



## Staff Conduct Policy

**NORTH TYNESIDE COUNCIL**  
**Human Resource Unit**

## **Code of Conduct for Employees**

### **1 What is the code and why does it exist?**

The way that employees conduct themselves influences the public's opinion of the council. This code of conduct is intended to guide the employee through their day-to-day work, to support them in maintaining standards and to help to protect the employee from misunderstanding or criticism.

It forms part of the council's conditions of employment and is designed to help the employee carry out tasks in a way that will bring credit to them and the council. Any employee, who is unsure about any aspect of the code, should check with their manager.

### **2 Summary**

As an employee of North Tyneside Council you are expected to: -

- treat others with respect
- work with colleagues to achieve goals
- maintain high standards of work and behaviour
- promote the values and aims of the council and implement relevant council policies
- seek help, in confidence, if for any reason you are unable to make your proper contribution

### **3 Treating others with respect**

Treat people with courtesy and consideration. Respect people's right to privacy.

#### **3.1 Councillors**

An employee must not do anything that compromises or is likely to compromise the impartiality of a councillor.

North Tyneside Council's protocol on member/officer relations states that elected members should treat employees with respect. Employees should treat councillors with respect and avoid over-familiarity, which may be unwelcome and embarrass others.

### **3.2 The local community and service users**

Deal with customers and service users in a courteous, efficient and unbiased manner and follow the policies and procedures of North Tyneside Council.

### **3.3 Colleagues**

Apply the same high standards to your dealings with colleagues and with the elected members of the council.

## **4 Working with Colleagues to Achieve Goals**

In order to meet the targets set in the council's performance plan, the council expects its employees to work together and to support each other.

## **5 Maintaining High Standards of Work and Behaviour**

### **5.1 Work**

The standard of work that employees are expected to deliver should be described in their job outline/role definition or in the personal targets agreed in each year's personal development interview.

### **5.2 Behaviour**

The public is entitled to and expects high standards from the Council's employees. The following sections detail the standards in particular areas. If an allegation is made and it is proved that, for example, a gift has been given to you as an employee, you will have to demonstrate that the reward has not been corruptly obtained.

An employee must not, in their official capacity or otherwise, use their position improperly to confer on or secure for any person, an advantage or disadvantage.

#### **5.2.1 Gifts**

Public employees are prohibited by law from accepting gifts or rewards, and must show neither favour nor disfavour to anyone in their official capacity. To safeguard yourself, do not accept any gift or other benefit offered to you, your partner or a family member by any person or organisation who has, or wishes to have, dealings with the council. Refuse them with courtesy and tact (there may be exceptions, including gifts of token value - check with your manager - if in doubt, err on the side of caution). Give a proper explanation that failure to do so might put you or your job at risk. In declining the offer of a gift, a possible way of avoiding offending someone may be to suggest they write to the council expressing their appreciation.

Although the law does not allow individuals to accept any gifts, the council is legally able to accept

gifts, so another possible way of not offending someone who has offered you a gift, which can be put into general use, may be to explain that you are accepting it on behalf of the council. This means you will have to hand it over to your manager when it will become the property of the council and could be used in one of the council's establishments.

Check with your manager or head of service first if you are offered a gift, as this will need to be recorded on the appropriate form (even if you have not accepted the gift).

Tell your manager immediately if you become aware that you, your partner or a family member have been made a beneficiary in a customer's will, for example, the will of someone for whom you are or have been a carer - your manager will tell you what to do.

### **5.2.2 Hospitality**

Accept offers of hospitality (which must be authorised) only in the circumstances described below.

- There is a need to pass on information or represent the council in the community.
- Attend social or sporting functions only when these are part of the life of the community or where the council should be seen to be represented.
- It is acceptable for you to accept hospitality through attendance at relevant conferences and courses if it is clear that the hospitality is business rather than personal, where the council gives permission in advance and is satisfied that any procurement decisions are not compromised.

Be careful about timing as the host could be seeking to do business with the council or to obtain a decision from it. Check with your manager first if you are offered hospitality, as this will need to be recorded on the appropriate form (even if you have not accepted the hospitality or it is not authorised).

If you are involved in visits to inspect equipment etc., avoid jeopardising the integrity of subsequent purchasing decisions by ensuring that the council meets the cost of such visits.

To assist managers in applying the Code of Conduct fairly and consistently, the guidance below should be followed when considering the acceptance of gifts or hospitality:

- what is the context of the offer – any offer must be impartial, for example, if an offer is received from an organisation currently bidding for a Council contract, or has recently won a Council contract, this could be interpreted as not impartial and should be declined.
- what is the value of the offer – high value offers would be questionable and should be declined
- what reason is given by the employee for accepting the offer – there must be a clear business reason for acceptance
- should the employee attend the event put pay for the hospitality – for example, an employee attending an event to promote networking opportunities
- could the offer of a gift be accepted on behalf of the Council rather than by the individual
- Is there any doubt about the appropriateness of accepting the gift or hospitality – if there is

any doubt as to the integrity or honesty, the manager should refuse permission to accept

### **5.2.3 Sponsorship**

The rules regarding the acceptance of gifts or hospitality also apply to an outside organisation that wishes to sponsor a council activity,

If the council wishes to sponsor an event or service, you or your partner, spouse or relative must not benefit from it in a direct way. If you have an interest in an event or service that the council wishes to sponsor, inform the head of human resources.

Where the council, through sponsorship, grant aid, financial or other means, gives support in the community, ensure that impartial advice is given and there is no conflict of interest involved.

### **5.2.4 Use of resources**

The council is responsible for the safekeeping of public buildings and the control of public money. Be open as far as possible, and be ready to answer for your actions. Use council resources for authorised, official purposes only.

Strive to ensure value for money to the local community and avoid any legal challenge to the council by using any public money in your care responsibly and lawfully.

### **5.2.5 Copyright and Intellectual Property**

If your employment entails you creating items of intellectual property, such as literary, musical and dramatic works, works of art, original drawings or design, performances and broadcasts (including material placed on the Internet) they belong to the council, unless the council specifically agrees otherwise. You should also ensure that nothing you create in the course of your employment infringes copyright, beyond that which would be accepted as "fair dealing" i.e. normally copies of parts of a work. If in doubt discuss the matter with your manager who may seek legal advice if appropriate.

### **5.2.6 Additional and Outside employment**

As your employer, the council has to be satisfied that conflicts of interest do not arise. For this reason, employees must inform their manager that they intend to seek any outside employment (paid or unpaid, and or where expenses may be offered) and check for any conflict of interest. You may be required to refund some or all of your income/expenses from your other activity if it is a function of your employment with the council.

The council will not unreasonably prevent you carrying out other employment; should your manager refuse your request they will explain their reasons to you for doing so.

Do not take outside employment if it conflicts with or overlaps with your official duties.

Be aware of the terms of your contract of employment.

### **5.2.7 Personal interests**

Do not make official decisions about matters in which you have a personal involvement.

Declare it, on the appropriate form, to your manager if: -

- you have any personal interests, whether financial or not, which could overlap or bring about conflict with the council's work or
- you belong to any society or organisation which is not open to the public without formal membership and which has secrecy about rules, membership or conduct, with a commitment of allegiance to the organisation. The purpose of this declaration is to protect you from allegations of bias, interest or favouritism.

Your manager should forward the declaration to the human resources unit as outlined on the form.

### **5.2.8 Relationships with suppliers and contractors**

If you have a financial interest in a contract to which the council is a party, or which is proposed to be entered into by the council or any of its committees, or if you have any relationships of a personal or a business nature with external contractors or service suppliers, or possible contractors or suppliers, you must declare this in writing to the head of human resources.

### **5.2.9 Communicating information**

Do not use information gained at work for your personal gain or pass it to others who do not have a legitimate work involvement.

Be aware of what information you can and cannot release. If you need guidance on this, ask your manager.

Only reveal information regarding other employees if you have obtained the approval of the person concerned first, or the law permits the information to be disclosed. The council's Disclosure of Information policy gives guidance on this the same rule applies to information about councillors.

The communications unit at the Town Hall, Wallsend deals with all media enquiries.

When completing and responding to reference enquiries you should give an honest and factual response, if in doubt contact your link HR Adviser for assistance.

#### **5.2.9.1 Data Protection**

Observe the requirements of the data protection legislation and follow the council's computer security policy. You may disclose personal data about an individual, from which he or she can be identified and which is held on computer equipment or manual records, only to those who are

registered as receivers of such information.

#### **5.2.10 Giving fair advice**

When asked, give fair advice - without bias.

Serve all councillors in the same manner and respect their rights.

If you are required to advise a meeting of a political group, remain politically neutral. Ensure that you do not show bias towards any particular group. You are advised to keep a summary of the key points of your advice. If you offer a briefing to one political group you should offer one to the other groups on the same topic, within an appropriate timescale. Follow any rules set out in the council's constitution, which will be available from your senior manager.

### **6 Promote the values and aims of the council and implement relevant council policies**

The council expects its employees to promote its values and aims and to make their contribution towards achieving its goals and implementing its policies.

### **7 Seeking help, in confidence**

If anything prevents you from fulfilling your part of your contract of employment with the council you should approach your manager or head of service.

### **8 Breaches of the Code**

Breaches of this code of conduct may lead to action being taken under the council's corrective and disciplinary procedure.

If you need a copy of this policy in an alternative format, namely:

- Braille
- Large print (18 point)
- Audio cassette

Please contact your link HR Adviser in the Human Resources Unit at Quadrant, or your Employee Services Team, who can give you help and advice.