

2.0 **OFFICERS' CODE OF CONDUCT**

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR COUNCIL EMPLOYEES

2.1 **Introduction**

The Council has developed vision and a set of objectives which sets out the key and underpinning aspirations that shape our work for the Town. Our vision is that Watford is a town to be proud of, where people will always choose to live, work and visit.

Our objectives are:

- Improve the health of the town and enhance its heritage
- Enhance the town's 'clean and green' environment
- Enhance the town's sustainability
- Enhance the town's economic prosperity and potential
- Supporting individuals and the community
- Securing an efficient, effective, value for money council
- Influence and partnership delivery

The Council places great value on the contribution of all staff in achieving these objectives, and is committed to creating an environment where staff are highly motivated and are able to provide excellent services to the community.

The Code of Conduct has been developed to help us achieve these aims and ensure that honesty, integrity and high standards of personal behaviour are maintained at all times.

This Code of Conduct applies to all employees of the Council and has been developed in consultation with the Trade Unions. It is intended to complement and enhance other employment regulations, policies and procedures which are available from either your line manager, or Human Resources.

The code provides a framework for employees that will help to maintain and improve standards, and also protect employees from misunderstanding or criticism.

It is very important for all staff to read and understand the code. It is possible, in some circumstances that if employees seriously fall below the expected standards, disciplinary action, and possibly dismissal may result.

The Council will take into account any mitigating circumstances which may be relevant to possible breaches of the Code.

If you do not understand any points made in the code, or have any questions or would like clarification you should seek advice from either your line manager or Human Resources.

2.2 **Respecting Others**

Respecting the rights, dignity and contribution of everyone is one of the Council's key aspirations, both within the organisation and also with the wider community. Everyone therefore has the right to be treated with courtesy and

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respect at all times and it is your responsibility to ensure you always treat others this way.

Additionally, everyone is entitled to be treated fairly and not to be discriminated against and the Council expects you to reflect this when carrying out your duties.

You should never harass or discriminate against or victimise people you meet in the course of your work either other council employees, service users or when working with the general public, in particular, on the following grounds:

Race	Gender	Sexuality
Disability	Religious Beliefs	Social Background
Marital Status	HIV Status	Educational Background
Irrelevant Conviction	Gender reassignment	Age

Harassment, discrimination or victimisation will not be tolerated by the Council.

It is not acceptable in the workplace to display material or make remarks which might be offensive or undermine the dignity of others.

Everyone has a role to play in ensuring fairness and respect towards colleagues and the community. If you have any concerns in relation to this, you must raise them either with your line manager or Human Resources. The Council has introduced procedures such as the Harassment and Bullying Procedure and Whistleblowing Procedure to support employees who may have concerns to raise.

2.3 **Working with the Community**

The community has a right to be treated with respect regardless of their background or any other personal issues. It is important that there is a positive attitude from all staff towards meeting the needs of individuals and different groups within the community.

Our service users and customers have the right to expect us to listen to them, be open, helpful and professional in our approach.

The Council recognises, that due to the nature of their work, some staff may come into conflict with members of the public more than others and this can often be difficult. The Council will support staff who are abused or assaulted by members of the public in the course of their duties.

If a member of the public is being abusive or completely unreasonable and your attempts to defuse the situation fail, try to end the conversation in a polite manner, and report the incident to your manager. Make every effort not to be rude or offensive in return.

Staff who are directly assaulted may be entitled as a last resort to take reasonable action to defend themselves, however, it is important to remember that only reasonable force (over reaction can constitute a criminal offence) may be used to remove a person who has acted violently and for example, refuses to leave the premises. In these circumstances it may be appropriate to call the police.

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The Council has a Violence at Work policy that gives guidance about dealing with potentially difficult situations and how the Council will provide support.

Our attitude, manner and appearance are important in portraying confidence in the Council and your behaviour or actions should not at any time damage public confidence in the Council.

2.4 **Relationships with other Employees and Managers**

In order to achieve the Council's aim of providing the best quality services for all, the same high standards of conduct need to be displayed with other employees as the public.

You should show respect for others and not disrupt their work. Harassment, discrimination and bullying will not be tolerated. It is important to maintain effective working relationships with team members and your manager.

Managers should show respect for staff and behave courteously, reasonably and fairly at all times. You should carry out any reasonable and lawful instructions your manager gives you to the best of your ability.

Any complaints about other employees may be raised through the Harassment and Bullying Procedure or the Grievance procedure. If you have a complaint relating to your immediate line manager you should report it to the manager next in line or contact Human Resources.

2.5 **Working with Councillors**

When dealing with Councillors' enquiries you are expected to be both polite and efficient, working within whatever procedures apply in your service or work area. Councillors should also deal with you courteously and reasonably and there is a Code of Conduct in place for Councillors which covers these areas.

You should serve all councillors impartially and professionally, not just those of any particular political group.

Councillors have the legal right to information that they "need to know" i.e. if it is reasonably necessary to fulfil their duties as a Councillor. If you have any concerns or are unclear about requests for information from Councillors you should raise this with your line manager.

Any personal issues relating to your job should not be discussed with Councillors directly, but should go through the accepted Council procedures, , Grievance, relevant appeal procedures and usual consultation routes. In the same way, allegations or claims about other employees should be taken up with an appropriate manager and not a Councillor.

You should not use Councillors to bypass formal Council procedures in any way, for example to influence the outcome of any disciplinary matter. This does not affect the rights of trade unions to take up matters on behalf of their members through the recognised channels.

The above does not preclude you from approaching your local Ward Councillor in his/her role as your elected representative.

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If you have any concerns about working relationships with Councillors you should raise them with your line manager.

2.6 **Working within the Law**

It is very important that the Council and all staff work within the law. In order for Council decisions and actions to be held to be reasonable in law, the Council must carry out its business in a way that is rational, proper and fair. Unlawful behaviour at, or even way from work could result in a loss of trust and confidence in the employee or the Council.

It is important that you uphold the law at work, and it is important that you do not break a law away from work which could damage public confidence in you or the council, or makes you unsuitable for the work you do. This includes, for example:

- submitting false or fraudulent claims to the Council or other public bodies (e.g. income support, housing or other benefit claims)
- breaching copyright on computer software
- crimes of dishonesty which might make an employee unfit to hold a position of trust
- accepting a bribe

If you are charged with or convicted of a crime which may affect your job you must inform your line manager or Human Resources.

2.7 **Working with Contracts and Contractors**

Orders and Contracts must be awarded in accordance with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and the law and no special favour must be shown to businesses run by, for example, friends, partners or relatives in this process, nor should any part of the local community be discriminated against.

If you engage or supervise contractors or have any other official relationship with contractors and have previously had or currently have a relationship in a private capacity with the contractors or potential contractors, you must declare that relationship to your manager.

There is a specific legal responsibility (Section 117 Local Government Act 1972) to declare such interests where you or your spouse/partner has a financial interest, (which can include a shareholding in a Company) in any Contract with the Council whether or not you have dealings with that contractor on behalf of the Council.

It is a criminal offence under the Bribery Act 2010 to request, agree or accept a financial or other advantage intending that you will perform your duties as a council officer improperly, or get another council officer to perform their duties improperly. It does not matter if you do not directly receive or accept the advantage. You are expected to perform your duties in good faith and impartially. As a council officer you are in a position of trust.

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Any attempts to bribe you or another employee must be reported to your manager as soon as possible, as should any evidence of corruption or improper conduct by others.

It is also not acceptable for an officer to purchase goods from, or use the services of a contractor for private use, at a preferential rate, if the preferential rate is given as a result of the official business relationship between the Council and the contractor.

If you have any concerns, or a situation arises in which you are uncertain about the correct way to deal with it, you should seek advice from your manager.

2.8 **Gifts, Loans, Benefits or Hospitality**

As a general rule members of staff should not accept any gift offered to them because of the work they do for the Council. Providing the public with the highest quality of service possible requires integrity and honesty at all times.

To prevent any suspicion of dishonesty or corruption as specified above and to protect you from suspicion, a hospitality register will be kept by the Head of Legal & Property Services. Any offer of a gift or hospitality, whether accepted or not, will be recorded on a proforma countersigned by your manager and forwarded to the Head of Legal & Property Services to place on the register. It is your responsibility to ensure that any offers are communicated to your manager and that you fill in the proforma.

Things that cannot be accepted include: money, goods, services, holidays, travel, accommodation, discounts or anything else of value.

There are occasions when a gift is offered and it may seem impolite to refuse, in these circumstances you must inform your line manager who will decide whether or not it is appropriate for the gift to be kept, returned or forwarded elsewhere (e.g. an appropriate charity organisation). This will be recorded in the hospitality register.

Often small gifts such as calendars, diaries or simple items of office equipment of modest value are made and these can be accepted if your manager agrees. They must be recorded in the hospitality register.

As a general guide no employee should accept a gift from anyone which could, or might appear to, place them under an obligation or be seen to influence the performance of their duties.

There are times when receiving reasonable hospitality is acceptable, such as light refreshments (e.g. tea, coffee, sandwiches) when visiting sites, offices or peoples homes in the ordinary course of your employment. It will not be necessary for these modest hospitalities to be recorded in the hospitality register.

Invitations to meals, or similar are acceptable if you are representing the Council in a professional capacity, but this must be agreed with your manager (in advance as far as possible), and will be noted in the hospitality register.

You should inform your manager if people you meet through work leave you things in their will.

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If you are in any doubt at all about whether you can accept a gift or hospitality it is your responsibility to seek advice from your line manager.

2.9 **Using the Council's Resources**

Only in exceptional circumstances, and after specific written authority from your manager may Watford Council's resources (property, equipment and staff) be used for private purposes. Separate guidelines for staff who use Council resources when they work from home in the course of their normal duties have been developed.

You must not steal or wilfully damage anything that belongs to the Council.

You should not copy or take Council Software including other licensed software for your own use, nor use your own software on Council equipment except with the prior consent of your manager and in accordance with the license provisions for that software. Any disc brought into the Council on legitimate business or exchanged within the Council must be virus checked.

Council telephones should normally be used for Council business. The Council understands that there are occasions when people need to make personal calls from work to make arrangements for child care, doctors appointments etc. These personal calls are acceptable only if they are essential and are kept to a minimum and are in accordance with any agreement reached with your manager. Other personal calls at the Council's expense are not acceptable

2.10 **Working with Sensitive Information**

Often information held by the Council is sensitive and confidential. The Council is required to make some information available to Councillors, auditors, government departments, service users and the public.

Information gathered by the Council should not be used for commercial or personal gain or misused in any way. It is important that you know what the Council treats as confidential, who is entitled to have access to the information, and are responsible and professional in using and allowing access to information.

Any personal information held on computer must be in line with the principles of the Data Protection Act.

If you have any concerns or are unsure you must seek clarification from your line manager.

2.11 **Work outside of Council Employment**

If you are undertaking additional employment outside of the Council you must advise your line manager, e.g. additional part-time employment. You must not use your position within the Council to gain such employment, and you may not be engaged in such employment during Council time (includes sick leave), or use Council equipment such as telephone or fax to carry out the work.

Your manager must be informed if you are engaged in additional employment (paid or unpaid) which is relevant to your job or may affect your work for the

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Council. Any such employment must not conflict with, or detrimentally affect the Council's duties or interests, or weaken public confidence in the Council.

Some employees work on a voluntary basis with other bodies, and the Council welcomes this involvement with the community. However, it is important to ensure that public confidence is maintained, and you should therefore inform your manager if your services to any such body could conflict with the work you carry out for the Council or if the organisation receives a grant from or has a contract with the Council. Your manager will decide whether or not there is a conflict of interests.

You are required to pay the Council any fees you receive for work you do such as lectures, speaking at conferences during the course of your job but you can keep fees for such work which the Council does not pay you for and is carried out in your own time.

2.12 **Confidentiality and Contact with the Media**

It is important that staff act as ambassadors of the Council, promoting the policies and reputation of the Council. Contact with the press and media should be conducted through the Council's Communications Team.

Any approaches by the media should be dealt with in a polite and courteous manner. You must contact the Council's Communications Team for advice before giving out any information relating to the Council. If you are in any doubt you should seek advice from your line manager.

You must never bring the Council into disrepute by publicising material which is confidential or against the interest of the Council and its employees. Any concerns you may have should be raised with your manager or through the usual recognised procedures, such as the Grievance procedure or Whistleblowing policy.

This does not include a spokesperson for the Council's recognised Trade Unions who may discuss Council business with the press for legitimate industrial relations activities.

2.13 **Working Hours and Attendance**

To carry out the Council's work for the community it is important that you are reliable and punctual in your work attendance. Time off for any reason should be agreed in advance by your immediate manager, and in order to qualify for leave under any of the leave schemes, you are expected to comply with the conditions of the scheme.

If you are not well enough to attend work, it is important to follow the Council's procedure for notifying sickness, which states that you must inform First Care as soon as possible on your first day of absence. Ideally you should make contact yourself, if this is not possible a partner, friend or relative will be sufficient. You should, where possible, give an indication of when you expect to be fit to return to work. For absence between 4 to 7 days duration you must complete a Watford self certification form. For any absence in excess of 7 days you must submit a Fit Note from your General Practitioner.

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The Council has a number of policies and leave schemes and you should refer to these to be clear about your entitlements under these schemes. They are: Sickness, Annual Leave, Flexi-time, Job Share, Maternity Leave, Dependency Leave, Paternity Leave, Special Leave (includes Compassionate Leave). If you are unclear or require any clarification you should speak to your line manager or Human Resources.

2.14 **Health and Safety**

The Council accepts and will meet any statutory obligations by making, so far as reasonably practicable, every effort to provide a safe and healthy work environment for all its staff and ensure that all steps are taken to protect the health and safety of its service users. The Council has agreed a number of policies in relation to Health and Safety to which you should refer. These are:

Health and Safety Policy
Alcohol and Drugs Policy
No Smoking Policy
Violence at Work Policy

You have a responsibility under Health and Safety legislation to help ensure a safe working environment by:

- following the Council's Health and Safety policy, copies available from your manager, Human Resources, or Health and Safety Advisor
- taking reasonable care to ensure the health and safety of staff you work with, service users and yourself
- wearing any safety clothing and using any appropriate equipment provided for your work, safely and correctly
- reporting any serious and imminent danger, accidents or near misses you have at work promptly
- attending any medical examination where required under Council Procedures
- complying with hygiene requirements
- telling your manager if you are taking any medication that may harm your ability to do your job safely

2.15 **Membership of organisations not open to the public**

You should register with your Head of Service your membership with any organisation not open to the public which has secrecy about rules, membership and/or conduct, for example, Freemasons.

The register will be open to Councillors and the Managing Director.

2.16 **Applying for a job with Council**

The Council is committed to an open and fair approach to staff recruitment and encourages applicants from all sections of the community to apply for posts, positively valuing the richness that diversity brings.

This approach requires that appointments are made without bias and on the basis of ability and suitability for the job. It is therefore important that you are open and honest at any interview and on your application form.

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You should disclose any criminal offence you have been convicted of (unless it is “spent” under the terms of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1978), or any charges you face which may have an impact on the job you are applying for.

You should also disclose if you are a personal friend, relative, tenant or landlord of someone who may influence your appointment.

2.17 **Misconduct**

The Council has a set of Disciplinary Rules which give examples of the types of breaches of standards of behaviour that may be considered to be misconduct. Some breaches are so great that they may be considered to be gross misconduct which could lead to your dismissal from the Council's service.

This Code of Conduct also sets out the standards of behaviour expected from all employees and you should understand that disciplinary action, including where appropriate dismissal, may result if standards of behaviour and conduct fall below those outlined in the Code.