

Windlesham Parish Council

Officers' Code of Conduct

1. Introduction

1.1 The public is entitled to expect the highest standards of conduct from all employees of the Council.

1.2 This code is based on models produced by the Local Authority Associations and the Local Government Management Board.

2. Status of The Code

2.1 The code sets out the minimum standards that employees should observe. Its aim is to lay down guidelines for employees which will help maintain and improve standards, and also protect them from misunderstanding or from criticism. Any breaches of this code may lead to disciplinary action being taken.

2.2 In addition to this code all employees must abide by the terms of the Council's Standing Orders and Financial Regulations.

3. Seven Principles of Public Life

3.1 The Nolan Report on Standards in Public Life defined good conduct for employees of public bodies as that of acting:-

- Fairly.
- In good faith.
- In a disinterested way; and
- So as to meet the specified objectives of the body to which he/she has been appointed.

3.2 There are a number of principles, of which seven stand out, and which have been taken from the Nolan Report. These principles underpin this Code of Conduct.

3.2.1 Selflessness

Holders of public office should take decisions solely in terms of the public's interest. They should not do so in order to gain any benefits financial or otherwise for themselves, their family or their friends.

3.2.2 Integrity

Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations which might influence them in the performance of their official duties.

3.2.3 Objectivity

In carrying out public businesses including making public appointments, awarding contracts or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices purely on merit.

3.2.4 Accountability

Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.

3.2.5 Openness

Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all decisions and actions that they take. They should give the reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.

3.2.6 Honesty

Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public's interest.

3.2.7 Leadership

Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.

4. Service Standards

4.1 Employees must give the highest possible standard of service to the public and, where it is part of their duties; provide appropriate advice to elected Members and fellow employees with impartiality.

4.2 Employees must always remember their responsibilities to the community they serve and ensure courteous, efficient and impartial delivery of services to all groups and people within that community according to the Council's policies.

5. Political Neutrality

5.1 Employees must serve all elected Members. In addition, they must ensure that the individual rights of all elected Members are respected.

5.2 Subject to rules laid down from time to time employees may be required to advise political groups. They must do so in ways consistent with the employee's political neutrality.

5.3 Whether or not employees are politically restricted by the law they must follow the lawfully expressed policies of the Council and must not allow their own personal or political opinions to interfere improperly with their work.

6. Personal Interests

Memberships of Pressure Groups

6.1 Employees shall disclose in writing to the Parish Clerk any personal interest that may conflict with the Council's interests, for example, involvement with an organisation or pressure group which may seek to influence Council policy.

6.2 Any declaration in relation to 6.1 shall be kept in the Register of Officer's Interests in the Parish Clerk's Office and on the employee's personal file.

6.3 In the event of the Parish Clerk having such an interest as described herein, the Parish Clerk shall declare that interest in writing to the Chairman of the Council and such an interest will be recorded in the Register of Officer Interests and on the Parish Clerk's personal file.

6.4 Employees must as soon as possible, make known in writing to the Parish Clerk, all relationships of a business or private nature which they have with contractors or potential contractors. Orders and contracts must be awarded on merit by fair competition against other tenders and no special favours must be shown to potential contractors (particularly

those run by, for example, by friends, personal or business associates, spouses or relatives). In the tendering process, no part of the community can be improperly or illegally discriminated for or against.

6.5 Employees who, in the course of their job, engage, supervise contractors, or have any other official relationship with contractors must declare as soon as possible, that relationship in writing to the Parish Clerk. Any employees who have, or in the past have had, a relationship in a private or domestic capacity with contractors (or their senior staff), must also declare their relationship in writing, as soon as practicable to the Parish Clerk

6.6 Any declaration in relation to 6.4 or 6.5 shall be kept in the Register of Interests in the Parish Clerk's Office and on the employee's personal file.

6.6.1 In the event of the Parish Clerk having such an interest as described herein, the Parish Clerk shall declare that interest in writing to the Chairman of the Council and such an interest will be recorded in the Register of Officer Interests and on the Parish Clerk's personal file

Council Services and Regulatory Functions

6.7 The same principles apply to employees who may have conflicts of interest in relation to services the Council provides or where the Council has a regulatory function. Employees must, as soon as possible, make known in writing to the Parish Clerk, all relationships of a business or private nature which they have with businesses, organisations or individual for whom the Council provides services or acts in a regulatory capacity, whenever a conflict of interest might be thought to occur. In considering whether a conflict of interest might be thought to occur, it must be remembered that the public see the Council as one organisation. The aim of declaring a potential conflict of interest is so that the Council and the employee can be seen to be above any possibility of suspicion of undue influence.

6.8 Employees shall not recommend that particular businesses are used by individuals or other businesses, where this could be misconstrued as a recommendation of the Council or a recommendation by the employee in their official capacity.

6.9 In any of the above cases, the Parish Clerk will decide whether the employee who has a conflict of interest, should cease to be involved with the particular piece of work giving rise to the conflict, or whether the conflict should be avoided in some other way.

6.10 Any declaration in relation to 6.7 shall be kept in the Register of Interests in the Parish Clerk's Office and on the employee's personal file.

6.11 In the event of the Parish Clerk having such an interest as described herein, the Parish Clerk shall declare that interest in writing to the Chairman of the Council who will seek independent advice as they deem appropriate as to whether the Parish Clerk should cease to be involved with the particular piece of work giving rise to the conflict.

7. Whistle Blowing

7.1 The Council's commitment to the highest standards of openness and accountability means that Officers have a duty to:-

7.1.1 Raise with the Parish Clerk issues they have reason to think might involve fraud, corruption or any irregularities which they feel have been dealt with improperly.

7.1.2 Provide them with any evidence or relevant information that they have in this respect.

7.2 The Council will take reasonable steps to protect the anonymity of the individual, unless the Council has no alternative but to rely upon any statements made by an individual.

7.3 The Parish Clerk, however, may take appropriate action if frivolous, reckless or malicious allegations have been made.

8. Appointment and Other Employment Matters

8.1 Employees shall not canvass any Member or Officer of the Council in respect of candidates seeking employment with the Council.

8.2 Employees who are involved in appointments must ensure that these are made on merit. There is a strong risk of litigation if an employee makes an appointment based on anything other than the ability of the applicant to undertake the duties of the post. To avoid accusations of bias, employees must not be involved with appointments where they are related to any applicant or otherwise have a close personal relationship with them.

8.3 By the same token employees must not be involved in supervisory decisions relating to the discipline, promotion or remuneration (re-grading) of any employee to whom they are related or otherwise have a close personal relationship.

9. Equality Issues

9.1 Employees must ensure that all members of the community, customers and fellow employees have a right to be treated with fairness and equality.

10. Fairness in Tendering

10.1 Employees involved in the tendering process must exercise and display fairness and impartiality when dealing with customers, suppliers, tenderers, contractors and subcontractors.

10.2 In the event that employees contemplate management buy-outs or otherwise consider tendering for Windlesham Parish Council work and otherwise are not restricted from tendering so doing they must advise the Parish Clerk accordingly as soon as they have formed a definite intent and withdraw immediately from any contract awarding process.

10.3 Employees must avoid any suggestion of impropriety when dealing with current or former employees, friends, personal or business partners, spouses or relatives in awarding contracts to a business run by them or employing them in a senior or otherwise relevant managerial capacity. Where possible, employees must remove themselves from the awarding role in such situations.

10.4 At all times employees dealing with Tenders and Contracts must ensure that they comply with the Council's Standing Orders and Financial Regulations.

11. Corruption

11.1 Employees in their official capacity must be aware that it is a serious criminal offence under the Prevention of Corruption Acts for them corruptly to receive or give any gifts, loans, fees, rewards or any other advantage for doing or not doing anything or showing favour or disfavour to any person.

11.2 Where any substantiated allegation is made the onus is on the employees to demonstrate that any such rewards given or received have not been corruptly obtained.

11.3 If anyone makes an approach to an employee which seems (or might seem to a third party) to be aimed at obtaining some form of preferential treatment or in any suspicious circumstances in connection with a service provided by the Council, a regulatory function of the Council or a contract, then for their own protection the employees must report the matter directly to the Parish Clerk.

12. Use of Financial Resources

12.1 Employees must ensure that they use public funds entrusted to them in a responsible and lawful manner. In all situations employees shall strive to ensure "value for money" to the local community and to avoid any action which by its nature, could lead to a legal challenge of Windlesham Parish Council.

13. Gifts and Hospitality

13.1 Employees are expected to use the Council's money and resources with absolute honesty and be able to demonstrate that at all times. It is a criminal offence for employees to give, get, or ask for any gift, reward or advantage for work done in his/her official capacity and it is up to the employee to show that any such reward was not improperly obtained.

13.2 Any offer of gift, favour or hospitality directed at individual employees should be treated with caution. This applies particularly when the organisation or individual making the offer maybe doing or hoping to do business with Windlesham Parish Council (whether by receiving business from the Council, receiving Council services or being subject to a regulatory function of the Council).

13.3 All personal gifts from contractors, outside suppliers and similar persons or organisations who may in some way do business with the Council (as defined in Paragraph 13.2 above), shall be discouraged, refused or donated to a recognised local Charity. The only exceptions to this are insignificant items of token value which may include such things as pens, diaries or token hospitality. There may be occasions when in the line of undertaking Council duties, it is appropriate to attend business lunches, dinners or events etc. however, in all cases the Parish Clerks prior approval must be obtained. In all cases where the value of the gifts or hospitality exceeds £20, the Parish Clerk's approval must be obtained and interest recorded in the Register of Interests held in the Parish Clerk's Office.

13.4 No member of staff shall accept hospitality from suppliers, contractors or other parties with whom the Council has dealings other than business lunches, dinners or events in appropriate circumstances. Under no circumstances should staff accept any offer of hotel or overnight accommodation.

14. Sponsorship - Giving and Receiving

14.1 Where an outside organisation seeks to sponsor a Windlesham Parish Council activity whether by invitation, tender, negotiation or voluntarily, the basic conventions concerning hospitality and gifts must apply. In this respect, particular care must be taken in dealings with contractors or potential contractors.

14.2 Where Windlesham Parish Council seek to sponsor an event or service, special care must be taken to ensure that if any benefit accrues to employees, friends, personal or business associates, spouses or relatives, full disclosure is made to the Parish Clerk. Similarly, if Windlesham Parish Council, through sponsorship, grant aid, financial or other means gives support in the community, employees must ensure that impartial advice is given and conflicts of interest avoided.

15. Confidentiality

15.1 Employees shall not divulge to any person (other than another member of staff or member of the Council that requires information for the performance of his/her duties), any information which the member of staff has obtained by reason of his/her employment to the Council, except where that information is anyway in the public domain.

15.2 In particular, no member of staff shall divulge personal information regarding any employee, person or contractor, having dealings with the Council e.g. information relating to tenders or other such issues.

15.3 Whilst staff are encouraged to be open to the press, the press should only be given information which would normally be available publicly. All comments to the press in relation to Council business shall be channelled through the Parish Clerk and/or the Chairman of the Council.

16. Private Work/Other Activities

16.1 No employee should undertake private work if it overlaps or conflicts in any way with the duties and responsibilities of their post, if it causes a conflict of interest, or it makes use of material to which the employee has access by virtue of his or her position. In considering whether a conflict of interest might be seen to occur, it must be remembered that the public see the Council as one organisation, not as a set of separate sections and departments. The aim of declaring a potential conflict of interest is so that the Council and the employee can be seen to be above any possibility of suspicion of undue influence

16.2 Normally employees shall not work privately for a client for whom the Council has a service provision role or towards whom the Council is acting in a regulatory capacity

17. Approval Procedure for Private Work/Other Activities

17.1 Employees considering or about to start an activity (trade, profession or vocation) in an area allied to Local Authority services must note the requirements of their conditions of employment.

17.2 Employees can be given consent to engage in any other activity (for example private work or a position of responsibility outside official duties) only by applying to the Parish Clerk.

17.3 In the first instance employees must write formally to the Parish Clerk outlining the proposed activity clearly stating what involvement he/she anticipates having.

17.4 The Parish Clerk then needs to be satisfied that in giving his/her consent to the activity that this will neither interfere with the employee's performance of his/her duties nor lead to any suspicion of improper influence on the Council's services. In this respect the comments of Members will be sought.

17.5 The Parish Clerk will then notify the employee in writing of the decision.

17.6 The employee must also understand that private work or outside activity must not be undertaken during Parish Council time, nor using the Council's equipment or materials.

18. Close Relatives, Friends or Partners of Employees

18.1 Any employee whose partner, close relative or friend is considering becoming engaged in any business which might provide services to the Council, use services of the Council or for whom the Council might act in a regulatory capacity must follow the

instructions set out in paragraphs 17.1 to 17.7 above. This is to minimise the risk of suspicion that some influence may be exerted.

19. Tenders and Contracts

19.1 No employee shall use his/her position and knowledge in the Council to gain access to information which puts himself/herself or anyone else in a better position than any other contractor to undertake external work. Any evidence that such a situation exists will be investigated as a disciplinary matter and could lead to the invitation to tender being withdrawn.

19.3 Responsibility on the issue of employees "advising" external tenderers, who may be partners, relatives or friends, rests with the individual employee. If he/she considers there may be a conflict of interest, he/she must immediately withdraw from any such discussion and seek guidance on the situation from the Parish Clerk.

20. Register of Interests/Updating

20.1 The Register of Officer's Interests will be reviewed annually by the Parish Clerk

21. Conclusion

21.1 As emphasised earlier in this code although the guidelines are set down and apply to all employees of Windlesham Parish Council and relevance may be greater for those employees involved, for example, in the management and policy making process of the Council nonetheless, a copy of this code will be made available to every employee, whatever their position and they will be expected to comply with it.

This policy will be reviewed annually or earlier if so required by legislation or additional material.