

 <p>Buckinghamshire &amp; Milton Keynes Fire Authority <b>MAKING YOU SAFER</b> PREVENTING PROTECTING RESPONDING WWW.BUCKSFIRE.GOV.UK</p>	<b>Information Asset Owner:</b>	Director of People & Organisational Development
	<b>Protective Marking:</b>	
	<b>Page :</b>	1 of 30

**Procedure Note: Code of Conduct**

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All employees of the Authority, including temporary staff.	Policy	<input type="checkbox"/>	This document sets out the arrangements to allow employees to comply with the Code of Conduct expected by Authority employees.
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	Procedure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
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<b>Please note that as Documents are frequently updated, if you print a document, its accuracy cannot be guaranteed, always check for latest version.</b>			

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<b>File Name</b>	Code of Conduct		



## Contents

Section	Subject	Page
1.0	Introduction	3
2.0	Scope	4
3.0	Working within the Code of Conduct	4
4.0	Working within the law	6
5.0	Equality and diversity	7
6.0	Health, safety and welfare	7
7.0	Data protection	8
8.0	Confidentiality	10
9.0	Politically restricted posts	10
10.0	Political neutrality	11
11.0	Use of financial resources	12
12.0	Appointments and other employment matters	12
13.0	Secondary employment	12
14.0	Standards of dress and appearance	13
15.0	Relationships	16
16.0	Disclosure of information	18
17.0	Registration of interests	19
18.0	Counter fraud and corruption	20
19.0	Hospitality and gifts	22
20.0	Sponsorships – giving and receiving	24
21.0	Acceptable use of technology	25
22.0	Protecting the Authority's business reputation	26

<b>Version:</b>	2.0	<b>Status of document:</b>	Draft for approval
<b>Author:</b>	Human Resources	<b>PIA:</b>	Complete
<b>Issue Date:</b>	July 2015	<b>Review Date:</b>	July 2018
<b>File Name</b>	Code of Conduct		



<b>Information Asset Owner:</b>	Director of People & Organisational Development
<b>Protective Marking:</b>	
<b>Page :</b>	3 of 30

## Procedure Note: **Code of Conduct**

### 1.0 Introduction

Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority (the Authority) is a publicly accountable body which manages Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire & Rescue Service on behalf of the communities it serves. The Authority will aim to;

- Ensure that all employees are aware of the vision, values and behaviours expected within the workplace
- Improve the Authority's performance through building the skills of a diverse workforce that reflect the community
- Ensure employees have an understanding of how the Service operates, in order to be as effective as possible within their role

The Authority's vision is;

"That Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes are the safest areas in England in which to live, work and travel."

Underpinning everything the Authority does is a set of values which is aspirational for all employees where they engage with others; be it with the public, partner agencies or colleagues. These values will be reflected throughout the employment related policy themes and will be utilised as corporate and public safety plans are developed and implemented.

Employees at all levels are required and expected to show professional conduct and behaviour in all aspects of their employment. A climate of mutual confidence, trust, loyalty and respect between managers, employees and other partners is critical to achieving the corporate aims and providing a high quality service. An employee must observe this Code of Conduct whenever they:

- conduct the business of the Authority
- conduct the business of any office to which they are appointed by the Authority, or

<b>Version:</b>	2.0	<b>Status of document:</b>	Draft for approval
<b>Author:</b>	Human Resources	<b>PIA:</b>	Complete
<b>Issue Date:</b>	July 2015	<b>Review Date:</b>	July 2018
<b>File Name</b>	Code of Conduct		



**Procedure Note:**

**Code of Conduct**

- acts as a representative of the Authority

The public is entitled to expect the highest standard of conduct from all employees of the Authority. This Code provides information for employees on the minimum standards that are expected by the Authority. It is not intended to be exhaustive, and does not address every possible circumstance. Simply because a particular action may not be addressed within the Code, does not condone that action by its omission.

Employees who have concerns over meeting any aspect of the Code of Conduct or any concerns about impropriety or breach of the Code should discuss these with their line manager at the earliest opportunity.

## 2.0 Scope

The Code set out in this document applies to all employees of the Authority, regardless of contract.

Additional Codes of Conduct are applicable for Councillors and Co-opted Members of the Authority and Members of the Local Pension Board.

## 3.0 Working within the Code of Conduct

Employees of the Authority 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 members, managers and other employees with impartiality. Employees must perform their duties with honesty, integrity, impartiality and objectivity. This includes not giving personal opinions about Authority policy or procedures to the press and complying with procedures and guidance relating to social media. All employees should:

<b>Version:</b>	2.0	<b>Status of document:</b>	Draft for approval
<b>Author:</b>	Human Resources	<b>PIA:</b>	Complete
<b>Issue Date:</b>	July 2015	<b>Review Date:</b>	July 2018
<b>File Name</b>	Code of Conduct		



**Procedure Note:**

**Code of Conduct**

- Work reliably and diligently
- Carry out any proper instruction given by managers, including general instructions contained in policies, procedures, financial regulations and instructions, contracts, legal requirements, safety or other codes of conduct and rules applicable
- Complete accurately and honestly any document, form or record required for work. Never destroy, damage, alter or falsify any document or record

Employees should, at all times, treat colleagues with respect and politeness. Many behaviours are reviewed as part of the annual performance review process. If an employee believes they are directly affected by unacceptable behaviour, or witnesses any unacceptable behaviour, they should speak with their line manager or suitable alternative immediately.

Should an employee have any concern about impropriety, breach of procedure, any deficiency in the provision of the service, it should be reported to their line manager or through another appropriate procedures such as the Grievance procedure.

The Authority has published policies, procedures and financial regulations and instruction, which describe important rules and standards, and all employees are expected to work in accordance with these documents

The Authority will undertake to apply this Code of Conduct consistently and fairly. Any breach of the Code of Conduct may result in the Discipline procedure being instigated. Some breaches (known as gross misconduct) can be serious enough to warrant disciplinary action up to and including dismissal. Examples of gross misconduct can be found in the Discipline procedure.

<b>Version:</b>	2.0	<b>Status of document:</b>	Draft for approval
<b>Author:</b>	Human Resources	<b>PIA:</b>	Complete
<b>Issue Date:</b>	July 2015	<b>Review Date:</b>	July 2018
<b>File Name</b>	Code of Conduct		



<b>Information Asset Owner:</b>	Director of People & Organisational Development
<b>Protective Marking:</b>	
<b>Page :</b>	6 of 30

**Procedure Note: Code of Conduct**

## 4.0 Working within the law

The Authority through its employees must carry out its business in a way that is proper and fair. Employees must not act or do anything without statutory authority and without following the relevant procedures.

The Authority expects employees to work within the law. Unlawful or criminal behaviour at, or away from work, may result in a loss of trust and confidence in the employee or the Authority.

All employees must:

- Uphold the law at work
- Understand the law relevant to their sphere of work
- Never break or disregard a law away from work which could damage public confidence in them or the Authority, or which makes them unsuitable for the role they do

Should an employee be found guilty of any criminal offence whilst employed by the Authority, they must inform their line manager as soon as practicable at the time of charge and/or conviction. If an employee is unsure about whether or not an offence should be disclosed, guidance should be sought from Human Resources. Employees must:

- Disclose any criminal offence they have been convicted of
- Disclose any criminal charges which have been made against them

<b>Version:</b>	2.0	<b>Status of document:</b>	Draft for approval
<b>Author:</b>	Human Resources	<b>PIA:</b>	Complete
<b>Issue Date:</b>	July 2015	<b>Review Date:</b>	July 2018
<b>File Name</b>	Code of Conduct		



## 5.0 Equality & diversity

The Authority is fully committed to equality and diversity and recognises that fairness and inclusion is fundamental to everything the Authority does in order to achieve its aim of making Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes safer. The Authority's policies, practices and procedures will be fair, open and transparent, providing an equality of opportunity to all employees and an effective service that understands and meets the needs of all parts of the local communities.

The Authority believes that a workforce, which better reflects the diversity of the local working population, will create a stronger, more enriched, and well informed organisation, able to meet the expectations for a modern Fire & Rescue Service. The Authority will therefore seek to attract talented people from all parts of the community, and to support their development and retention.

Bullying, harassment, unfair discrimination and unacceptable behaviours will not be tolerated. The Authority will ensure that it manages any complaints or concerns in a prompt, fair and equitable manner.

The Authority respects both visible and non-visible differences, and believes that such an environment will enable the Authority to achieve exceptional results.

## 6.0 Health, safety and welfare

The Authority takes its legal, contractual and moral obligations as an employer seriously and aims to provide a safe and healthy place of work. Each employee has a legal obligation under Section 7 of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 to take reasonable care for their own health and safety and for the safety of others who may be affected by their acts or omissions. Employees also have a duty to comply with the Working Time Regulations 1998, Driving Regulations and any other health, safety and welfare legislation and guidance. Failure to do so may endanger the employee, the public and other employees.

<b>Version:</b>	2.0	<b>Status of document:</b>	Draft for approval
<b>Author:</b>	Human Resources	<b>PIA:</b>	Complete
<b>Issue Date:</b>	July 2015	<b>Review Date:</b>	July 2018
<b>File Name</b>	Code of Conduct		





<b>Information Asset Owner:</b>	Director of People & Organisational Development
<b>Protective Marking:</b>	
<b>Page :</b>	8 of 30

## Procedure Note: **Code of Conduct**

### **Operational fitness**

All employees are expected to maintain an appropriate level of fitness to undertake their role. The operational firefighter role imposes a significant physiological strain on the body, the maintenance of an appropriate level of fitness is essential to ensure operational personnel are able to perform their roles safely and effectively.

### **Support Services staff**

Whilst there is not an expectation for Support Services staff to maintain an appropriate level of fitness to undertake their role, they are encouraged to maintain an acceptable level of fitness for their own health and well-being.

### **Substance misuse**

The use of substances by any employee must not impair the safe, efficient running of the Authority or put at risk the health, safety or welfare of its employees, suppliers or members of the public. Employees must not report, or try to report to work whilst impaired through alcohol, drugs or other substances.

### **Smoking**

The Authority is committed to the provision of a tobacco smoke free working environment. Employees are not permitted to smoke:

- In the workplace
- Undertaking their duties
- In uniform or corporate wear whilst representing the Authority
- In Authority vehicles

## **7.0 Data protection**

The Authority collects and uses information about the people with whom they deal. The Authority will also acquire information about others in the course of those dealings. These people – collectively called 'data subjects' - include employees, users

<b>Version:</b>	2.0	<b>Status of document:</b>	Draft for approval
<b>Author:</b>	Human Resources	<b>PIA:</b>	Complete
<b>Issue Date:</b>	July 2015	<b>Review Date:</b>	July 2018
<b>File Name</b>	Code of Conduct		





<b>Information Asset Owner:</b>	Director of People & Organisational Development
<b>Protective Marking:</b>	
<b>Page :</b>	9 of 30

## Procedure Note: **Code of Conduct**

of services, staff in other organisations and institutions, as well as contractors and suppliers of various kinds. The information can be factual information, such as name and address, or expressions of opinion about our intentions towards individuals. It can occur in any form or format - word documents, databases and spread-sheets, emails, CCTV, audio recordings, photographs, paper files etc.

The Data Protection Act obliges the Authority, as a Data Controller, to manage the information they hold in a proper way. It states that anyone who processes personal information must comply with eight principles, which make sure that it is:

1. Fairly and lawfully processed
2. Processed for limited purposes
3. Adequate, relevant and not excessive
4. Accurate and up to date
5. Not kept for longer than is necessary
6. Processed in line with individual rights
7. Secure
8. Not transferred to other countries without adequate protection

Any individual about whom personal data is retained or is being processed will be informed of:

- The purpose for which this is being done
- To whom such data may be disclosed
- The source of such data and who will have access to it on request
- How to have such data corrected or erased, where appropriate

<b>Version:</b>	2.0	<b>Status of document:</b>	Draft for approval
<b>Author:</b>	Human Resources	<b>PIA:</b>	Complete
<b>Issue Date:</b>	July 2015	<b>Review Date:</b>	July 2018
<b>File Name</b>	Code of Conduct		



<b>Information Asset Owner:</b>	Director of People & Organisational Development
<b>Protective Marking:</b>	
<b>Page :</b>	10 of 30

Procedure Note: **Code of Conduct**

## 8.0 Confidentiality

The Authority acknowledges the importance of preserving confidentiality of information. It is expected that all employees understand the importance of treating information in a discreet and confidential manner and do not disclose such information. Breaches of confidentiality may lead to disciplinary action, which could include dismissal.

## 9.0 Politically restricted posts

Some posts within the Authority are politically restricted under Part 2 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 (the LGHA 1989) (as amended). The restrictions aim to prevent politics coming into play where an employee is in a politically influential position. This could be where an employee implements the Authority's policies, gives advice to, or speaks on behalf of, the Authority,

If this applies to a post political restrictions means that the post holder will be prevented from having any active political role either inside or outside the workplace. Individuals will be advised if a post is politically restricted at the application stage of the recruitment process. The post holder will not be able to:

- Hold or stand for elected office
- Participate in political activities, publicly express support for a political party or undertake other activities such as canvassing on behalf of a person who seeks to be a candidate
- Speak to the public at large or publish any written or artistic work that could give the impression they are advocating support for a political party

<b>Version:</b>	2.0	<b>Status of document:</b>	Draft for approval
<b>Author:</b>	Human Resources	<b>PIA:</b>	Complete
<b>Issue Date:</b>	July 2015	<b>Review Date:</b>	July 2018
<b>File Name</b>	Code of Conduct		



<b>Information Asset Owner:</b>	Director of People & Organisational Development
<b>Protective Marking:</b>	
<b>Page :</b>	11 of 30

Procedure Note: **Code of Conduct**

## 10.0 Political neutrality

Employees must not do anything which compromises or which is likely to compromise, their own political impartiality or of others who work for, or on behalf of, the Authority. Amongst other things this means employees will:

- provide appropriate advice with impartiality
- without fear of recrimination, bring to the attention of management any deficiency in the provision of service or any impropriety or breach of policy or procedure
- serve the Authority as a whole, i.e. all employees and not just those of, for example, a controlling political group
- ensure that the individual rights of all employees are protected
- in advising political groups or their representatives, to not compromise political neutrality and to respect the individual rights of all councillors or group
- when using or authorising the use by others, the resources of the Authority, act in accordance with the Authority's lawful requirements and not allow his/her own political or personal opinions to interfere with his/her work
- maintain political impartiality during pre-election periods, and particularly around election campaigns

Councillors usually direct enquiries for information through the Chief Fire Officer or Directors. However, if an employee receives a direct approach from a Councillor for information and they are doubtful about whether it is appropriate to provide the information or about the Authority's ability to supply the information, they should advise the Councillor accordingly. In all cases the employee should speak with their line manager to establish the best approach to dealing with such matter.

<b>Version:</b>	2.0	<b>Status of document:</b>	Draft for approval
<b>Author:</b>	Human Resources	<b>PIA:</b>	Complete
<b>Issue Date:</b>	July 2015	<b>Review Date:</b>	July 2018
<b>File Name</b>	Code of Conduct		



<b>Information Asset Owner:</b>	Director of People & Organisational Development
<b>Protective Marking:</b>	
<b>Page :</b>	12 of 30

Procedure Note: **Code of Conduct**

## 11.0 Use of financial resources

Employees must ensure they use any public funds entrusted to them in a responsible and lawful manner. Employees must strive to ensure value for money to the local community and to avoid legal challenge to the Authority in all circumstances.

Employees must ensure they use any public funds, vehicles or equipment entrusted to them in a responsible and lawful manner. Employees must strive to ensure value for money to the local community and to avoid legal challenge to the Authority in all circumstances.

## 12.0 Appointments and other employment matters

Employees involved in staff selection decisions should ensure their decisions are made on the basis of merit and in accordance with the Authority's Recruitment and Selection procedure. It would be unlawful for an appointment to be made on the basis of anything other than the ability of the candidate to undertake the duties of the post.

In order to avoid any possible accusation of bias, an employee must not be involved in an appointment where they are related to an applicant, or they have a personal relationship outside work with them.

## 13.0 Secondary employment

The Authority expects the highest standard of conduct from all employees. Employment or other personal interests which may impact upon, or conflict with, the Authority's interests should not be pursued. Further detail can be found in the Secondary Employment procedure.

<b>Version:</b>	2.0	<b>Status of document:</b>	Draft for approval
<b>Author:</b>	Human Resources	<b>PIA:</b>	Complete
<b>Issue Date:</b>	July 2015	<b>Review Date:</b>	July 2018
<b>File Name</b>	Code of Conduct		



<b>Information Asset Owner:</b>	Director of People & Organisational Development
<b>Protective Marking:</b>	
<b>Page :</b>	13 of 30

## Procedure Note: **Code of Conduct**

Secondary employment is prohibited unless the employee has the express permission of the Authority in writing. An approval authorising secondary employment is conditional upon the employee being compliant with the Working Time Regulations 1998 and the Working Time (Amendment) Regulations 2003.

If employees are unsure of whether they need to notify the Authority of outside roles / secondary employment they should seek guidance from their line manager in the first instance who will take advice as necessary from Human Resources or the Authority Monitoring officer – Director of Legal & Governance.

Voluntary work will be looked at on a case by case basis, and the individual should discuss this with their line manager in the first instance. Consideration will be given to the type of role and the potential impact this may have on the individual's primary role.

### **14.0 Standards of dress and appearance**

The Authority expects employees to dress appropriately in business attire or uniform. Employees are expected to demonstrate good judgement, professional taste and courtesy to co-workers by dressing in a manner than is presentable and appropriate for the workplace.

Some roles will require the wearing of uniform. If provided with a uniform, this must be worn as specified and not in conjunction with non-issued clothing. Provided uniform must not be worn whilst out of work, except for travelling to and from work, or attendance at Authority functions. If uniform is to be worn for any other reason, prior written permission must be obtained from the line manager.

Employees who are required to wear personal protective clothing (PPE) which is provided by the Authority must not, under any circumstances, wear alternative clothing whilst performing safety critical tasks. The contravention of this requirement will be treated as a disciplinary matter.

<b>Version:</b>	2.0	<b>Status of document:</b>	Draft for approval
<b>Author:</b>	Human Resources	<b>PIA:</b>	Complete
<b>Issue Date:</b>	July 2015	<b>Review Date:</b>	July 2018
<b>File Name</b>	Code of Conduct		



**Procedure Note:**

**Code of Conduct**

Employees who wear business attire that is deemed inappropriate in the workplace will be dealt with on an individual basis. Unsuitable business attire includes, however not limited to, denim jeans, logo t-shirts, shorts, flip-flops.

The Authority respects the right of employees who, by the nature of their religious convictions, may choose to wear items of clothing, jewellery or insignia at work. However, this must be appropriate for the workplace and for the role undertaken; it cannot inhibit the employee from carrying out their role or compromise any health and safety procedures.

Particular items of uniform or corporate clothing can be provided or adjusted in order to meet the needs of pregnant women, or staff with individual needs associated, for instance, with a disability.

An acceptable standard of personal hygiene must be maintained by all employees.

**Jewellery**

Jewellery should be kept to a minimum and must not represent a hazard when dealing with equipment or PPE, or inhibit work performance. The wearing of earrings and studs is acceptable subject to the above provisions, however other visible piercings (for instance, eyebrow, lips, nose, and tongue piercings) are not considered in keeping with a professional image if an employee deals regularly with the public or represents the Authority at meetings. At other times, such jewellery should be restricted to a small stud.

**Hair**

Hair is to be worn in a smart and professional manner, hairstyles such as a Mohican is not acceptable. If hair is coloured or bleached, it must remain within naturally occurring hair colours. Flammable styling products are not to be used by operational staff.

When at incidents, employees should wear their hair so they do not put their safety and the safety of others at risk. Uniformed employees who choose to wear their hair long for

<b>Version:</b>	2.0	<b>Status of document:</b>	Draft for approval
<b>Author:</b>	Human Resources	<b>PIA:</b>	Complete
<b>Issue Date:</b>	July 2015	<b>Review Date:</b>	July 2018
<b>File Name</b>	Code of Conduct		



## Procedure Note:

## Code of Conduct

religious or other reasons must maintain it in a safe manner. If wearing a helmet, hair will be completely inside the helmet or fastened back and under the fire kit

The maintenance of hair to a safe and satisfactory standard will rest with the individual; however, the line managers will be responsible for ensuring that hair is worn in a manner that does not jeopardise the health and safety of themselves or others whilst at work.

Facial hair can compromise the seal of a facemask. All uniformed operational employees must be able to maintain a seal as laid out in the BA set general checks for the duration of time they are on call or on duty.

### Tattoos

Employees are asked to consider the requirements of the workplace when choosing the placement and style of new tattoos. Any tattoo considered discriminatory, violent, profanity or intimidating is prohibited.

For those employees engaged in community facing roles, the Authority prohibits visible tattoos, primarily on hands, face and above the collar line.

For those employees in non community facing roles, where tattoos are visible, these should be discrete and in keeping with the professional image of the Authority.

Employees may be requested to cover tattoos, for example by wearing long sleeved shirts where there is likelihood that they may cause offence or project an unprofessional image.

For those employees, who in the absence of there being a previously defined procedure, have chosen to have what are termed visible tattoos, a professional discussion between the line manager and the individual concerned should take place, in order to make clear the future expectations required of them. This may include determining what work related activities, be it on or off Authority premises, that require the covering of visible tattoos where practicable.

<b>Version:</b>	2.0	<b>Status of document:</b>	Draft for approval
<b>Author:</b>	Human Resources	<b>PIA:</b>	Complete
<b>Issue Date:</b>	July 2015	<b>Review Date:</b>	July 2018
<b>File Name</b>	Code of Conduct		





<b>Information Asset Owner:</b>	Director of People & Organisational Development
<b>Protective Marking:</b>	
<b>Page :</b>	16 of 30

**Procedure Note: Code of Conduct**

For employees considering a new tattoo, it is recommended for them to speak with their line manager in the first instance, to remove any uncertainty with regards to what constitutes being a visible or unacceptable tattoo. The line manager must determine the suitability of the tattoo being proposed and that it will comply with the professional image of the Service.

An employee, who chooses to get a tattoo that the Authority deems as unacceptable, may be requested to get the tattoo removed at the employee’s expense if it is not practicable for the tattoo to be covered up.

Line managers should ensure that employees under their supervision adhere to the standards of dress and will be responsible for identifying cases that do not meet with this Code and for taking appropriate action to resolve such matters, which may include discipline action up to and including dismissal.

## 15.0 Relationships

To ensure there are no conflicts of interest, there is an expectation that employees inform the Authority of any relationships they may have with other staff members within the Authority. The definition of relationship in this circumstance is:

- Spouse or partner
- Siblings
- Parents/grandparents
- In-laws
- Any other relationship with another colleague within the Authority which could be viewed as a conflict

Personal relationships that will pose a risk for the employee and Authority are:

- Participating in any recruitment and selection activity where there is a personal relationship with a candidate

<b>Version:</b>	2.0	<b>Status of document:</b>	Draft for approval
<b>Author:</b>	Human Resources	<b>PIA:</b>	Complete
<b>Issue Date:</b>	July 2015	<b>Review Date:</b>	July 2018
<b>File Name</b>	Code of Conduct		



**Procedure Note:**

**Code of Conduct**

- Line management responsibility
- Providing input into any performance appraisal or development
- Providing input into any recommendation for salary or reward

**Councillors**

Employees are responsible to the Authority through their senior managers. A role may require an employee to give advice to councillors on the Fire Authority, independent members of the Fire Authority and members of other Authorities. Mutual respect between employees, councillors and independent members is essential. Close personal familiarity between employees and individual councillors can damage the relationship and prove embarrassing to other employees and councillors. It should therefore be avoided.

**The Local Community and Service Users**

Employees of the Authority should always remember that their responsibilities are towards the community which they serve and ensure courteous, efficient and impartial service delivery to all groups and individuals within that community, as defined by the policies and procedures of the Authority.

**Contractors**

All relationships of a business or private nature with external contractors or potential contractors should be made known to the employee's line manager. Orders and contracts must be awarded on merit, by fair competition between other tenders, and no special favour should be shown in the tendering process. Particular care needs to be taken in relation to businesses which the employee is aware are either run by, or employ, in a senior or relevant management capacity, either existing or former employees, friends, partners or relatives.

All relationships of a personal or private business nature, whether previously or currently held, with external contractors, contractors bidding for contracts, the purchasing of goods or services must be reported to the employee's line manager for inclusion in the relevant Register of Interests.

<b>Version:</b>	2.0	<b>Status of document:</b>	Draft for approval
<b>Author:</b>	Human Resources	<b>PIA:</b>	Complete
<b>Issue Date:</b>	July 2015	<b>Review Date:</b>	July 2018
<b>File Name</b>	Code of Conduct		



## 16.0 Disclosure of Information

There is a statutory responsibility that requires certain types of information to be made available to Councillors, auditors, government departments, service users and the public. The Authority itself may decide to be open about other types of information.

Employees must not use any information obtained in the course of their employment for personal gain or benefit, nor should they pass it on to others who might use it in such a way.

It is expected that some employees will have contact with the media when appropriate to their role, e.g. information about operational incidents, proactive use of the media to support community safety activities, or other work related activities. It is imperative that no personal or personal sensitive information is shared with the media or any information that, together with other information likely to be or come into their possession, could lead to the identification of an individual without the individual's consent.

Unauthorised or improper use of Authority information is a serious offence, and will be dealt with in accordance with the Discipline procedure, which may include action up to and including dismissal.

Employee's privy to Authority information on tenders or costs for either internal or external contractors should not disclose that information to any unauthorised party or organisation, including any other potential bidder whether internal or external.

<b>Version:</b>	2.0	<b>Status of document:</b>	Draft for approval
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<b>Issue Date:</b>	July 2015	<b>Review Date:</b>	July 2018
<b>File Name</b>	Code of Conduct		



## 17.0 Registration of interests

All employees must comply with any requirements of the Authority; to register or declare interests; and to declare hospitality, benefits or gifts received as a consequence of their employment within the Authority.

In considering what it is appropriate to register individual employees may need to include the interests of family and friends, where these have an impact on, or could be interpreted as influencing the employee's conduct in relation to the performance of their duties.

If an employee has any financial interests that could conflict with the Authority's interests, they should declare these in writing to their line manager for inclusion in the relevant Register of Interests.

If an employee has any non-financial interests they consider could bring about conflict with the Authority's interests they should declare, in writing, these to their line manager for inclusion in the relevant Register of Interests. These might, for example, include a relationship with somebody seeking guidance on fire safety regulations, or who is seeking advice under the building control regulations, membership of a school governing body or of the committee of a voluntary organisation, where this is relevant to the employee's area of work.

If an employee is unclear as to the relevance of a particular matter of personal interest they should speak with their line manager in the first instance.

Employees must declare any interest they think may be covered by this Code, in writing, as soon as they become aware that such an interest may arise, and update the Register of Interests as and when appropriate.

<b>Version:</b>	2.0	<b>Status of document:</b>	Draft for approval
<b>Author:</b>	Human Resources	<b>PIA:</b>	Complete
<b>Issue Date:</b>	July 2015	<b>Review Date:</b>	July 2018
<b>File Name</b>	Code of Conduct		



<b>Information Asset Owner:</b>	Director of People & Organisational Development
<b>Protective Marking:</b>	
<b>Page :</b>	20 of 30

## Procedure Note: **Code of Conduct**

Line managers who receive a declaration of personal interest should discuss the circumstances with the Director of Legal and Governance, who will determine what action should be taken in order to safeguard the Authority's interest. This may, for example, result in a decision that the employee concerned should not engage in the particular work activity that has given rise to the declaration. Such a decision might also arise if an employee had indicated that they were not prepared to disclose an interest which the Director of Legal & Governance reasonably believes may have a detrimental impact on the Authority's interest taking into account the role of the employee concerned.

The Registers of Interests will be kept securely under the control of the Director of Legal and Governance.

### **18.0 Counter fraud and Corruption**

The Fire Authority expects all members, employees, consultants, contractors, suppliers and partner organisations, to act honestly and with integrity and to safeguard the public resources for which they are responsible, and to provide any help information and support necessary to deal with fraud and corruption.

The Authority will not tolerate any level of fraud or corruption; consequently, any case will be thoroughly investigated and dealt with appropriately. The Authority is committed to ensuring that opportunities for fraud and corruption are reduced to the lowest possible level of risk.

Where relevant, the Authority will include appropriate clauses in its contracts about the consequences of fraud, bribery and corruption; evidence of such acts is likely to lead to a termination of the particular contract and may lead to prosecution. In respect of employees, the Authority's disciplinary rules are such that fraud and corruption are considered to be potential gross misconduct and if proven, will normally result in dismissal.

<b>Version:</b>	2.0	<b>Status of document:</b>	Draft for approval
<b>Author:</b>	Human Resources	<b>PIA:</b>	Complete
<b>Issue Date:</b>	July 2015	<b>Review Date:</b>	July 2018
<b>File Name</b>	Code of Conduct		



<b>Information Asset Owner:</b>	Director of People & Organisational Development
<b>Protective Marking:</b>	
<b>Page :</b>	21 of 30

**Procedure Note: Code of Conduct**

It is a serious criminal offence for an employee to seek to influence the placing of a contract by or from the Authority through:

- the receiving or giving of any gift, loan, fee, reward or advantage, or
- by either taking inappropriate action or failing to take action when there is a clear need to do so, or
- by showing favour, or disfavour, to any person or organisation.

An employee must not take advantage of their position within the Authority. For example:

- By acquiring goods or services at a preferential rate which would not normally be available to other Fire Authority employees
- By acquiring goods or services at a reduced rate because a contractor or those bidding for contracts in the employee’s area of work, or another person or body seeking influence with the Authority treats the employee, their relatives or friends more favourably than others
- By accepting gifts or hospitality from a contractor or those bidding for contracts with the Authority or any other person or body seeking influence with the Authority
- Employees may be offered goods and services at a reduced rate by one of the Authority’s suppliers. If this reduced rate is widely publicised as being available to all Authority employees then the purchase of these items would not generally need to be registered. However, if an employee is in a position to influence the purchasing decisions of the Authority in relation to these items, they must register them in accordance with the Register of Interest. Account would need to be taken of the level of authority that the employee had in relation to the decision making and the number of checks in place involving other levels of authority
- A relationship between a supplier of goods and/or services and the Authority, should not affect the purchasing practice of an employee in a situation where the prices to the public are published and the employee is purchasing at the

<b>Version:</b>	2.0	<b>Status of document:</b>	Draft for approval
<b>Author:</b>	Human Resources	<b>PIA:</b>	Complete
<b>Issue Date:</b>	July 2015	<b>Review Date:</b>	July 2018
<b>File Name</b>	Code of Conduct		



<b>Information Asset Owner:</b>	Director of People & Organisational Development
<b>Protective Marking:</b>	
<b>Page :</b>	22 of 30

## Procedure Note: **Code of Conduct**

published prices. Therefore, an employee would not need to register where they purchase their weekly shopping, for example

However, where there is a general expectation that prices are open to negotiation and an employee is responsible for advising on purchasing decisions relating to those items, it would be appropriate for the employee to register this.

### **Whistleblowing**

Employees have a legal right and duty to report any concerns if they have reasonable belief that wrongdoing may be occurring, or may have occurred within the Authority.

A structured mechanism is available for employees to raise any serious concerns about any aspect of the Authority's work without the risk of subsequent detriment or disadvantage and staff are encouraged to raise serious concerns within the Authority initially, rather than overlooking a problem or blowing the whistle outside.

The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 protects employees/workers from reprisal, victimisation or harassment at work if they raise a concern in good faith.

The Authority will take seriously any concerns raised that are subsequently proven to have been made maliciously. Any employee/worker, who is found to have acted maliciously, may be subject to the Discipline procedure. If, however, an employee/worker raises a concern in good faith that is not later confirmed by investigations, no action will be taken against that employee/worker.

## **19.0 Hospitality and gifts**

Employees are expected to register all offers of hospitality or gifts that are received, whether or not they are accepted and offers of hospitality and/or gifts must be registered as they are received. It is not appropriate for these to be done on an annual basis.

<b>Version:</b>	2.0	<b>Status of document:</b>	Draft for approval
<b>Author:</b>	Human Resources	<b>PIA:</b>	Complete
<b>Issue Date:</b>	July 2015	<b>Review Date:</b>	July 2018
<b>File Name</b>	Code of Conduct		





<b>Information Asset Owner:</b>	Director of People & Organisational Development
<b>Protective Marking:</b>	
<b>Page :</b>	23 of 30

## Procedure Note: **Code of Conduct**

The declaration of hospitality and gifts form should be completed on all occasions by the employee and line manager for forwarding to the Legal and Governance Directorate.

### **Hospitality**

The utmost discretion must be exercised in accepting offers of hospitality from contractors, potential contractors or their representatives, or from other organisations or individuals involved in commerce. Whether hospitality can suitably be accepted depends on the nature and on the circumstances and a precise rule cannot be laid down. Generally speaking all hospitality, including reciprocal hospitality, should be such as would seem to be reasonable and appropriate in the circumstances.

Employees should only accept offers where there is a genuine organisational need to impart information or represent the Authority in the community. Offers to attend purely social or sporting functions should not generally be accepted unless the Authority specifically wishes to be represented. All offers of hospitality must be recorded on the relevant Register of Interests and those accepted must additionally be authorised by the line manager.

Acceptance of hospitality through attendance at relevant conferences and courses is acceptable where it is clear the hospitality is corporate rather than personal, and offered to the Authority rather than the individual employee on a personal basis. In such cases employees should obtain the consent from the line manager in advance and it must be recorded on the Register of Interests.

### **Gifts**

As a general rule employees should not accept significant personal gifts from clients, contractors and outside suppliers. Gifts, such as wines or spirits, which are given to individuals, must not be accepted. However, the Authority allows employees to keep insignificant items of token value such as pens, diaries etc.

<b>Version:</b>	2.0	<b>Status of document:</b>	Draft for approval
<b>Author:</b>	Human Resources	<b>PIA:</b>	Complete
<b>Issue Date:</b>	July 2015	<b>Review Date:</b>	July 2018
<b>File Name</b>	Code of Conduct		



<b>Information Asset Owner:</b>	Director of People & Organisational Development
<b>Protective Marking:</b>	
<b>Page :</b>	24 of 30

## Procedure Note: **Code of Conduct**

Authority employees must not accept personal payments from clients, contractors or outside suppliers. Cash and monetary gifts should always, without exception, be refused.

An employee declining a gift should do so politely and, where practical, return it to the donor with an explanation as to why it cannot be accepted. Where returning the gift is likely to be expensive or inconvenient, it should be donated to a suitable charity and the donor advised of what has happened and politely requested not to make similar gifts in the future.

Whether a gift (including a gift offered to a relative or partner) is accepted or refused, the employee's line manager should be informed and the circumstances should be recorded on the Register of Interests.

## 20.0 Sponsorship - giving and receiving

Where an outside organisation wishes to sponsor or is seeking to sponsor an Authority 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 Authority wishes to sponsor an event or service and an employee is involved in some way in consideration of the application, the employee or individuals connected to that employee must not benefit from such sponsorship without there being full disclosure to the line manager for inclusion on the Register of Interests. Similarly, where the Authority 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.

<b>Version:</b>	2.0	<b>Status of document:</b>	Draft for approval
<b>Author:</b>	Human Resources	<b>PIA:</b>	Complete
<b>Issue Date:</b>	July 2015	<b>Review Date:</b>	July 2018
<b>File Name</b>	Code of Conduct		



## 21.0 Acceptable use of technology

Employees should not do anything which would risk the integrity of the Authority's ICT systems. This can include the use of unauthorised or unlicensed software on the Authority's system.

The Authority provides access to ICT systems to support its business activities. During the working day these ICT systems should only be used to access role-related information.

The Authority allows limited personal use of the internet and email for the duration of an authorised break or prior to the start of / at the end of a working day. Any personal use must be in accordance with the Authority values and current legislation and must not disrupt the system.

The Authority accepts that employees may bring in their personal devices into work. Personal devices must only be used during authorised breaks or prior to the start of / at the end of a working day. This also applies to the use of mobile phones; however the Authority does accept that an employee may be required to use their phone in emergency situations whilst at work.

Whilst at work, all personal devices must be on silent and kept securely by the employee. The Authority accepts no liability for loss or damage to personal property.

In exceptional circumstances, employees may use their own personal devices whilst at work; however this must only be done with the express permission on the employee's line manager.

To help protect users from accidentally accessing inappropriate sites e.g. sites that hold unlawful, obscene, or other materials / images which conflict with Authority values a number of sites are blocked. The list of websites which are blocked is continually being reviewed and revised. If a user accidentally visits a site which they feel to be inappropriate, they must notify the IT Department immediately.

<b>Version:</b>	2.0	<b>Status of document:</b>	Draft for approval
<b>Author:</b>	Human Resources	<b>PIA:</b>	Complete
<b>Issue Date:</b>	July 2015	<b>Review Date:</b>	July 2018
<b>File Name</b>	Code of Conduct		



<b>Information Asset Owner:</b>	Director of People & Organisational Development
<b>Protective Marking:</b>	
<b>Page :</b>	26 of 30

## Procedure Note: **Code of Conduct**

Employees should be aware that ICT systems are monitored.

## 22.0 Protecting the Authority's business reputation

All employees are responsible for protecting the corporate reputation of the Authority. Employees must not post libellous or defamatory statements about the Authority, clients, suppliers and vendors, and other affiliates and stakeholders.

Employees should also avoid social media communications that might be misconstrued in a way that could damage our business reputation, even indirectly.

Employees should make it clear in social media postings that they are speaking on their own behalf when communicating via social media, write in the first person and use a personal email address when communicating via social media.

Employees are personally responsible for what they communicate in social media. What is published might be available to be read by the masses (including the organisation itself, future employers and social acquaintances) for a long time. Keep this in mind before posting content.

If an employee discloses their affiliation as an employee of the organisation, they must also state that their views do not represent those of the Authority. An employee could state *"the views in this posting do not represent the views of my employer"*. An employee should also ensure that their profile and any content posted are consistent with the professional image presented to clients and colleagues.

Employees must avoid posting comments about sensitive business-related topics, such as performance. Even if they make it clear that their views on such topics do not represent those of the Authority; comments could still damage reputation.

<b>Version:</b>	2.0	<b>Status of document:</b>	Draft for approval
<b>Author:</b>	Human Resources	<b>PIA:</b>	Complete
<b>Issue Date:</b>	July 2015	<b>Review Date:</b>	July 2018
<b>File Name</b>	Code of Conduct		



**Procedure Note:**

**Code of Conduct**

If an employee is uncertain or concerned about the appropriateness of any statement or posting, they should refrain from making the communication until it is discussed with their line manager.

If an employee sees content in social media that disparages or reflects poorly on the Authority or its stakeholders, they should contact their line manager.

**Respecting intellectual property and confidential information**

Employees should not do anything to jeopardise confidential information and intellectual property through the use of social media.

In addition, employees should avoid misappropriating or infringing the intellectual property of companies and individuals, which can create liability for the Authority, as well as the individual author.

Employees must not use the Authority logos, brand names, slogans or other trademarks, or post any confidential or proprietary information without prior written permission.

To protect employees and the Authority against liability for copyright infringement, where appropriate, reference sources of particular information posted or uploaded and cite them accurately. If an employee has any questions about whether a particular post or upload might violate anyone's copyright or trademark, they should contact the Information Governance & Compliance Manager before making the communication.

**Respecting colleagues, clients, partners and suppliers**

Employees must not post anything that colleagues or clients, suppliers, vendors or other stakeholders would find offensive, including discriminatory comments, insults or obscenity.

Employees must not post anything related to colleagues or our, clients, suppliers, vendors or other stakeholders without their written permission.

<b>Version:</b>	2.0	<b>Status of document:</b>	Draft for approval
<b>Author:</b>	Human Resources	<b>PIA:</b>	Complete
<b>Issue Date:</b>	July 2015	<b>Review Date:</b>	July 2018
<b>File Name</b>	Code of Conduct		



<b>Information Asset Owner:</b>	Director of People & Organisational Development
<b>Protective Marking:</b>	
<b>Page :</b>	28 of 30

**Procedure Note: Code of Conduct**

**Social Media**

Employees need to exercise common sense when using social media. Online conduct should not be any different to offline conduct and when posting material on social networking sites employee’s should remember that what is written is in the public domain and may be seen or used by others the employee did not intent, even if they have privacy settings, or material is posted on a closed profile or group.

Social media should never be used in a way that breaches any of the Authority’s other policies and procedures. If an internet post would breach any of our procedures in another forum, it will also breach them in an online forum. For example, employees are prohibited from using social media to:

- Breach acceptable use of communications systems, information systems and internet systems policies and procedures
- Breach any obligations with respect to the rules of relevant regulatory bodies;
- Breach any obligations they may have relating to:
  - Confidentiality
  - Breach disciplinary rules
  - Defame or disparage the organisation or clients, business partners, suppliers, vendors or other stakeholders
  - Harass or bully other employees in any way
  - Unlawfully discriminate against other employees or third parties OR breach our Equality and Diversity policy
  - Breach Data protection policy (for example, never disclose personal information about a colleague online)
  - Breach any other laws or ethical standards (for example, never use social media in a false or misleading way, such as by claiming to be someone other than themselves or by making misleading statements).

Employees should never provide references for other individuals on social or professional networking sites, as such references, positive and negative, can be

<b>Version:</b>	2.0	<b>Status of document:</b>	Draft for approval
<b>Author:</b>	Human Resources	<b>PIA:</b>	Complete
<b>Issue Date:</b>	July 2015	<b>Review Date:</b>	July 2018
<b>File Name</b>	Code of Conduct		



<b>Information Asset Owner:</b>	Director of People & Organisational Development
<b>Protective Marking:</b>	
<b>Page :</b>	29 of 30

**Procedure Note: Code of Conduct**

attributed to the Authority and create legal liability for both the author of the reference and the Authority.

Using the Authority’s insignia to promote an individual person or external organisation without approval is prohibited.

**Cyber Bullying**

ACAS define Cyber Bullying as “any use of information and communications technology to support deliberate and hostile attempts to hurt, upset or embarrass another person” and cite examples of Cyber Bullying that might include the following actions:

- Offensive emails – sending offensive e-mails to a colleague – even if this is meant as a joke – and continuing to send similar messages having already being asked to stop
- Email threats – this might also include ostensibly relatively inoffensive messages in terms of actual content where it is the implied meaning behind the message that constitutes a form of bullying. An example might be where a superior is using email to bombard an employee with more work than they can handle, whilst other members of the team are not being treated the same way
- Posting blogs and leaving comments on social networking sites – it may be that a person does not experience any direct form of cyber-bullying, being unaware that the bully is posting offensive messages about them on sites in the public domain
- Propagating defamatory gossip about employees on social networking sites
- Threats or offensive comments sent to a person’s mobile phone via SMS text messages
- Harassment by email – sending persistent emails to a person when previous email approaches have been rejected
- Sharing a person’s private data online - posting personal details – i.e. those which they would not normally want to share with complete strangers, such

<b>Version:</b>	2.0	<b>Status of document:</b>	Draft for approval
<b>Author:</b>	Human Resources	<b>PIA:</b>	Complete
<b>Issue Date:</b>	July 2015	<b>Review Date:</b>	July 2018
<b>File Name</b>	Code of Conduct		





<b>Information Asset Owner:</b>	Director of People & Organisational Development
<b>Protective Marking:</b>	
<b>Page :</b>	30 of 30

**Procedure Note: Code of Conduct**

as home address and phone numbers – in such a way that they become available to the general public

It should be noted that when an allegation is made that bullying / harassment or cyber-bullying has taken place or where these instructions and guidelines are breached an investigation will take place and action will be taken under the Bullying and Harassment and / or the Discipline procedures, whether the action has taken place in an employee's personal time or in their working time.

Employees who breach any of the above policies or procedures will be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment.

Draft for approval

<b>Version:</b>	2.0	<b>Status of document:</b>	Draft for approval
<b>Author:</b>	Human Resources	<b>PIA:</b>	Complete
<b>Issue Date:</b>	July 2015	<b>Review Date:</b>	July 2018
<b>File Name</b>	Code of Conduct		