procedure to ensure compliance with Money Laundering Legislation. All employees must ensure that they are aware of their responsibilities under the Policy and Procedure. Employees who fail to disclose suspected money laundering activity may be liable to prosecution under the legislation. The Policy and Procedure are available on the Intranet.

16. GIFTS AND HOSPITALITY

- 16.1 It is a criminal offence under the Local Government Act 1972, for an employee of a local authority, to demand or accept any fee or reward whatsoever other than their proper remuneration for any service or information obtained as a direct result of their employment with the Council. Acceptance of rewards, gifts and hospitality without authorisation could be regarded as gross misconduct and will be dealt with under the Council's Disciplinary Procedure.
- 16.2 As a general rule, with the exception of small gifts given as part of a clearly established commercial practice (such as pens, mouse mats, mugs etc.) employees

should tactfully refuse any personal gift offered to them or any member of their family by an organisation or person who has, or seeks, dealings with the Council.

- 16.3 With regard to hospitality, in general terms it will be more acceptable where it is offered to a group rather than specifically to any individual employee. For example, invitations to a Society or Institute function are likely to be acceptable. However, extravagant offers of meals in restaurants, theatre tickets or use of holiday accommodation would not be acceptable.
- 16.4 Hospitality may only be accepted with the approval of the relevant Head of Service.
- 16.5 All offers of gifts (except small gifts such as those referred to at paragraph 15.2) and hospitality must be recorded in each Service Area's Register of Gifts and Hospitality (whether accepted or not). The employee and Head of Service must sign each entry on the register recording the action taken. The Monitoring Officer reviews all Registers of Gifts and Hospitality on an annual basis.

17. CONFIDENTIALITY AND DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION

- 17.1 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, the public and other persons. The City Council may itself decide to be open about other types of information. Employees must be aware of which information is considered confidential and not disclose any confidential information.

18. INFORMATION CONCERNING EMPLOYEES OR OTHER PERSONS

- 18.1 Information which the Council holds concerning an employee's or any other person's private affairs, must not be supplied to any person outside the service of the authority or used for private purposes by other employees of the Council, unless the consent of the individual concerned is obtained first. This applies to all requests for information such as those from building societies, loan companies, banks etc. and other persons.
- 18.2 Information will be disclosed where the Council is under a legal obligation to provide the information. The Council cannot legally refuse to provide information to certain organisations eg the Child Support Agency. Where possible employees will be advised that the information has been disclosed.

19. CONFIDENTIAL DOCUMENTS AND INFORMATION

- 19.1 Employees must not disclose information from meetings where the press and public have been excluded in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Act 1972. Employees must not disclose confidential documents/information unless required by law or expressly authorised to do so.
- 19.2 All employees must ensure that when sending confidential information electronically, they must comply with the requirements of the Council's ICT Security Policy, which is available on the Intranet.

19.3 All service areas deal with matters of a confidential nature to some degree and the need to be circumspect in what is said outside the office is stressed to all employees.

20. OFFICIAL STATEMENTS

- 20.1 In the normal course of your duties, you may be required to make an official statement to the Police, Health and Safety Executive etc. In such instances you are advised that it is in your own best interests to retain a copy of the statement in order that Legal Services may properly represent the Council in any court proceedings. If the subject matter of your statement affects your Service Area, you should inform and provide your Head of Service with a copy of your statement.
- 20.2 Where any party (other than the Council) requests an employee to give evidence in proceedings in their official capacity, employees should insist on their attendance being secured by a witness summons.
- 20.3 Where employees are requested to provide information for use in third party proceedings, employees must not disclose any information unless specifically ordered by a Court to do so.
- 20.4 In the event of an accident or any incident involving a possible claim against the Council or an individual, you should not admit any liability or blame either verbally or in writing. An insurance company acts on behalf of the Council in all cases where compensation is requested for alleged injury, loss or damage as a result of the negligent act of the Council (or the Council's employees) and the decision as to legal liability is made at their sole discretion.
- 20.5 The Council has agreed to indemnify employees against personal liability for any damage, costs or expenses incurred by that officer in the course of their duties, subject to certain conditions, which are available from your Head of Service.
- 20.6 Employees must not speak to the press in their capacity as an employee without the prior approval of the Policy, Performance and Communications team. All press releases must be issued by Policy, Performance and Communications.
- 20.7 An employee is entitled to make personal comments to the media in almost any circumstances, including acting as a "whistle-blower" to reveal any corrupt or improper practices. It should be emphasised that if you are not authorised to make statements to the media about your work or the work of your service area, you should refer any enquiry to your Head of Service or Executive Director. There may be circumstances when you want to talk to the media about personal matters, including your conditions of employment. The Council recognises your right to take this course of action but if you do you must:-
- Make it clear that the views you are expressing are your personal views and not those of the Council.
 - Not reveal any commercially sensitive information to the media. Commercially sensitive information is information, which could place the Council at a disadvantage in any negotiations with a third party or in any tendering process.

20.8 It is important that you observe these two points. If you do not you may be subject to disciplinary action. If you are in any doubt about what you can say you should seek the advice of the Policy, Performance and Communications Team. Please contact Peter McQuitty, telephone (01865) 252780 or email pmquitty@oxford.gov.uk.

20.9 Any subjects that appear to have legal implications should also be referred to the Head of Legal and Democratic Services.

21. CONDUCT IN PUBLIC AND WRITTEN PROTESTS IN THE PUBLIC ARENA

21.1 You should always act in ways that will not bring the Council into disrepute and not harm its reputation, for example not expressing publicly personal views which conflict with the policies of the Council or which may damage the reputation of the Council. If you attend lobbies or rallies (including trade union meetings) you should not display abusive posters or other material. If you are unsure on this point you should seek guidance from your line manager, or trade union representative. You should not wear Council uniforms at public protests without the consent of your line manager.

22.2 If you publicly express views as a trade union officer these should be clearly acknowledged as the views of the union so that there can be no confusion with the views of the Council.

23.3 If you wish to protest against Council policy you must not use the Council's headed notepaper, work time or Council facilities to do so and if you write to newspapers or otherwise publicise your personal views you must be careful not to imply that you are speaking on behalf of the Council.

22. SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN

22.1 The Council has a policy on Safeguarding of Children. If your work brings you into contact with children you must ensure you undertake the responsibilities as required by the policy including safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. The full policy is available on the Intranet.

23. EQUALITY ISSUES

23.1 All employees are required to comply with the Council's Corporate Equality Scheme and Dignity at Work Policy and Procedure. These are available on the Intranet.

24. DATA PROTECTION

24.1 All employees must comply with the Council's Data Protection Policy, which is available on the Intranet.

25. FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

25.1 Members of the public can make a request for information from the Council under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The Council has a duty to respond to these requests. If you receive a request you should inform your Service Area's designated Freedom of Information (FOI) contact and/or the Council's Freedom of Information Officer.

26. APPOINTMENT OF EMPLOYEES AND OTHER EMPLOYMENT ISSUES

- 26.1 If you are involved in the recruitment and appointment of employees you must ensure that appointments are made on the basis of merit. In order to avoid any possible accusation of bias, you must not be involved in any appointment, or any other decisions relating to discipline, promotion or pay and conditions for any other employee, or prospective employee, to whom you are related, or with whom you have a close personal relationship outside work.
- 26.2 On occasions a candidate may apply for a position in the same work area or under the supervision of a relative or partner. The candidate is required to disclose any relationship on their application. Where a relationship is declared the Executive Director and Head of HR will decide whether to allow the application to proceed.
- 26.3 Further guidance and information is available from Human Resources.

27. CANVASSING

- 27.1 The canvassing of any elected member or senior officer of the Council in connection with an appointment to a vacancy automatically disqualifies the applicant.

28. ADDITIONAL PAID AND VOLUNTARY WORK

- 28.1 Employees taking up additional paid or voluntary work must ensure that it does not conflict with or have an adverse effect on the Council's interests.
- 28.2 All employees must obtain the written consent of their Head of Service before taking up additional paid work in any capacity. Further information is available in the Council's Guidance for Managers and Employees on Additional Paid and Voluntary Work, which is on the Intranet.

29. INVOLVEMENT IN OTHER ORGANISATIONS

- 29.1 Many of the Council's objectives are delivered by developing partnership arrangements with other public and private sector organisations or community groups. You may also be asked to take part in voluntary activity or offered a role in a voluntary organisation. In these situations the following applies:
- It is important that you clarify the role expected of you and whether you are acting in your own right or as the voice of the Council;
 - If acting for the Council, you should clarify what authority is vested in you by the Council and other partner organisations by checking with your line manager as to the extent of your participation or authorisation. Liability can arise from formal membership of external organisations, and you should seek further advice from your line manager if you have reason to believe that any liability may arise.
 - You must not accept any voluntary position, in which you are acting on behalf of the Council, without the prior consent of your line manager.

30. EMPLOYEE IDENTITY CARDS

30.1 Some employees require an identity card to enter Council offices and perform duties outside of the office. Employee identity cards must only be used for authorised purposes and must be handed back to your line manager when your employment ends.

31. DRESS CODE

31.1 Employees who meet with members of the public represent the Council and must be of reasonable general appearance.

31.2 Any personal protective equipment or high visibility clothing issued by the Council must be worn at all relevant times. Failure to wear protective equipment or high visibility clothing may result in disciplinary action.

31.3 Employees who have been given a uniform, work wear or name badge should wear them at all times whilst working.

32. INVESTIGATIONS BY THE COUNCIL'S MONITORING OFFICER

32.1 You must assist and co-operate fully with the Council's Monitoring Officer where the Monitoring Officer is either carrying out an:-

- Enquiry or investigation about the lawfulness of the Council's actions under Section 5 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989; or
- Investigation into a complaint against a Member that has been referred to the Monitoring Officer under Section 66 of the Local Government Act 2000.

33. LEAVING THE COUNCIL

33.1 Upon leaving the Council you must ensure you hand back all Council property that you may have such as mobile telephones and computer equipment.

33.1 After you leave the Council, you still have a duty not to disclose personal data relating to others or exempt/confidential information that you have learnt in the course of your work at the Council.

34. AVAILABILITY OF POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

34.1 A number of Policies and Procedures are referred to in this document as being available on the Council's Intranet or Website. If you are unable to access these for any reason you may request a paper copy from your line manager or Human Resources.

35. REVIEW OF THIS CODE

35.1 This Code will be reviewed regularly to ensure that it continues to be effective and up to date.