

Code of Conduct



WORKING TOGETHER

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Policy Overview

The councils expect the highest standards of conduct from all employees, and for everyone employed by the councils to act with honesty, integrity, and to represent the councils to the best of their ability.

Under the councils' competency framework, employees must exhibit high standards of professional behaviour and integrity at all times and must also be able to demonstrate objectivity and impartiality when making decisions. This Code sets out the standards expected from employees.

This document is part of a family of policies which provide advice and information on the expected behaviours and values of Chorley and South Ribble employees, see the Grievance, Conduct and Social Media policies for more information. This policy applies to all employees of Chorley & South Ribble Borough Councils, their wholly owned companies, contractors, partners, and volunteers.

Policy Objective

This policy is designed to ensure that all employees are aware of, understand and maintain the high standards of conduct and integrity required by the councils.

The two main aspects of the Code of Conduct relate to the expected standards and the disclosures that employees must make.

The councils' responsibilities

The councils will monitor the Code of Conduct to ensure that it remains fit for purpose, is consistently applied and does not discriminate against any of the protected characteristics.

Breaches of the Code of Conduct will be dealt with in accordance with the Conduct policy.

Employee responsibilities

Some of the issues covered will affect senior, managerial and professional employees more than other employees but many aspects of the Code are applicable to everyone.

As an employee you should never do anything that you could not justify publicly. Your conduct reflects on the councils and may affect the councils' reputations.

The councils also take active steps to ensure that key contractors providing services on behalf of the councils either have their own Code of Conduct arrangements in place or adopt the councils'.

Standards

You are expected to give the highest possible standard of service to the public and to provide appropriate advice to councillors and fellow employees with impartiality. You should, without fear of recrimination, bring to the attention of your manager any concern about the provision of service. You must also report to your manager or any other appropriate senior manager any misconduct or breach of procedure. For further guidance regarding the disclosure of potential misconduct or breaches of procedures you should refer to the councils' Whistleblowing Policy.

Sharing Information

Certain information must be available to members, auditors, government departments and members of the community. In certain circumstances, employees may have a legal or professional duty to disclose information to a member of the public or third party and must adhere to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Data Protection Act 1998 (as amended by the General Data Protection Regulations).

Other than in the circumstances outlined above, you must not:

- disclose confidential information,
- use any information obtained in the course of your employment for personal gain or benefit
- pass information on to others who you believe might use it in such a way

In situations where employees feel that they have a moral obligation to disclose information the Whistleblowing Policy should be followed.

Political Neutrality

Employees serve each council as a whole, so you must serve all councillors and not just those of the controlling group. You must ensure that the individual rights of all councillors are respected and that you do not compromise your political neutrality.

Employees must not allow their own personal or political opinions to interfere with their work.

Recruitment

Employees involved in a recruitment process should ensure that appointments are made based on merit and the ability of the candidate to undertake the duties of the post. To avoid any possible accusation of bias, employees should not be involved in an appointment where they are related to an applicant or have a close personal relationship outside work with them.

Relationships at Work

Employees should not be involved in decisions relating to discipline, promotion or pay for any other employee they are related to or have a close personal relationship with outside work. Employees should not be immediately line managed by someone they have a close personal or romantic relationship with.

Other employment

Employees of all grades must not undertake outside work, whether paid or unpaid, if it causes a conflict of interest with your official duties, or if it makes use of confidential material which you have access to due to your position. Employees working in commercial or income generating services will not ordinarily be permitted to work for another employer who is a direct competitor of the Councils or their companies.

All employees are required to disclose and obtain written consent prior to taking any outside employment. This enables the councils to monitor the number of hours and employee works and to prevent a potential conflict in interest. Director discretion may apply in certain circumstances and this will be carefully monitored.

No paid outside work of any sort should be undertaken by employees during working hours. Council premises, facilities and resources must not be used for paid outside work.

Intellectual Property

All intellectual property rights (copyright, design rights and the right to patent inventions) relating to anything created or invented by an employee in the course of your duties normally belongs automatically to the councils. Employees are not entitled to use or sell this intellectual property without written permission from the councils.

Equality Issues

All members of the local community, customers and other employees have a right to be treated with fairness and equity irrespective of race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, disability, religion, political persuasion, marital status, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation or age. All employees should ensure that the councils' equal opportunity policies are complied with in addition to the requirements of the law.

Tendering

Employees involved in the tendering process and dealing with contractors must comply with legal requirements of the councils' procurement and financial policies and procedures.

Employees must exercise fairness and impartiality when dealing with all customers, suppliers, other contractors and sub-contractors.

Employees who have access to confidential information on tenders or costs should not disclose that information to any unauthorised party or organisation.

Employees who have any financial or non-financial interest in a tendering process should inform the appropriate manager and withdraw from the contract awarding process.

Employees should 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 a senior or relevant managerial capacity.

Corruption

It is a serious criminal offence for employees to corruptly receive or give any gift, loan, fee, reward or advantage for doing, or not doing, anything or showing favour, or disfavour, to any person in their official capacity.

Where corruption is alleged the Conduct and Capability Policy may be used alongside a police investigation.

Use of Financial Resources

You must ensure that you use public funds entrusted to you in a responsible and lawful manner and in accordance with financial regulations. You should use all appropriate financial and procurement processes to ensure value for money to the local community and to avoid legal challenge to the councils.

Personal use of telephones

It is recognised that employees may have to use the councils' telephone systems for personal use, however, any such use must only be occasional and be kept to an absolute minimum and observe current usage policies. Further information regarding the use of all technology is contained within the Information Security Framework.

Lost property

Where an employee finds some lost property whilst working, they should inform their manager immediately and every effort must be made to return the property to their rightful owner. Where, after extensive actions, including reporting to the Police, it has not been possible to return the property to its rightful owner, then it should be donated to the appropriate mayor's charities.

Disclosures

The councils understand that employees may have relationships or outside interests which have the potential to conflict with the interests of the councils. It is also accepted that contractors or other outside bodies, may from time to time, offer employees hospitality or gifts.

It is very important that the integrity of the councils is maintained at all times, to avoid any allegations of corruption.

The following circumstances detail where an employee must make a disclosure, all of which will be recorded on the Register of Interests or the Register of Gifts and Hospitality.

Relationships

Close personal familiarity between employees and individual councillors, especially if an employee's role is to give advice to councillors, can damage the relationship and prove embarrassing to other employees and councillors. These close relationships should be avoided.

Employees should always remember their responsibilities to the community they serve and ensure courteous, efficient, and impartial service delivery to all groups and individuals within that community.

Orders and contracts must be awarded on merit and in accordance with the councils' procedures, and no special favour should be shown to businesses run by, for example, friends, partners or relatives.

Employees who place orders, award contracts or supervise contractors and have previously had or currently have a relationship in a personal capacity with contractors they deal with in the course of these duties, must declare that relationship.

Personal Interests outside the Councils

Employees must declare any non-financial and financial interests or membership of organisations that could potentially bring about conflict with the authority's interests. These may include membership of organisations which may or may not use the councils' premises for their activities such as:

- sports clubs,
- voluntary and uniformed organisations,
- community groups

Financial interests may include working for another employer which must be disclosed.

When considering whether a personal interest needs to be disclosed you need to take account of the nature of your personal interest and the organisation, and whether there is any link to either the functions carried out by the co or any of their premises or land. You also need to take account of your position and role within the councils and how this may be viewed by someone external.

If you are in any doubt, you should discuss the personal interest with your line manager or someone within HR.

Membership of Closed Organisation

Employees must declare membership of any organisation which is not open to the public without formal membership and commitment of allegiance and which has secrecy about rules or membership or conduct such as Freemasonry membership. Candidates for posts will not be expected to declare membership of such organisations but, if appointed, must declare it when they take up their post.

Hospitality & Gifts

Employees should treat with caution any offer of hospitality. The person or organisation making the offer may be doing or seeking to do business with the councils or may be affected by a decision of the councils. You should consider whether the offer of hospitality could put at risk public confidence in the councils.

All offers of hospitality must be disclosed. When hospitality is declined those making the offer should be courteously but firmly informed of the procedures and standards operating within the councils.

Employees should not accept significant personal gifts from contractors and outside suppliers. Insignificant items with a value of less than £5, such as pens, diaries etc. may be accepted but, if there is any doubt as to whether an item is classed as insignificant, or if acceptance of the gift could be perceived to jeopardise the integrity of any subsequent decision by the councils, then the gift must be recorded.

All gifts with a value, or perceived value, of £5 or greater must always be disclosed.

When being offered hospitality/gifts employees should be particularly sensitive as to its timing in relation to decisions which the authority may be taking affecting those providing the gift or hospitality.

In considering whether offers of hospitality/gifts should be accepted, you should bear in mind:

- the possible motive behind the hospitality/gift,
- the scale of the hospitality/gift,
- the likely perception of others if the hospitality/gift is accepted,
- is the hospitality/gift being offered due to your position within the councils?
- could the acceptance of the hospitality/gift be, in any way, inappropriate or place you under pressure in relation to any current or future issue involving the councils?
- how will you respond to the hospitality/gift?
- could you justify the decision to the councils, press or public?
- are you comfortable with the decision?

Sponsorship – Giving and Receiving

Where an outside organisation wishes to sponsor a council activity, whether by invitation, tender, negotiation or voluntarily, the same conventions concerning acceptance of gifts or hospitality apply. Particular care must be taken when dealing with any current or potential contractors or developers.

Where the councils wish to sponsor an event or service neither an employee nor any partner, spouse or relative must benefit from the sponsorship in a direct way without there being full disclosure of any interest. Similarly, where the councils 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.

Disclosure process

All disclosures should be made in writing to your line manager, South Ribble employees should ensure this is forwarded to HR, Chorley employees should complete the form on the intranet. It is recommended that any disclosure is initially discussed with your Director prior to submission.

With hospitality and gifts, it is recommended that they are not accepted until it has been discussed and authorised by your Director or as soon as possible afterwards.

All disclosures will be forwarded, either electronically or in hard copy to the relevant Director for a decision.

The Director may instruct the employee to refuse the offer of hospitality unless it has already been enjoyed, refuse or return the gift or require it to be donated, or simply note the disclosure.

The employee will be informed of the Director's decision and a copy of the disclosure and decision forwarded to the HR.

Directors will forward any disclosures which they make to their relevant line manager and disclosures made by the Chief Executive will be forwarded to the councils' Monitoring Officer.

Reporting arrangements

All disclosures detailed within the Code of Conduct, will be collated by HR and will be available for scrutiny if requested.

In order to comply with Data Protection, all reporting will be done on the basis that individual employees, wherever possible, cannot be identified, with particular care when reporting Membership of Organisations as these will generally be separate from an individual's employment with the councils.