



Code of Conduct Policy

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We will on request produce this document, or particular parts of it, in other languages and formats, in order that everyone can use and comment upon its content.

Some of the electronic links in this document will only work for staff of the Council, as they go to pages on our intranet. We will send anyone paper copies of any policies upon request.

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1. **Statement of Intent**

SCC seeks to uphold the highest standards in the way it operates. This policy sets out the standards that workers must observe. These guidelines will help to maintain and improve standards within the Council, and will protect both individual workers and the Council from criticism and legal risk and costs.

2. **Scope**

The policy applies to all workers of the Council, including office holders such as registrars. The standards also apply to any of our workers who are seconded out to other organisations.

The term ‘workers’ is deliberately used, as the policy applies to all employees, and temporary or casual workers. It is a condition of engagement that any consultants and contractors delivering services to the Council and its customers must also observe the spirit of this policy.

The policy does not apply to elected members (councillors), or school-based workers, for whom separate policies apply.

NB: some roles, such as social workers, health visitors and school nurses, will have their own additional professional code of conduct, which they must adhere to as well.

3. **Nolan Principles: The Seven Principles of Public Life**

The Seven Principles of Public Life (also known as the Nolan Principles) apply to anyone who works as a public officeholder. This includes all those who are elected or appointed to public office, such as those in the Civil Service; local government; police; courts and probation services; public bodies; and in health, education, social and care services, and workers in other sectors who deliver public services. All public office-holders are both servants of the public and stewards of public resources.

- **Selflessness**
Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.
- **Integrity**
Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that may try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.
- **Objectivity**
Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.
- **Accountability**
Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.
- **Openness**
Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for doing so.
- **Honesty**
Holders of public office should be truthful.
- **Leadership**
Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

More information about the Nolan principles can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life>

In addition, Suffolk County Council staff are required to demonstrate the Council's organisational values in their behaviours at work: 'We-Aspire':

<https://askhr.suffolk.gov.uk/corporate/policies-guidance/ASPIRE-Values/staff-values>

4. **Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion**

Suffolk County Council represents all of the communities it serves and seeks to be an employer of choice. All colleagues, volunteers and customers have a right to be treated with fairness, inclusion and equality. Workers must comply with both Council policies concerning equality issues and the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

The Council expects workers to:

- Treat each other and clients with respect and dignity, putting into practice the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion.
- Contribute to fulfilling their directorate or team's equality action plan.
- Seek to improve their own awareness and good practice on equality, diversity and inclusion, as part of service delivery and the culture within the organisation.
- Act according to the values of the organisation – 'We-Aspire' (see link above).
- Challenge discriminatory or non-inclusive practice, behaviours and words.
- Seek proactively to identify any barriers to services, or negative impacts affecting particular groups, and remove or mitigate them as much as possible.
- Help the Council to be an exemplar of good practice in this area.

Staff can access more information about equality and diversity here:

<https://suffolknet.sharepoint.com/sites/myscc/myjob/equalityanddiversity/Pages/EqualityandDiversity.aspx>

Suffolk County Council's Workforce Equality Report 2019 can be found here:

<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/assets/council-and-democracy/our-aims-and-transformation-programmes/Workforce-Equality-Report-2019.pdf>

5. Health and Safety

The Council takes its duty of care to its employees seriously. Workers must comply with any corporate or local health and safety policies and practices that apply to their work or role. Everybody has a responsibility to ensure their own safety, and the safety of colleagues or customers in their vicinity or sphere of influence. Any incidents or near misses must be reported. Risk assessments should be completed where necessary, e.g., for lone working or to assess risks to pregnant staff. Managers must care for the safety and well-being of the staff in their team.

Further information and guidance for staff about health and safety is available at:

<https://suffolknet.sharepoint.com/sites/myscc/myjob/healthandsafety/Pages/Compliance.aspx>

Information for staff about building security and staff responsibilities can be found

here: <https://suffolknet.sharepoint.com/sites/myscc/news/Pages/Building-Security-and-Staff-Responsibilities.aspx>

6. Standards and Whistleblowing

Workers must give a high standard of service to the public, and provide appropriate advice and support to elected members, colleagues, or service users with impartiality.

If a worker has any concerns about an issue in the provision of Council services, or any breach of conduct or procedures, they must bring it to the attention of their line manager. If they do not feel able to speak to their line manager, they can raise the issue with their senior manager, Head of Service or Director, depending on who they feel able to speak to. They should be able to do this without fear of recrimination or

victimisation. Workers may wish to use the Council's Whistleblowing procedure.

In particular, workers should be prepared to highlight any concerns with regards to: fraud, safeguarding issues, human trafficking and modern slavery, health and safety, equality and diversity, data protection, and any other issue of legal compliance; or where there could be serious impact on the safety or well-being of colleagues or customers, or the reputation of the Council.

The Whistleblowing Policy can be found on Ask HR here:

<https://askhr.suffolk.gov.uk/corporate/policies-guidance/codes-of-conduct/recieved-whistleblowingcomplaint>

7. Disclosure of Information and Data Protection

Workers must not use information obtained in the course of their employment for personal or commercial gain or benefit, or pass it on knowingly to others who might use it in such a way. Workers who have access to any commercially sensitive, confidential or personal information should only disclose it in the course of their work, as needed. Similarly, workers should only access and view data essential to their day-to-day tasks and not actively seek out individual or personal information. Workers should disclose to their manager, if at any time personal matters may result in a conflict of interest with them viewing the personal data of specific people.

Staff must adhere to the Council's policies on computer misuse and information security. Workers must have due regard to current data protection law, in respect of the way personal and special category information is stored and used. They must comply with the Acceptable Use of Information Policy and the Data Protection Policy.

The Council's Acceptable Use of Information Policy can be seen here:

https://askhr.suffolk.gov.uk/corporate/policies-guidance/a-z-policies/Acceptable_IT_Use_Policy

Staff can access the Data Protection Policy here:

<https://suffolknet.sharepoint.com/sites/myscc/IT/Documents/ICT-PL-0099%20Data%20Protection%20Policy.pdf>

Staff can access further guidance about data protection here:

<https://suffolknet.sharepoint.com/sites/myscc/myjob/Pages/Data%20Protection.aspx>

8. Political Neutrality

Workers serve the County Council as a whole. They must serve all elected members and not just those of the controlling group. In addition, they must ensure that the individual rights of all elected members are respected.

Workers may be required to advise political groups. They must do so in ways consistent with workers' political neutrality.

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

9. Outside Employment, Voluntary Work and Working Hours

All workers must obtain consent from their manager before engaging in any outside work or employment. This includes self-employment, voluntary work and work as a member or office holder for any professional association. This is primarily to ensure no breach of the Working Time Regulations and no conflict of interest. Requests will only be refused for business or welfare reasons, and a clear explanation will be given.

The Working Time Regulations were established to protect the well-being of workers and ensure they have adequate breaks and rest periods. They state that workers must not exceed an average of 48 hours per week. The Council has an obligation to advise staff of this limit, and do all it can to ensure it is not exceeded.

All workers must be clear about their contractual obligations and must not take on outside employment which conflicts with the Council's interests (see section 10).

Workers must adhere to the Council's rules on the ownership of intellectual property or copyright created during their employment with the Council. This could include patents, copyrights, brevets, inventions, licences, secret processes, trade designs and protections. For senior employees, these rules may be included in the terms and conditions of employment. Consent and advice about matters relating to intellectual property and copyright should be sought from the line manager, in the first instance, or from the Director or Head of Service, if needed.

There is more information about the Working Time Regulations on Ask HR:
<https://askhr.suffolk.gov.uk/corporate/policies-guidance/General-information-guidance/work-time-regs>

10. Personal Interests and Conflicts of Interest

Workers must declare in writing any personal or financial interests, which could reasonably be considered to conflict with the Council's interests.

Conflicts of interest could include anything that might reasonably prevent, or be perceived as preventing, staff from acting with impartiality or professionalism. This may include personal relationships with customers, volunteers or colleagues. It will most often concern family or romantic relationships, but may also concern friendships. This will be particularly relevant when impartiality is a key component of the relationship, as a service provider, commissioner, or, in employment, usually as a manager. It will also apply where there is interpersonal conflict arising from a personal relationship that is interfering with effective working. Staff must seek to separate themselves from any such work as far as possible, for instance by declaring the relationship and ensuring a colleague rather than themselves is assigned to provide a service to, manage a contract with, or line manage the person in question.

Workers must not gain financial benefit as a result of their Council employment, outside of their salary or other payment related to their employment. This would constitute a conflict of interest, and potentially corruption (see bribery and corruption section below). Examples would include signposting customers to their own business as part of their Council work, or setting up a business that directly competes with the work undertaken at the Council, and/or improper use of Council resources.

Declarations must be made about membership of any organisation that is not open to

the public without formal membership and commitment of allegiance, which has an element of secrecy (e.g. the Masons, some 'friendly' societies etc). Any declarations will be treated in confidence and will only be disclosed in appropriate situations.

If in doubt whether to disclose something, workers should err on the side of caution.

Declarations are made through the Disclosure of Interests Form. The line manager must be informed, as they will need to manage the conflict and may reassign work.

Staff can access the Disclosure of Interests Form and guidance via this link:

<https://suffolknet.sharepoint.com/sites/myscc/Pages/staff-policies-and-procedures.aspx>

Further guidance can be found on Ask HR here, including how to manage relationships declared and confidentiality around disclosures

<https://askhr.suffolk.gov.uk/corporate/policies-guidance/Relationships-at-work>

11. Commissioning, Procurement and Contract Management

Workers responsible for commissioning, procurement or contract management must comply with the council's Procurement Regulations. They must deal fairly and impartially with current and potential contractors.

Workers must avoid any suggestion of impropriety when dealing with current or former workers, friends, personal or business partners, or relatives in awarding or managing contracts. Where possible, workers must remove themselves from the decision-making role in such situations.

Workers must ensure that there is a clear separation between client and provider roles, for example where an in-house unit is involved in a tendering exercise, or a contract with an in-house provider is being reviewed. They must ensure that there is no privileged access to information, and that specifications, evaluation models, contract terms and other documents are not biased towards or against individual providers.

If a worker's personal or financial interest could be perceived to prejudice a procurement process they are involved with, they must immediately make their line manager aware, even if they have previously declared the interest. Their line manager shall, if needed, discuss the matter with a senior procurement officer.

Workers who are privy to confidential information about tenders or costs must not disclose that information to any party or organisation not entitled to it.

As soon as workers have formed a definite intent to tender for Council work, outside of their official capacity, and are not restricted from doing so, they must advise their line manager. They must immediately withdraw from the process to award the contract. Workers who have had privileged access to information may be debarred from submitting a tender, if there is no other means of ensuring fairness.

The Council's Procurement Regulations can be accessed here:

<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/assets/Jobs-careers-and-business/tenders-and-supplying-us/2018-03-13-Suffolk-County-Council-Procurement-Regulations-v2.4.pdf>

12. Bribery and Corruption

It is a criminal offence for workers corruptly to receive or give any gift, loan, fee, reward or any other advantage for doing, or not doing, anything or showing favour, or disfavour, to any person in their official capacity. Where an allegation is made, a disciplinary investigation will take place.

The general principles which govern gifts and hospitality are:

- i) offers of hospitality should only be accepted if there is a genuine need to represent the Council;
- ii) gifts should only be accepted in **exceptional** circumstances.
- iii) To determine whether a gift or hospitality is acceptable, the 'PROVEIT' test should be applied by staff, and referred to their line manager if in doubt.

Gifts

Any offer, gift, favour or hospitality directed at individual workers or members should be treated with caution. This applies particularly when the organisation making the offer may be doing, or hoping to do, business with the Council.

All personal gifts from contractors, suppliers, applicants, organisations and customers should be discouraged, refused or donated to charity. The only exceptions to this are insignificant items of token value, such as pens, diaries and calendars.

Hospitality

Staff should ask themselves whether members of the public, knowing the facts of the situation, could reasonably think that staff might be influenced by the hospitality offered. If the answer is yes, the hospitality should be declined.

Offers of hospitality should only be accepted if there is a need to impart information or represent the Council in the community. Any accepted offers must be recorded on the Declaration of Gifts and Hospitality Form, within 28 days of being made.

Acceptance of hospitality through attendance at relevant conferences and courses is acceptable where it is clear that hospitality is corporate, rather than personal, where the Council gives consent in advance and where any purchasing, planning or other decisions are not compromised. Overnight hospitality should not be accepted.

Where visits to inspect equipment are required, the Council should meet the costs of such visits, to avoid jeopardising the integrity of subsequent purchasing decisions. Visits to inspect equipment during or shortly before a procurement exercise should not be arranged if they might be seen to give unfair advantage to a particular bidder. The worker should seek advice from a senior procurement officer.

Staff can access the Declaration of Gifts and Hospitality Form and obtain further guidance via this link:

<https://suffolknet.sharepoint.com/sites/myscc/Pages/staff-policies-and-procedures.aspx>

13. Sponsorship

If an outside organisation seeks to sponsor a Council activity, the rules concerning hospitality and gifts must apply. Particular care must be taken in dealings with actual or potential contractors, or applicants for planning permission, licences, etc.

If the Council seeks to sponsor an outside event or service, special care must be taken to ensure that any benefit that accrues to workers, family, friends, or business partners, is fully disclosed and registered before the venture is pursued. Similarly, if the Council gives support in the community, through sponsorship, grant aid, financial or other means, workers must ensure impartiality and avoid conflicts of interest.

14. Use of Financial Resources

Workers must ensure that they use public funds entrusted to them in a responsible and lawful manner. They should strive to ensure value for money and to avoid any action that, by its nature, could lead to justifiable legal challenge of the Council.

Staff must uphold and promote the principles of the Council's Financial Regulations, and its Commercial Statement.

The Council's Financial Regulations document can be viewed here:

<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/assets/council-and-democracy/the-council-and-its-committees/constitution/Part-4.1-Financial-Regulations-updated.pdf>

The Council's Commercial Statement can be viewed here:

<https://askhr.suffolk.gov.uk/corporate/policies-guidance/SCC-Commercial-statement>

Document Control – amendments since 2018

Version	Date	Amended By	Changes
2.5	06/10/2020	Gita Banerji (HR)	<p>Additions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Nolan Principles; ● mention of human trafficking; ● new health and safety section; ● additional information under equality, personal interests and data protection sections; ● links to the relevant policies and guidance under each sections, including: the Commercial Statement, the Council’s refreshed values (We Aspire), building security guidance, disclosure of interests form and declaration of gifts and hospitality form, Financial Regulations, Procurement Regulations, information about the Working Time Regulations, Information Management policies, Whistleblowing Policy, Equality information and workforce report. <p>Other changes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Replacing line manager as point of escalation for most issues, in line with other Council policies. ● Renaming of some sections for clarity and consistency, re-ordering of sections for better flow (e.g., incorporation of gifts and hospitality into ‘bribery and corruption’). ● Identification section replaced with link to building security guidance. ● Content amended to meet website accessibility guidelines. ● Content reviewed and minor amendments made for clarity throughout. ● Amendment of document control format, for relevance and greater consistency with other documents. <p>Removals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Frequently Asked Questions – this was not needed, and not consistent with the format of other Council policies. FAQs are more often in our guidance documents than policies.