



## 1. Changes since the last version

Current version 4.0 document reissued following a review. Minor amendments have been made to the previous version 3.0. This document will be monitored by Human Resources and reviewed after three years from the date of publication unless there is need to review earlier.

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Approval: Executive Committee on recommendation from the Overview and Audit Committee

*Please note that as Service Documents are frequently updated, if you print a document, its accuracy cannot be guaranteed. Always check the intranet for the latest version.*

## 2.0 Index

1. [Document changes](#)
2. Index
3. [Purpose and scope](#)
4. [Roles and responsibilities](#)
5. [Working within the Code of Conduct](#)
6. [Working within the law](#)
7. [Equality, diversity and inclusion](#)
8. [Health, safety and welfare](#)
9. [Privacy and data protection and information security](#)
10. [Politically restricted posts](#)
11. [Political neutrality](#)
12. [Use of financial resources](#)
13. [Appointment and other employment matters](#)
14. [Secondary employment](#)
15. [Standards of dress and appearance](#)
16. [Relationships](#)
17. [Disclosure of information](#)
18. [Counter fraud and corruption](#)
19. [Whistleblowing](#)
20. [Hospitality, benefits and gifts](#)
21. [Sponsorships – giving and receiving](#)
22. [Acceptable use of technology](#)
23. [Monitoring and assurance](#)
24. [Document history](#)



25. [Consultation/publication/communication](#)
26. [Impact Assessments](#)

### 3.0 Purpose and scope

Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority (the Authority) is a publicly accountable body, which manages Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service (the Service) on behalf of the public. The Service will:

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

The Service's vision is to ensure that:

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

Underpinning everything the Service does is a set of values, which are aspirational for all employees where they engage with others; be it with the public, partner agencies or colleagues. These values are:

- Service to the Community – we will serve the community by:
  - Working with all groups to reduce risks
  - Treating everyone fairly and with respect
  - Striving for excellence in all we do
  - Being answerable to those we serve
- People – by everyone practising and promoting:
  - Fairness and respect
  - Recognising commitment and the achievement of excellent service
  - Honesty and trust
  - Opportunities to develop and learn
  - Co-operation and inclusive working
- Diversity – we value diversity in our Service and in the community by:
  - Treating everyone fairly and with respect
  - Challenging prejudice and discrimination
  - Creating opportunities to meet the different needs of people and the communities



- Promoting equal opportunities in terms of recruitment, promotion and retention
- Improvement – we value improvement at all levels of the Service by:
  - Accepting responsibility for our performance and actions
  - Being open-minded and receptive to alternative approaches
  - Learning from our experiences
  - Supporting others to enable them to achieve their goals
  - Encourage innovation and creativity

These values will be reflected throughout the Service's employment related policies and procedures policy themes and will continue to be utilised as corporate and public safety plans are developed and implemented.

The public expect the highest standards of professional conduct from all employees. This Code provides information for employees on the ~~minimum~~ expected standards of professional conduct. It is not 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.

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

The Service acknowledges the Core Code of Ethics for Fire and Rescue Services, which complement and support the Service's own vision and values, which forms part of everything we do. The Principles in the Core Code are based on the Seven Principles of Public Life, known as the Nolan Principles. These have been tailored to suit the Fire and Rescue Services context, and the Core Code of Ethics sets out five ethical Principles in which to base behaviours on:

1. Putting our communities first - we put the interest of the public, the community and Service users first
2. Integrity – we act with integrity being open, honest and consistent in everything we do
3. Dignity and respect – we treat people with dignity and respect, making decisions objectively based on evidence, without discrimination or bias
4. Leadership – we are all positive role models, always demonstrating flexible and resilient leadership

We are all accountable for everything we do and challenge all behaviour that falls short of the highest standard



5. Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) – we continually recognise and promote the value of EDI, both within the Fire Service and the wider communities in which we serve  
We stand against all forms of discrimination, create equal opportunities, promote equality, foster good relations and celebrate difference

These principles will be embedded within everything the Service and its employees do.

This document applies to all employees of the Service. Employees are expected to follow the principles represented within this document in all day-to-day activities, whether working online or offline and working remotely where a virtual co-presence is provided.

#### **4.0 Roles and responsibilities**

Employees at all levels are required and expected to show professional conduct and behaviour at all times. 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 to the public. An employee must observe this Code of Conduct whenever they:

- Conduct the business of the Service
- Conduct the business of any office to which they are appointed by the Service
- Represent the Service

All employees should demonstrate leadership skills and behaviour. Employees demonstrate these skills in different ways through leading themselves, leading others, leading the function and leading the Service. These categories are then assessed further through personal impact, outstanding leadership, service delivery and organisational effectiveness. The leadership skills are explained in depth in the NFCC Leadership Framework.

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.

#### **5.0 Working within the Code of Conduct**

Employees 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 complying with all policies and procedures and not giving personal opinions about Service policies or procedures via any media, including social media. All employees should:

- 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 maliciously damage or falsify documents or records

Employees should, at all times, treat colleagues with dignity, respect and politeness. Expected 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 Human Resources.

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, [alternative senior manager, Human Resources](#) or through another appropriate procedure, such as the Grievance procedure.

All employees are expected to work in accordance with the Service's published policies, procedures, guidance document, financial regulations and instructions, which describe important rules and standards. These documents can be found on the Service's Intranet.

The Service will apply this Code of Conduct consistently and fairly. Any breach of the Code may result in discipline action. Some categories of breaches (known as gross misconduct) can be serious enough to warrant discipline action up to and including dismissal. Examples of gross misconduct can be found in the Service's Discipline procedure.

### **6.0 Working within the law**

Employees must not act or do anything without statutory authority and without following the relevant procedures.

## Service Document Procedure: Code of Conduct



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All employees must:

- 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 Service, or which makes them unsuitable for the role they do

Conduct constituting a criminal offence, regardless of whether or not there has been a prosecution or conviction, could lead to discipline action where the conduct is relevant to the individual's employment within the Service.

An employee will not be dismissed or otherwise disciplined solely because they have been charged with or convicted of a criminal offence. Consideration will be given as to whether the employee's conduct or conviction merits actions because of its employment implications.

All employees are required to declare any pending charges or unspent criminal convictions. If an employee does not declare any charges or criminal conviction and these become known to the Service, this could result in discipline action. In all instances, the employee should notify either their line manager or the Duty Officer. In addition, employees should inform their line manager of circumstances where they are assisting with any police enquiries.

The Service reserves the right to take appropriate discipline action before the outcome of a police investigations or legal proceedings are known.

In the event that the Service has reasonable belief that an employee's conduct might constitute a criminal offence, the matter may be reported to the police.

~~Should an employee be found guilty of any criminal offence whilst employed by the Service, they must inform their line manager as soon as practicable. If an employee is unable to contact their line manager, they should notify a suitable alternative, such as a Duty Officer or HR Manager. If an employee is unsure about whether or not an offence should be disclosed, guidance should be sought from Human Resources. Employees must:~~

- ~~• Declare any pending charges or unspent criminal convictions they have incurred prior to or during their employment with the Service and at the time these occur~~
- ~~• Disclose any criminal charges which have been made against them~~
- ~~• Disclose any criminal offence they have been convicted of~~
- ~~• Notify the Service of any endorsement to their driving licence~~



~~The Service 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 Service and may result in a discipline investigation and action under the Discipline procedure. In the event that the Service has reasonable belief that an employee's conduct might constitute a criminal offence, the matter may be reported to the police.~~

## **7.0 Equality, diversity, and inclusion**

The Service is committed to equality, diversity, and inclusion. It recognises that fairness and inclusion is fundamental to everything the Service does to achieve its aim of making the public of Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes safer. The Service's policies, procedures and practices will be fair, open and transparent, providing equality of opportunity to all employees.

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

The Service promotes equality both in employment and in the delivery of its services and does not tolerate unlawful discrimination. The Service is fully committed to undertaking the duties placed on it as an employer, service provider and public body under the Equality Act (2010) and other relevant legislation and respects the rights and privacy of all.

## **8.0 Health, safety, and welfare**

The Service 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 public and employees.

**8.1 Fitness:** All employees are expected to take reasonable measures to be fit for work. The maintenance of an appropriate level of fitness is essential for



health and wellbeing and will ensure employees are able to perform their roles safely and effectively.

Operational employees are required to undertake six-monthly fitness assessments to ensure they are maintaining an appropriate level of fitness to be able to perform their role safely and effectively.

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

Employees who test positive for drugs and/or alcohol misuse during any screening process may be subject to discipline action and will be immediately suspended from work.

**8.3 Smoking:** The Service is committed to the provision of a smoke free working environment. Employees are not permitted to smoke or vape:

- Indoors - this applies to all offices and work areas regardless of the occupancy. No employee or visitor may smoke/vape whilst visiting other workplaces, or whilst carrying out duties on behalf of the Service. The smoke free environment also applies to any social or community event taking place on Service premises
- Outdoors - any common access areas, regardless of whether they are accessed by employees only, public only, or both. This includes car parks, yards, and pathways. The workplace also includes the "Incident Ground" or when carrying out exercises, training, or Service public events
- Whilst representing the Service
- Vehicles - in any Service vehicle or lease vehicle and when driving in a privately owned vehicle for work purposes either as the sole driver or when accompanied by a colleague (excluding employees own personal time, i.e. travel to and from work and lunchbreaks)

Exclusion – employees may smoke/vape in Service property, occupied under the arrangements for Day Crewing Housing Provision, whilst off duty.

## **9.0 Privacy, data protection and information security**

The Service is committed to protecting and respecting the privacy of individuals and the responsible handling of personal information.



## Service Document Procedure: Code of Conduct



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The Service collects and uses information about the people with whom they deal. The Service will also acquire information about others in the course of those dealings. These people – collectively called 'data subjects' - include employees, users of services, staff in other organisations and institutions, as well as contractors and suppliers of various kinds. The information can be factual, such as name and address, or expressions of opinion about our intentions towards individuals. It can occur in any form or format, such as word documents, databases and spread-sheets, emails, CCTV, audio recordings, photographs, paper files etc.

Any individual about whom personal data is going to be processed will be informed of the collection and use of their personal data; how long it will be kept for and with whom it will be shared. This is called 'privacy information'. The Service will provide privacy information to individuals at the time personal data is collected from them and if we obtain personal data from other sources, we will provide individuals with privacy information within one month. For further information about how personal information is dealt with refer to the [Service's 'Privacy Statement – How employee personal data is managed'](#) and ['Privacy Statement for prospective employees'](#). ~~'Dealing with requests for information procedure' and 'How employees and potential employee personal information is managed'~~.

All employees have a responsibility to ensure compliance with regulations and protecting and respecting the privacy of individuals. [This will help to ensure that all personal and otherwise confidential information is protected from inappropriate access / disclosure, loss, or corruption, whether it be in an electronic, hard copy or verbal form. Not only is this a legal responsibility, but much of the Service's information is business critical and needs to remain accurate and available.](#) Any employee acting under the authority of the Service, who has access to personal data, must not process data except on instruction as part of their role. Any breaches may lead to discipline action, which could include action up to and including dismissal.

[Employees must ensure the security of data when travelling to and from work or home and other locations as applicable. Sensitive and confidential data must be secured, encrypted and protected appropriately.](#)

[When working from home, employees must be mindful of their surroundings and the potential increase for breaches to data privacy, for example individuals external to the Service overhearing confidential conversations and gaining access to private information and documents. Employees must protect confidentiality and maintain the integrity of the Service's business whilst working from home.](#)



## **10. Politically restricted posts**

Some posts within the Service are politically restricted under Part 2 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 (the LGHA 1989) (as amended). The restriction covers behaviour in politically sensitive posts and restricts the post holder's activity in the political space. This could be where an employee implements the Service's policies, gives advice to, or speaks on behalf of the Service.

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

## **11. Political neutrality**

Employees must not do anything which compromises, or which is likely to compromise, their own political impartiality or that of others who work for, or on behalf of the Service. 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 Service 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, not compromise political neutrality and to respect the individual rights of all Councillors or groups
- When using or authorising the use by others, the resources of the Service, act in accordance with the Service's lawful requirements and not allow their own political or personal opinions to interfere with work
- Maintain political impartiality during pre-election periods and particularly around election campaigns

Councillors usually direct enquiries for information through the Chief Fire Officer/CE or Directors within the Service. 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 Service'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.

## **12. Use of financial resources**

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 Service in all circumstances.

## **13. Appointments and other employment matters**

It is against the Authority's values and unlawful for an appointment to be made on the basis of anything other than ability of the candidate to undertake the duties of the post. Employees involved in recruitment, selection and promotion decisions should ensure their decisions are made in accordance with Service procedures. Appropriate training will be given to those involved in appointment decisions.

To avoid bias or conflict of interest, an employee must not be involved in an appointment in which they may have a personal or family relationship, either within or outside the Service.

## **14. Secondary employment**

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

Secondary employment is prohibited unless the employee has the express written permission of the Service. 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 Service 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 Service Monitoring Officer – Director of Legal and 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.

### **15. Standards of dress and appearance**

The Service expects employees to dress in appropriate business attire or uniform and to maintain a professional appearance at all times when representing the Service. Employees are expected to demonstrate good professional judgement and ~~taste and~~ courtesy to co-workers by dressing appropriately for work, whether in the workplace or working from home.

An acceptable standard of personal hygiene must be maintained by all employees. Employees should come to work having attended to their personal hygiene each day, with clean clothes and hair and free from unpleasant odours.

Line managers should ensure that employees under their supervision follow the standards of dress, are responsible for identifying cases that do not meet with this Code, and for taking appropriate action to resolve such matters.

**15.1 Dress:** Some roles require the wearing of uniform. If provided with a uniform, this must be worn as specified, which includes appropriate identification, ~~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 Service 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 equipment (PPE) which is provided by the Service must not, under any circumstances, wear alternative clothing whilst performing safety critical tasks for which PPE is provided.

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

Employees are required to be appropriately dressed for work whilst working from home.

The Service 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 employees with individual needs associated, for instance, with a disability.

**15.2 Jewellery and adornments:** 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 Service at meetings.~~ Where piercings present a hazard in the workplace, employees will be required to remove or tape up the item(s) to reduce the risk to an acceptable level. ~~At all times, jewellery should be restricted to a minimum.~~ For operational employees, facial piercings must not be worn whilst on duty, as these can become loose and therefore compromise the normal workings of the BA facemask.

Artificial eyelashes can become detached from the face, and therefore compromise the normal working of a BA facemask. For operational employees these should not be worn whilst on duty.

Fingernails (including extensions) must be kept to a length that allows PPE (any type of glove) to be worn correctly and allow the wearer to operate equipment and manipulate objects. The style and length of fingernails must not damage/pierce either surgical or nitrile gloves.

**15.3 Hair:** To be worn in a smart and professional manner. ~~Hairstyles such as mohicans are not acceptable. If hair is coloured or bleached, it must remain within naturally occurring hair colours.~~

~~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 religious or other reasons must maintain it in a safe manner. If wearing a helmet, hair must be completely inside the helmet or fastened back and under the fire kit. Flammable styling products are not to be used by operational employees.

The maintenance of hair to a safe and satisfactory standard will rest with the individual; however, the line manager 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.

Hair, including facial hair can compromise the seal of a facemask. All operational employees have a responsibility to ensure an adequate seal is maintained whilst wearing Breathing Apparatus (BA) as laid out in the BA set general checks. Operational employees must also comply with the Service's [Maintaining Safe and Effective Respiratory Protective Equipment procedure](#) Facial Hair and Cosmetics procedure and ensure that the integrity of the facemask is not detrimentally affected by the wearing of cosmetics. [In addition, hair must not compromise the fit of the fire helmet or any other article of PPE, impeding hearing or vision and/or presenting a risk of entanglement or distraction.](#)

**15.4 Tattoos:** Any tattoos considered discriminatory, violent, profane, or intimidating are prohibited.

~~For those employees engaged in community facing roles, the Service prohibits visible tattoos, primarily on the hands, face and above the collar line. Where tattoos are visible, these should be discreet and in keeping with the professional image of the Service.~~

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

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, to make clear the future expectations required of them. This may include determining what work related activities will require the covering of the visible tattoos (where practicable).~~

~~For employees considering a new tattoo, it is recommended they 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 whether it will comply with the professional image of the Service.~~



An employee, who chooses to get a tattoo that the Service 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.

### 16. Relationships

There is an expectation that employees inform the Service of any relationships they may have with other members of staff. The definition of relationship in this circumstance is:

- Spouse or partner
- Siblings
- Parents/grandparents
- In-laws
- [Colleagues dating](#)
- Any other relationship with another colleague within the Service which could be viewed as a conflict

Personal relationships that may result in a conflict of interest are:

- Participating in any recruitment, selection, and promotion activity where there is a personal relationship with a candidate
- Line management responsibility
- Providing input into any performance appraisal or development
- Providing input into any recommendation for salary or reward

**16.1 Councillors:** 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, or if they exist, they should be declared.

**16.2 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.

## **17. 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 Service itself may decide to be open about other types of information, some of which is posted on the website. 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 Service 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.

Employees privy to Service 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.

## **18. Counter fraud and corruption**

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





The Service 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 Service's discipline rules are such that fraud and corruption are considered to be potential gross misconduct and if proven, will normally result in dismissal.

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

- The receiving or giving of any gift, loan, fee, reward or advantage, or 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 Service, for example:

- By acquiring goods or services at a preferential rate which would not normally be available to other 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 Service 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 Service or any other person or body seeking influence with the Service
- Employees may be offered goods and services at a reduced rate by one of the Service's suppliers. If this reduced rate is widely publicised as being available to all Service 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 Service 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 Service, 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 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

## **19. 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 Service.

A structured mechanism is available for employees to raise any serious concerns about any aspect of the Service's work without the risk of subsequent detriment or disadvantage. Employees are encouraged to raise serious concerns within the Service initially, rather than overlooking a problem or blowing the whistle outside. Further information can be found in the Whistleblowing procedure.

The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 protects employees from reprisal, victimisation or harassment at work if they raise a concern in good faith. The Service will take seriously any concerns raised that are subsequently proven to have been made maliciously. Any employee who is found to have acted maliciously, may be subject to the Discipline procedure. If, however, an employee raises a concern in good faith that is not later confirmed by an investigation, no action will be taken.

## **20. Hospitality, benefits and gifts**

The Service is funded almost entirely from public funds, either through grants from central government (funded through general taxpayer), or through council tax, funded from the local taxpayer. It is essential that we can demonstrate the highest standards of probity in general, and specifically in relation to its dealings with third parties. These relationships are a source of considerable interest and subject to close scrutiny, both through formal and regular channels such as auditors, and also through channels such as Freedom of Information requests. All employees must comply with any requirements of the Service; to register or declare interests; and to declare hospitality, benefits or gifts received as a consequence of their employment within the Service.

This Code covers both the receipt and offering of hospitality and gifts. 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.



A Register of Interest will be kept securely under the control of the Director of Legal and Governance.

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 to safeguard the Service'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 and Governance reasonably believes may have a detrimental impact on the Service's interest taking into account the role of the employee concerned.

**20.1 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 Service in the community. Offers to attend purely social or sporting functions should not generally be accepted unless the Service 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 Service rather than the individual employee on a personal basis. Employees should obtain the consent from the line manager in advance, and it must be recorded on the Register of Interests.

**20.2 Offering hospitality:** Service funds should not normally be used for offering hospitality to third parties. Only in exceptional circumstances, Senior Officers may be in a position where they are required to provide hospitality (e.g. buying lunch for the purpose of managing the reputation of the Service). For any officer other than the Strategic Management Board the need to incur such expenses must be approved in advance by a Senior Officer.



Catering (including refreshments such as tea/coffee and biscuits) may be provided for formal meetings with external bodies in certain circumstances, for example, if meetings take place outside normal office hours. Catering for meetings will not normally be provided where no external guests are present, even if these meetings are arranged over a lunchtime period, it is expected that employees would provide their own lunch as any normal working day.

Accommodation should not normally be provided for third parties. Consultants and advisors working with and for the Service should provide their own accommodation and subsistence.

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

Service employees must not accept personal payments from clients, contractors, members of the public or outside suppliers. Cash and monetary gifts should always 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 this 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.

## **21. Sponsorship – giving and receiving**

Where an outside organisation wishes to sponsor or is seeking to sponsor a Service 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 Service 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 Service through sponsorship, grant



aid, financial or other means, gives support in the community, employees should ensure impartial advice is given and there is no conflict of interest involved.

### **22. Acceptable use of technology**

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

The Service 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 Service allows limited personal use of the internet and email for the duration of an authorised break or prior to the start or at the end of a working day. Any personal use must be in accordance with the Service values and current legislation and must not disrupt the system. [Employees are not to use their work email address for personal use.](#)

The Service accepts that employees may bring in their personal devices into work. Whilst at work, all personal devices must be on silent and kept securely by the employee. The Service accepts no liability for loss or damage to personal property.

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

Employees should be aware that use of Service ICT resources is presumed to be for work purposes and is therefore subject to monitoring for inappropriate use.

**22.1 Protecting the Service's business reputation:** All employees are responsible for protecting the corporate reputation of the Service. Employees must not post libellous or defamatory statements about the Service, 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 Service. 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 Service, comments could still damage reputation.

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 Service or its stakeholders, they should contact their line manager.

### **22.2 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 Service, as well as the individual author.

Employees must not use the Service logos, brand names, slogans or other trademarks, or post any confidential or proprietary information without prior written permission from the [Director of Legal and Governance](#) Information Governance and Compliance Manager.



To protect employees and the Service against liability for copyright infringement, where appropriate, reference sources of 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 Team before making the communication, by emailing - informationgovernance@bucksfire.gov.uk](mailto:informationgovernance@bucksfire.gov.uk). ~~Information Governance and Compliance Manager before making the communication.~~

**22.3 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, clients, suppliers, vendors or other stakeholders without their written permission.

**22.4 Online and social media platforms:** Employees need to exercise common sense when using social media [platforms, and online messaging Apps](#). Online conduct should not be any different to offline conduct and when posting material on social networking sites, employees should remember that what is written is in the public domain and may be seen or used by others the employee did not intend, even if they have privacy settings, or material is posted on a closed profile or group. [Employees should also be aware that out of hours activities can still be considered in the course of employment.](#)

[Inappropriate use of online and social media platforms and the sharing of material of an unprofessional nature in the course of employment will amount to wilful misconduct and appropriate discipline action will be taken, which may include action up to and including dismissal.](#)

Social media should never be used in a way that breaches any of the Service's policies and procedures. If an internet post would breach any Service 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 related to:
  - Confidentiality
  - Breaching discipline rules



- Defaming or disparaging the organisation or clients, business partners, suppliers, vendors or other stakeholders
- Harassment or bullying other employees in any way
- Unlawfully discriminating against other employees or third parties or breach our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy
- Breaching data protection (for example, never disclose personal information about a colleague online)
- Breaching 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 attributed to the Service and create legal liability for both the author of the reference and the Service.

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

**22.5 Cyberbullying:** Cyberbullying is a form of bullying, harassment or victimisation that takes place online or through the use of electronic devices. Cyberbullying can occur in many different forms and some examples can include:

- Leaking sensitive information
- Sending abusive/offensive/threatening emails or messages
- Making inappropriate/threatening/offensive comments online
- Leaving individuals out of group chats but including all other team members
- Stalking or harassing colleagues online
- Propagating defamatory gossip about employees on social networking sites
- Circulating indecent or inappropriate images
- Setting up false profiles, identity fraud or identity theft
- Theft, fraud or deception over the internet
- Sending emails to bombard an employee with more work than they can handle, whilst other members of the team are not being treated the same way

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

Where an allegation is made that bullying / harassment or cyberbullying has taken place, or where these instructions and guidelines are breached, an investigation will take place in accordance with and action will be taken under the Anti-Bullying and Harassment and/or 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 procedures will be subject to discipline action, which may include action up to and including dismissal.

### **23. Monitoring and assurance**

The Authority's Code of Conduct provides individuals with an understanding of the standards expected when performing duties as an employee and guides behaviour, placing an obligation on all employees to take responsibility for their own conduct. To ensure the highest standards of public service and provide necessary assurance to the Authority, routine monitoring of activity as specified within the Code will be carried out and reported.



Human Resources will monitor the effectiveness of this document and unless there is a need to review earlier, the document will be reviewed after three years from date of publication.

Human Resources will report any exceptions or issues arising under this document to the relevant SMT representative.

## 24. Document history

- OC81/01 issued September 2006
- Document updated and approved by Executive Committee on 29 July 2015
- Document updated and approved by Executive Committee on 10 July 2019

## 25. Consultation, publication, communication

Consultation period between September and October 2022

## 26. Impact Assessments

### A) The Equality impact table

Assessment of impact table. Does the activity have the potential to impact differently on individuals in different groups? To complete the table ✓ the likely impact. If an EIA action plan is necessary, this can be downloaded from the Intranet.

Assessment of impact on groups in **bold** is a legal requirement. Assessment of impacts on groups in *italics* is not a legal requirement, however it will help to ensure that your activity does not have unintended consequences.

Protected characteristic	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Rationale for decision ( <i>use action plan if necessary</i> )
Individuals of different ages	✓			Acknowledging and embracing diversity and promoting equal opportunities
Disabled individuals	✓			Creating opportunities to meet the different needs of individuals and promoting equal opportunities. Providing reasonable



				adjustments where appropriate to meet specific needs
Individuals transitioning from one gender to another	✓			Acknowledging and embracing diversity and promoting equal opportunities
Individuals who are married or in civil partnerships	✓			Acknowledging individuals may have relationships and ensuring they are no conflicts of interest
Pregnancy, maternity and new parents	✓			Providing reasonable adjustments where appropriate to meet specific needs
Individuals of different race	✓			Acknowledging and embracing diversity and promoting equal opportunities
Individuals of different religions or beliefs	✓			Issues of respect for and knowledge about different religious beliefs and cultural values  To comply with health and safety legislation and to make operational employees as safe as possible whilst wearing breathing apparatus, the seal of the facemask cannot be compromised
Individual's gender identity	✓			Acknowledging an individual's right to be recognised as they identify
Individual's sexual orientation	✓			Acknowledging and embracing diversity and promoting equal opportunities
<i>Individuals living in different family circumstances</i>			✓	No specific impacts identified
<i>Individuals in different social circumstances</i>			✓	No specific impacts identified
<i>Different employee groups</i>			✓	No specific impacts identified
<i>Other</i>				

**B) Data Protection Impact Assessment Screening Questions**

If the document includes any personally identifiable information (PII) a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) will be required. This should be discussed with the Data Protection Officer and the DPIA file location referenced at this point in your document.

Where no PII is involved, it should be stated at this point in your document.

The Data Protection Officer holds the master copies of all completed DPIA in N: Common/Information Assets/DPIAs.

The DPIA needs to be reviewed periodically to ensure that any PII is adequately considered.

The DPIA template and guidance can be found [here](#).