



EMPLOYEE CODE OF CONDUCT

A Guide for the Town Council's Staff

1. OUTLINE OF THE CODE

1.1 Status of the Code

As a local government officer your conduct must be beyond reproach and you must do nothing that might give rise to the suspicion, however ill-founded, that you are in any way influenced by improper motives.

This code sets out the standards that are expected of employees and provides a framework that will help to promote good practice. All employees of the Council are required to observe and uphold the standards of the code and all policies and procedures of the Council. The primary aim of this code is to provide advice and guidance and to lay down clear guidelines to help ensure the maintenance and improvement of standards and to protect staff from misunderstanding or criticism.

1.2 Who Does the Code Apply to?

This code covers all employees of Godalming Town Council.

1.3 Responsibility

All employees of the Council 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.

You are encouraged, without fear of recrimination, to bring to the attention of the appropriate level of management or Members any impropriety or breach of procedure that comes to your attention.

1.4 Confidentiality

All information will be handled sensitively and used only for its proper purpose.

Under the Data Protection Act 1998 individuals have the right to see their own personal data held subject to the rights of confidentiality of any third parties involved in that information.

1.5 Dealing with Abuses of the Code

Employees who attempt to abuse this policy may face disciplinary action. The Council takes false or misleading accusations very seriously which may result in further action taken through the disciplinary procedure. This will not include ill-founded allegations that were made in good faith.

1.6 Publicising/Distribution of the Code

A copy of this code is issued to every employee. A copy can also be viewed on the Council's website

New employees will be informed of the existence of this code in recruitment and induction information.

1.7 Reviewing the Code

The Council will keep the operation of this policy under review and will make such changes to the policy as deemed appropriate in the light of the experience of its application. Any such changes shall be made in consultation with staff.

1.8 Equality and Diversity

The Council is committed to treating the people it serves or employs fairly, consistently and with respect; all employees must ensure that policies relating to equality issues as agreed by the Council are complied with, in addition to the requirements of the law. This applies both in the delivery of our services and in relation to our employment practices.

1.9 Alternative Formats

Should you require a copy of this policy in any alternative format then a request should be submitted to the Town Clerk.

1.10 Further Information

If you require any further advice relating to this document, you should contact your line manager in the first instance.

2. PROCEDURE

2.1 Standards and Attitude

Employees must give the highest possible standard of service to the public and, where it is part of their duties, provide appropriate advice to elected Members and fellow employees with impartiality.

Employees must always remember their responsibilities to the community they serve and ensure courteous, efficient and impartial delivery of services to all groups and people within that community according to the Council's policies.

In all cases, it is not enough to avoid actual impropriety, as public perceptions are very important. Employees should at all times avoid any appearance of improper conduct, which may give rise to suspicion.

2.2 Confidentiality and Disclosure of Information

Employees shall not divulge to any person (other than another member of staff or member of the Town Council that requires information for the performance of his/her duties), any information which the member of staff has obtained by reason of his/her employment to the Council, except where that information is anyway in the public domain by virtue of legislation or under the Council's Publication Scheme

In particular, no member of staff shall divulge personal information regarding any employee, person or contractor, having dealings with the Council and information relating to tenders or other such issues.

Whilst staff are encouraged to be open with the press, the press should only be given information which would normally be available publicly. If the employee is in any doubt as to whether or not the information can be disclosed to the press, then prior approval from the Town Clerk must be sought.

2.3 Political Neutrality

Employees serve the Council as a whole. Employees must serve all elected Members. In addition, they must ensure that the individual rights of all elected Members are respected.

Employees must follow the lawfully expressed policies of the Council and must not allow their own personal or political opinions to interfere improperly with their work

2.4 Relationships

2.4.1 Colleagues

Good working relationships between colleagues are essential. Officers should treat their colleagues with dignity and respect at all times. Attention is particularly drawn to the Council's Bullying & Harassment Policy a copy of which should be issued alongside this Code of Conduct.

2.4.2 Councillors

Mutual respect between employees and councillors is essential for good local government. Some employees need to work closely with councillors. 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.

2.4.3 The Local Community and Service Users

Employees should always remember their responsibilities to the whole of the community they serve and ensure courteous, effective and impartial service delivery to all groups and individuals within that community in accordance with the policies of the Council.

2.4.4 Contractors

All relationships of a business or personal nature with external contractors or suppliers, or potential contractors or suppliers, must be declared to the Town Clerk at the earliest opportunity. Orders and contracts must be awarded in accordance with Council standing orders and no special favour should be shown to businesses run by, for example, friends, partners or relatives.

2.5 Appointment and Other Employment Matters

Employees shall not canvass any Member or Officer of the Council in respect of candidates seeking employment with the Council. Officers shall disclose to the Town Clerk any relationship known to exist between themselves and any person who they know is a candidate for employment with the Council. (The Town Clerk shall make any such disclosure to the Chairman of the Staffing Sub-Committee.)

Employees who are involved in appointments must ensure that these are made on merit. There is a strong risk of litigation if an employee makes an appointment based on anything other than the ability of the applicant to undertake the duties of the post.

To avoid accusations of bias, employees must not be involved with appointments where they are related to any applicant or otherwise have a close personal relationship with them.

By the same token employees must not be involved in supervisory decisions relating to the discipline, promotion or remuneration (re-grading) of any employee to whom they are related or otherwise have a close personal relationship.

2.6 Outside Commitments

Your off-duty hours are your personal concern but you must not subordinate your Council work to your private interests or other employment, or put yourself in the position where your work and your private interests/employment conflict. If you are in any doubt whatsoever that any outside activities or employment might be detrimental to the Council's interests, you must discuss the matter with the Town Clerk.

All full-time employees are normally expected to devote their working time only to Godalming Town Council. However, in exceptional circumstances, consent can be given for employees to engage in any other business by applying to the Town Clerk.

2.7 Personal Interests

You must declare, in writing, to the Town Clerk any financial or non-financial interests which could bring about conflict with the Council's interests. If you are in any doubt about a potential conflict of interest, you should bring the matter to the attention of your line manager so that a decision can be made as to how best to proceed. You must not make, or become involved with any official or professional decisions about matters in which you have a personal interest.

You must declare to the Town Clerk membership of any organisation not open to the public, requiring any commitment of allegiance, or which has secrecy about rules or membership or conduct, for example, the Freemasons

The Town Clerk must make any declarations required by this paragraph, in writing, to the Chairman of the Staffing Sub-Committee.

2.8 Equality

All members of the local community, customers and other Council employees have a right to be treated with fairness and equity. You should become familiar with and observe all Council policies relating to equality issues, e.g. the Council's Equal Opportunities Policy Statement, in addition to the requirements of the law.

2.9 Tendering Procedures

Employees involved in the tendering process or who have any other official relationship with contractors, must exercise fairness and impartiality when dealing with all customers, suppliers, other contractors and sub-contractors. If you are responsible for engaging or supervising contractors and have previously had, or currently have, a relationship in a private or domestic capacity with contractors, you must declare that relationship to the Town Clerk. If you become privy to confidential information on tenders or costs relating either to internal or external contractors, you must not disclose that information to any unauthorised person. All 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 businesses run by them or employing them in any capacity.

At all times, employees dealing with Tenders and Contracts must ensure that they comply with the Council's Standing Orders and Financial Regulations with respect to Contracts.

2.10 Use of Financial Resources

You must ensure that you use public funds entrusted to you in a responsible and lawful manner. You should strive to ensure value for money to the local community and to avoid legal challenge to the Council.

All employees involved in financial activities and transactions on behalf of the Council, including budgetary control, payments of accounts, payments of salaries and wages, petty cash and orders for works, goods or services must follow the Council's financial regulations.

2.11 Protection of the Council's Property

You must take all reasonable precautions to ensure that the Council's regalia, equipment and other property that is placed in your charge is kept safe and is protected from damage.

In the general interests of security in the Council's premises, you should take care not to do anything that reduces the level of security. In particular, you must ensure that doors and windows are shut and locked when you leave any premises and that any security alarms (if present) are set or that arrangements are in place for them to be set later. If you notice a potential lapse in security, you should bring it to the attention of the Facilities Manager or the Town Clerk.

2.12 Information Technology

You will agree to abide by the conditions set out in Godalming Town Council's Policy on the use of IT Facilities (annexed to this code).

2.13 Use of Non-financial Council Resources for Personal Purposes

You should not use or abuse the Council's equipment and other resources for your own personal purposes, either at home or at the office, regardless of whether or not such use is for your personal gain.

However, in certain circumstances and with the prior agreement of the Town Clerk, it may be possible for you to make reasonable use of the Council's resources. In such a case, the Council will make an appropriate charge for the use of its resources for example photocopying.

2.14 Corruption

It is an offence under the Prevention of Corruption Acts for employees to accept corruptly any gift or consideration as an inducement or reward for doing, or refraining from doing, anything in an official capacity or showing favour or disfavour to any person in an official capacity. For your own protection, if anyone makes an approach to you which seems to you, or might seem to a third party, to be aimed at obtaining some form of preferential treatment, or in any suspicious circumstances in connection with a contract, you must report the matter to the Town Clerk.

Under the Prevention of Corruption Act 1916, if an allegation is made against you in this connection, it is for you to demonstrate that any such rewards have not been obtained corruptly.

2.15 Hospitality and Gifts

You should only accept offers of hospitality if there is a genuine need to impart information or represent the Council 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 Council should be seen to be represented. They should be authorised by the Town Clerk, in advance whenever possible.

When hospitality has to be declined, those making the offer should be courteously but firmly informed of the procedures and standards operating within Godalming Town Council.

When receiving authorised hospitality you should be particularly sensitive as to its timing in relation to decisions which the Council may be taking affecting those providing the hospitality.

You should not accept significant personal gifts from contractors and outside suppliers, although you may keep insignificant items of token value such as pens, diaries, etc when you are satisfied that there is no ulterior motive associated with the offer of the gift and where acceptance gives no danger of misinterpretation by a member of the public.

Gifts which fall outside the definition above should be politely refused and the Council's policy on the acceptance of gifts should be explained. If you have any doubt, please seek advice from the Town Clerk.

If a gift is delivered to the office without prior warning, unless it falls within the scope of acceptable gifts the gift should be returned, or if the return of the gift would cause offence the item should be donated to the Mayor's Charity.

All hospitality offered, whether or not it is accepted, and all gifts offered or received, whether or not they are accepted or returned, must be entered in the Register of Hospitality and Gifts and a note made of the action taken.

2.16 Sponsorship – Giving and Receiving

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.

Where the Council wishes to sponsor an event or service, neither an employee nor any partner/civil partner, spouse nor relative must benefit from such sponsorship in a direct way without there being full disclosure to the Town Clerk of any such interest. Similarly, where the 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.