



Code of Conduct for Employees

Your behaviour, decisions and actions as a public official are important to Hackney.

1. Introduction



We are here to provide services to the public.

We are a political organisation and have a democratically elected Mayor and Councillors who set the policies that govern our services. These services can have a profound effect on the quality of the lives of our community and like our elected Members, we are accountable to the local community at all times.

Every employee is expected to behave in a highly professional manner and to offer the highest standards of customer service to the public. The way you carry out your duties must promote and maintain public confidence and trust in the work of the Council.

This Code of Conduct provides a framework for your behaviour, decisions and actions as a public official. It is not an exhaustive list of what you can and cannot do, but aims to help employees understand the ground-rules that must be observed, including the ways in which Officers interact with elected Members and senior management. If at any time you are unsure about the 'right thing to do', you can:-

- refer to this Code of Conduct and/or any policies, procedures, guidance or local rules and requirements that apply to your job
- discuss the situation with your manager
- contact Human Resources, Audit & Anti-Fraud or Legal Services for assistance

This Code forms part of your contract of employment and you must comply with it. Failure to do so may result in disciplinary action, which could include dismissal. It is your responsibility to read this code and work in accordance with it.

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This Code consists of seven key principles of working at Hackney, supported by more detailed standards in section 3.



2. The Seven Principles of working at Hackney



- ① **Serving the public** – we are here to provide services to the public. You are expected to offer the highest standards of customer service to the public at all times
- ② **Political neutrality** – be politically neutral and unbiased at all times when at work. Our Members have been elected by local people to represent them. You must respect their position irrespective of the parties they represent or your own views.
- ③ **Honesty and integrity** – never place yourself in a position where your honesty and integrity may be questioned and avoid conflicts of interest between your private interests and your public duties. Make all decisions fairly, consistently and on merit, including when making appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards, benefits or opportunities and ensure that they are recorded appropriately.
- ④ **Respect for others** – promote equality by never discriminating against any person and by treating members of the public, colleagues and elected Members with respect regardless of their age, disability, gender reassignment or gender expression, marital or civil partnership status, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion or beliefs, sex, sexual orientation or political affiliation. While you may have personal views that are not those of the Council, you must ensure that these are not expressed in a way that brings the Council into disrepute or adversely impacts on your ability to do your job.
- ⑤ **Accountability** – you are accountable to your manager, to Councillors and to the public for your actions. You must use any funds entrusted to you in a responsible and lawful way that ensures value for money for the local community, and always act in accordance with financial and procurement rules. You should always follow any reasonable instruction issued by your manager.
- ⑥ **Representing the Council** – present yourself at all times in a way that brings credit to the Council. Never speak to the press or publish articles about Council business without express permission
- ⑦ **Management and leadership** – set a good example for employees through your promotion of these principles, make sure employees know what is expected of them and fairly assess their performance, and provide employees with learning and development opportunities



3. Our Principles in Detail



3.1 Serving the public

⦿ Working with service users and the public

The public have a right to the services the Council provides. Always perform your duties to the highest standard and treat members of the public with dignity and respect, taking account of their individual needs. You must promote the Council's aims for equality and social inclusion by actively including all of the local community in your work and encouraging their participation in all areas of the Council's business.

Be honest, impartial and independent at work regardless of your personal views on a matter. If your personal views conflict with the performance of your official duties and you believe that you cannot act impartially, you must contact your line manager.

3.2. Political neutrality

⦿ Working in a political environment

In carrying out your work, you must:-

- be politically neutral
- be unbiased in the performance of your duties
- respect the function and office of Members, regardless of the party they represent

⦿ Working with Councillors

You serve the democratically elected Council as a whole (i.e. all Councillors). You must respect Councillors' rights and not allow your personal and political views to interfere with your working with Councillors. Close relationships between employees and Councillors may be incompatible with high standards of public life and should be avoided.

3.3. Honesty and integrity

⦿ Avoidance of corruption

Never use your official position or authority to seek to improperly influence a decision or action or for your own personal gain. Always work in accordance with the Council's Anti-Fraud & Corruption Policy.

⦿ Dealing with conflicts of interest

You must aim to avoid conflicts of interests between your private interests and your public duties and declare them in writing should they occur.

Examples of conflicts of interests include:-

- being a member of organisation (such as the Freemasons)
- as a manager, taking decisions relating to discipline, promotion or pay adjustments for any employee who is a relative, friend or partner
- as a purchasing officer liaising with a supplier that you, your partner, family or a close associate has financial interests in



☉ **Accepting gifts and hospitality**

It is not normally acceptable to accept a gift, reward or favour from others for work done in your official capacity. Our residents have a right to the services they receive and the Council rewards you for the work you do. Any gift offered or accepted must be declared and recorded in the local Gifts and Hospitality Register.

You must never accept a gift or hospitality from anyone who is or is likely to tender for a contract, seek planning consent, or seek employment with the Council.

☉ **Dealing with criminal charges and convictions**

You are expected to work within the law. You must uphold the law at work and never break a law away from work as this could damage public confidence in you or the Council. Notify the Council immediately in writing if you are charged with or convicted of any offence. This will not normally affect your employment unless the offence damages public confidence in you or the Council; or makes you unsuitable for the job you do.

☉ **Avoiding undermining the Council in its business**

Never undermine the Council (or its partners) in its business or allow your standards of behaviour to fall below those expected of the local community you serve e.g. by squatting in a Council property; or not paying debts owed to the Council.

3.4. Respect for others

☉ **Respecting others**

You must treat colleagues, elected Members and the public respectfully and with dignity. You must never discriminate against, harass or victimise any person.

☉ **Working with managers**

Follow all reasonable instructions given by your manager; or any other person with the authority to give you instructions at work. You must respect their role which means accepting that you may not always agree with all of their decisions. You must report to your manager anything that impairs your ability to do your job.

Your manager will:-

- ensure that you understand what is required of you at work and fairly and objectively appraise your performance;
- promote the principles of fairness and equality in the workplace;
- provide you with training and development opportunities;
- recognise your need to balance your life at work and away from work and be as flexible as possible.



3.5. Accountability

⦿ Attendance

Always be at work and performing Council duties when you should be and in accordance with your contractual requirements. Agree in advance with your manager any leave requests, additional working, etc. Never do private work when you should be at work for the Council or when you are on sick leave. Notify your manager if you are unable to attend work for any reason.

⦿ Doing non-council work

Get your manager's written approval before undertaking other employment. Any other employment must not conflict with the interests of the Council. Council time and/or resources may not be used for other employment.

⦿ Dealing with the Council's money

Use any public funds entrusted to you:-

- in a responsible and lawful manner; and
- ensure value for money for the local community; and
- in accordance with the Council's Standing Orders, financial regulations and procurement rules

When committing Council money, you must:-

- ensure that there is an approved budget for such expenditure; and
- that the expenditure is within the limits that you are personally authorised to spend

⦿ The Council's facilities, property and equipment

Never use Council facilities, property or equipment inappropriately; or waste, damage or lose it. You should not use Council facilities or property for private purposes unless it is authorised e.g. limited personal use of the Council's email and internet facilities.

⦿ The Council's information and records

The Council holds information and records on behalf of the public to enable it to carry out its functions. You must handle this information, including personal and sensitive data, in accordance with the Information Governance, Security and Sharing Policies. You must ensure that appropriate records are created, stored, accessed and disposed of securely, and in line with legal requirements, confidentiality rules and these policies and other Council standards.

⦿ Yours and others' health and safety

You have a responsibility for your own health and safety and that of service users, members of the public or colleagues who may be affected by what you do. Always:-

- work in accordance with the Council's Health & Safety Policy and any instructions, information or training provided;
- report health and safety hazards that you think are inadequately controlled and accidents and near misses that you have at work;
- attend any medical examination as required (e.g. under the Council's sickness procedures);
- when on sick leave, act sensibly to speed your recovery and return to work



3.6. Representing the Council

⦿ Protecting the Council's reputation

Never act in a way that could discredit the Council or bring it into disrepute – whether on duty or not.

⦿ Appearance and dress standards

All employees must be neat and tidy in appearance and dress in a way that inspires confidence in a professional service. Managers will set standards of dress at local service level based on the following principles:-

- office-based staff must wear appropriate office dress (e.g. no jeans, shorts, tracksuits or sports clothing, clothing with slogans or symbols, trainers);
- there is flexibility for employees who work directly with residents, and where it is important to dress in a way that they can relate to;
- where uniforms are provided, these must be worn and not modified;
- clothing or jewellery worn for religious reasons is permitted, providing that it does not give rise to health and safety risks;
- clothing provided for health and safety reasons must be worn.

⦿ Dealing with the press and making public comments

Any requests for information from journalists must be referred to the Communications Team.

You must not publish articles or views in print or on the internet about Council business without express permission from your Director and clearance from Communications. When expressing personal views you must not appear to speak for or about the Council without permission e.g. by referring to your job at Hackney.

3.7. Management and leadership

⦿ Expectations of managers

All Hackney managers will:-

- treat employees fairly and with dignity and respect
- consult and inform employees about change and on matters affecting the Council (in accordance with the Council's Organisational Change Policy)
- ensure that employees know what is expected of them and how they are doing
- provide a safe and secure working environment
- provide employees with opportunities for training and development
- manage budgets



4. Breaches of the Code of Conduct



Any breach of the Code of Conduct will normally result in disciplinary action. Some breaches (known as gross misconduct) can be serious enough to justify dismissal for a first offence, and without notice. Examples are in Appendix 1 of this Code.

5. Reporting breaches of the Code and whistle-blowing



We are committed the highest standards of public life and to preventing malpractice, fraud and corruption. If you are concerned about any practice that you think conflicts with this Code, you should report these to your manager or Head of Service.

If you have concerns about theft, fraud and other malpractice in the workplace you can report these anonymously and confidentially to the Council's independent whistleblowing service, provided by Expolink. You can call Expolink free, 24 hours a day and 7 days a week, on 0800 374199.



Appendix 1

Gross Misconduct - Examples

Any breaches of the Code of Conduct will normally result in disciplinary action. Some breaches (known as gross misconduct) could be serious enough to justify the Council in dismissing staff for a first offence, and without notice. It is possible that other conduct, not in itself a breach of the Code of Conduct may also amount to gross misconduct.

As a yardstick, any act which destroys the relationship of trust and confidence that the Council needs to have in an employee will constitute gross misconduct. This is not a complete list, since the circumstances of each case are different, but you should consider dismissing an employee for gross misconduct if they:-

- 1) Conceal any serious matter they should reasonably have known to report.
- 2) Cause loss, damage or injury through serious negligence (e.g. resulting in a loss to the Council).
- 3) Act negligently or recklessly in a way which leads to a serious breach of the Data Protection Act.
- 4) Try to obtain a job by lies or deception.
- 5) Seriously demean or offend the dignity of others or abuse their position.
- 6) Refuse to carry out a legitimate instruction from their manager.
- 7) Threaten, instigate a fight with or assault anyone.
- 8) Steal or damage things that belong to someone else or to the Council.
- 9) Commit any deliberate acts of discrimination, harassment or bullying.
- 10) Sell or possess illegal drugs in the workplace.
- 11) Consume alcohol in the workplace (unless they have been given permission by an Assistant Director or his/her deputy – e.g. at a staff leaving party).
- 12) Seriously breach health and safety rules.
- 13) Do private work when they should be at work for the Council.
- 14) Submit false or fraudulent claims to the Council or other bodies (e.g. income support claims, housing or other benefit claims).
- 15) Breach financial (or other Council) regulations.
- 16) Break a law at work which makes them unfit for the work they do.
- 17) Demonstrate serious incapability at work brought on by alcohol or illegal drugs.
- 18) Refuse to repay any debt they owe to the Council.
- 19) Obtain Council services, property or money by fraud (e.g. falsify time sheets).
- 20) Ask for or accept bribes, gifts, or favours.
- 21) Squat in Council property or occupy the property of a Housing Association or any organisation that the Council has a nomination agreement with in such a way as to prevent a Council nominee from taking up occupation.

