

CODE OF CONDUCT

Policy

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Introduction

This code is binding on all council employees. It sets out the expected standards of behaviour of all employees. It provides a framework for employees that will help to maintain and improve standards. The code also protects employees from misunderstanding or criticism.

It does not replace other employment policies, procedures, regulations and departmental rules and codes of practice operating in the council.

The code is not a complete list of what you can and cannot do. Its aim is to set out clearly the basic ground rules that all employees must observe.

We must all:

- give our communities in Brent the highest standards of service
- work in partnership with members, managers and colleagues, fostering good working relationships
- do nothing to harm the council's reputation, in and out of work.
- work consistently and in support of the council's policies and procedures
- abide by the following seven guiding principles: selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.

The council places great value on the key contribution of all employees in achieving these aims, and is committed to creating a working environment where staff are highly motivated and able to provide excellent services to the people of Brent. In return, employees can expect to be treated courteously and with respect by members, managers, colleagues and members of the public.

Breaches of the code and the standards it sets down may result in disciplinary action being taken against the employee. We expect all employees to operate within the law, both inside and outside of the workplace. Unlawful or criminal behaviour at work will result in disciplinary action, and even away from work, may lead to disciplinary action being taken against the employee.

Misconduct and Gross Misconduct

The council has in place a disciplinary procedure, which gives examples of the types of breaches of standards of behaviour that are considered to be misconduct, and therefore would result in disciplinary action being taken against the employee. Some breaches are so serious that they are considered to be gross misconduct. If proven, this can result in the employee's dismissal from the council's service. The disciplinary procedure also gives examples of gross misconduct.

This Code of Conduct also sets out the standards of behaviour expected from all our employees, and you should understand that breaches of the code may result in disciplinary action being taken against the employee. Some breaches of the code are so serious that they are considered to be gross misconduct, which if proven can result in the employee's dismissal from the council's service.

Working for our communities in Brent

Council activities can have a real impact on the quality of life of the communities that we serve. Their environment, health and well-being can all be affected by our standard of work, commitment and conduct.

The council is often the main source of services. It is vital that we get it right and our standards have to take into account the special requirements of local government officers. Our work is often politically sensitive and open to public scrutiny. The public is interested in what we do and how we do it. Success can depend on public confidence in our staff honesty, professionalism and hard work.

Our work is publicly funded. If we are to be above suspicion, any payments or other benefits we personally receive must be properly due to us, and any expenditure we incur on behalf of the council must be lawful and justifiable.

We are employed to work with and for the people of Brent. This requires a positive commitment to public service and means putting service users, customers and local communities first. We have a duty to give our best at all times, to listen to our customers, to be open, helpful and professional in our approach. Our customers are entitled to have confidence in our services, which depends on all of us being considerate, responsible, sensitive and mindful of the need to respect confidentiality. *Of course, the council is also committed to protecting its employees from aggressive, abusive or bullying behaviour from customers.

When dealing with the public, make sure:

- you make every effort to meet or exceed agreed standards of service when dealing with people, in person, by phone, by letter or by email. These standards are on the Brent Council intranet via the link 'customer care' under 'quick links' on the home page
- you are polite, responsive and helpful*
- you identify yourself as appropriate to members of the public - (this is outlined in the Customer Care Standards)
- you are appropriately dressed and presented
- you never make remarks that are racist, sexist, ageist, homophobic, offensive to people who are disabled or other religions
- you do not harass or discriminate against any member of the public or anyone you meet in the course of your work. The council treats very seriously complaints of harassment¹ or discrimination on grounds of race, gender, disability, religion or belief, ethnic or national origin, sexuality or age
- you avoid any conduct in public areas of council buildings which may discredit the council.

Working with Members

Members expect council staff to contribute to proper and effective working relationships. In return, members should show respect to officers and not use an inappropriate manner to pressurise them to take action or refrain from taking any action. Officers who feel that they are being bullied or harassed by members should report this to their managers.

We all serve the council as a whole – not just members of any controlling group. You must maintain political neutrality at work and be seen to be impartial.* Close personal familiarity between individual councillors and officers may damage this relationship, and give rise to the appearance of improper conduct.

Footnote 1 Harassment is any unwanted behaviour usually linked to protected characteristics whether intentional or not, that violates the dignity of men and women in the workplace or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for another person. Something can still be considered harassment even if the alleged harasser didn't mean for it to be. It doesn't have to be intentionally directed at a specific person.

When working with members, ensure that you:

- provide them with information they are entitled to and to seek advice if you are unsure about their entitlement to that information
- do not disclose confidential information to members unless they are entitled to receive it
- serve all members impartially and professionally, irrespective of their particular political group*
- do not allow personal or political opinions or preferences, to interfere with your work, or working relationships with members*
- deal with member enquiries efficiently, and within the agreed timescale, which is five working days
- disclose to your head of service any family, business or personal relationships with members where this may, or may appear, to put you in a position to exercise improper influence over the workings of the council
- do not canvass members on employment related matters nor seek to influence members prior to any meetings of the Senior Staff Appointments Sub Committee or Staff Appeals Sub Committee, other than in the context of giving proper professional advice
- do not take up any work problems or issues with members.

*The paragraphs marked with an asterisk will not normally apply to staff engaged in the political offices of the council.

Working for your manager

You are expected to show loyalty to the council and to support its managers. A climate of mutual trust, confidence and respect between managers and staff is essential to achieving the council's aims and objectives, meet its performance targets, and providing the highest quality services.

In performing your duties, make sure that you:

- work diligently and reliably, and never neglect your duty
- co-operate with managers, always be polite, helpful and respectful
- never lie to, deceive, abuse or undermine them
- carry out any reasonable management instructions
- fill in honestly any document, form or record your managers need for work
- never falsify any document
- never wilfully destroy any document that you know is needed by your managers
- be at work on time
- tell your manager if you will be late for work (for example, for a doctor's visit)
- agree in advance with your manager and obtain their approval for any leave or other time off you want
- follow the council's rules on reporting any absence, including absence due to sickness
- never claim sick leave when you are not sick
- if you are on sick leave, act sensibly to speed your recovery and return to work, and do nothing deliberately that you know would delay your recovery or worsen the problem
- do not drink alcohol to the extent that it adversely affects your work, performance, attendance or behaviour. In some jobs you should not drink at all, before or during the working day where this could affect safety or your ability to do your job. You should not be under the influence of alcohol, including having alcohol on your breath during any business meetings or dealings with customers as this could damage yours and the Council's reputation
- never drink alcohol on council property unless at an approved social function, e.g. a leaving do, or official council function. The only exception to this being off duty

employees who wish to use the Civic Centre bar (defined as the Gallery and Bridge areas) may drink alcoholic beverages after work as long as they are not in uniform, noting the bullet point above

- never take illegal drugs or any banned substance on council property
- comply with the council's 'Access to Information Policy'
- comply with the council's 'No Smoking Policy'.

In performing your duties make sure that you do not display any of the following behaviours:

- aggressive behaviour, shouting or threatening, impolite or discourteous behaviour
- unwelcome, sexual advances including touching, standing too close or circulating or displaying offensive material
- spreading malicious rumours or insulting someone
- ridiculing or demeaning someone or setting them up to fail
- exclusion or victimisation
- behaviour or decision-making which is based on improper prejudice
- making unjustified, persistent criticisms
- intimidating or undermining any member of staff whether they be in a senior or junior position
- making threats or comments which are without foundation, about job security and intentionally blocking off promotion or training opportunities
- making someone the butt of jokes.

Managing staff

For the council, the people it employs and the way they work are the key to its successes. The council wants its managers to provide staff with sound leadership, clear direction, support which is appropriate to the employee's needs, and the opportunity to develop their skills and abilities to enable them to properly fulfil their role.

When supervising or managing staff, ensure that you:

- manage in accordance with the council's policies and procedures
- set acceptable standards of conduct at work
- Support and assist staff to carry out their work properly
- do not:
 - act in an overbearing manner (ie using unwarranted excessive supervision)
 - wilfully neglect to supervise your employees properly
 - misuse your power or position
- avoid close personal familiarity with staff as this may give rise to improper conduct or the impression of improper misconduct and damage the working relationship
- consider the training and development needs of your staff to enable them to meet the current and future service needs
- deal with staff fairly and consistently, and in accordance with the principles of equality of opportunity
- accept responsibility for the work you and your staff do
- provide for all your staff a working environment that is free from any form of discrimination, unfair treatment, bullying or harassment¹
- are alert to an correct unacceptable behaviour
- raise any concerns in a private and confidential place wherever possible
- ensure staff can seek advice when raising harassment¹ problems
- take all complaints seriously and thoroughly investigate them
- where appropriate report unacceptable behaviour to senior management
- deal with complaints fairly, thoroughly and confidentially.

Footnote: refer to page 4 of this document for definition of harassment.

Respecting your colleagues, clients and customers

When dealing with your colleagues make sure that:

- set a good example by treating all your colleagues, client and customers with politeness, courtesy, respect, fairness, consistency and confidentiality. (however, confidentiality will only be maintained where this does not impact on the council's vicarious liability)
- you never make remarks that are ageist, homophobic, racist, sexist, belittling of a person's religion, offensive to the disabled or otherwise improper
- you do not harass, bully or discriminate against any colleague. the council treats very seriously complaints of harassment¹ or bullying, or discrimination on grounds of race, gender, disability, religion or belief, ethnic or national origin, sexuality or age
- you are polite, responsive, helpful and professional

Working honestly

We expect you to use public money and resources with complete honesty and be able to demonstrate that at all times.

Ensure that you:

- avoid corruption and the suspicion of it
- do not ask for or accept bribes of any sort
- never seek or take any reward or favour for providing council services apart from your pay
- do not take a reward from anyone who has, or might have a business relationship with the council, or anyone who stands to lose or gain from a council decision
- do nothing that could be seen as likely to improperly influence your work, your decisions or your impartiality
- comply with the council's policy on gifts and hospitality
- tactfully refuse any gifts of more than token value from an organisation or individual with which the council does, or may do business
- do not accept hospitality exceeding a minimum level of common courtesy from an organisation or individual with which the council does, or may do business, other than in accordance with the council's policy on gifts and hospitality
- record any offers of gifts and hospitality in the Departmental Gifts and Hospitality Register
- do not use improper influence to get people you meet through your work to leave you things in their will
- report to your manager if people you meet through work leave you things in their will
- never obtain council property or money when you are not lawfully entitled to it (this includes subletting council property without approval)
- do not fraudulently claim housing benefit, or any other benefit from the council, or any administered by the Department of Work and Pensions or Inland Revenue
- do not commit fraud or theft against any organisation or individual, including when claiming housing benefit or income support
- do not falsify documents to claim pay including a bonus or sick pay
- do not make personal use of council property, facilities or equipment unless you are properly authorised to do so
- do not engage in private work i.e. business or take up an appointment outside the council (paid or unpaid) unless you have prior consent from your manager
- never do private work when you should be working for the council or are on sick leave (consent will not be unreasonably withheld)
- never abuse your own position with the council to benefit yourself, your family, your friends or any outside organisation or political party.

Footnote: refer to page 4 of this document for definition of harassment.

Working with integrity

We expect you to do whatever is needed to protect your own reputation and standing with the public and to build respect for the council. There should be no reason to suspect that any of us are seeking opportunities for private gain. The relationships that the council has with its partners, contractors, consultants, community groups, suppliers and others must be responsibly managed so as to ensure there can be no suspicion of corruption or dishonesty with public money.

Ensure that you:

- do nothing away from work, which might damage public confidence in the council, or make you unsuitable for the work you do
- never, without good cause, wilfully withhold any payments you owe to the council such as rent or council tax, or salary/wages overpayment
- be fair and impartial in dealing with all customers, competitors, suppliers, contractors and sub-contractors
- complete a declaration of your financial and other interests if you are graded PO1 and above
- inform your head of service if you have links with a firm or organisation, which may get money, grant awards, contracts or work from the council
- inform your head of service if you have a relationship with someone, which might appear to improperly influence a decision one might make about the other in connection with the work of the council. This includes things like being someone's landlord, being in debt to someone, or having a close personal relationship with a council member, client, customer or employee
- never use your work to further the aims of any group whose ideas are in conflict with the council's values and policies*
- inform your manager if you are charged with or convicted of a crime.

Working with sensitive information

We expect you to use sensitive information properly and to have due respect for any confidentiality and the integrity and availability of information generally. The council is required to make appropriate information available to members, internal and external auditors, government departments, service users and the general public. Information you gather while working for the council should not be used for commercial or personal gain or be otherwise misused.

Ensure that you:

- know what information, to which you have access, the council treats as sensitive. the information may be marked to inform you of this, or you will be briefed appropriately. If you are unsure then seek clarification from your manager
- know who else is entitled to have access to information that you have access to
- do not discuss sensitive information in public places, and never gossip about or misuse sensitive information
- protect information when it is in your care. This includes when you are in possession of information away from council buildings
- are responsible and professional in using and allowing access to personal information on clients, customers, staff and others
- never create or amend information records or other information whether held on paper record or on computer system which relates to yourself, your family, relatives or friends without prior authorisation from your manager.
- use personal information held on computer in line with the principles of the Data Protection Act.

Working within the law

The council expects you to work within the law. A framework of laws and regulations set council powers. In order for its decisions and actions to be held to be reasonable in law, the council must carry out its business in a way that is within its powers, and is rational, proper and fair. Unlawful or criminal behaviour at, or even away from work, may result in a loss of trust and confidence in the employee, or the council.

Ensure that you:

- uphold the law at work
- comply with the council's Corporate Standards and the rules set out in the council's constitution.

Working with the media*

The council expects staff to promote the policies and reputation of the council and to act as ambassadors. The council has a media protocol in place, which is on the Intranet homepage under help and guidelines, then under corporate communications. Contact with the press and media is directed through the Director of Communication and Consultation's office. This protects individual employees from unwanted media attention and allows the council to properly manage its reputation. Relations with the media require specific skills and expertise and staff should not discuss council business with the press without prior permission.

Ensure that you:

- refer appropriate enquiries from the press to the Director of Communication and Consultation's office
- seek advice from the Communications and Consultation Team and get permission from your manager before you speak to, write to, or give interviews to the media
- never bring the council into disrepute by publicising material, which is confidential, or against the interests of the council, or criticises its employees
- do not bring the council's name into disrepute in any other way through the press or media.

Applying for a job with Brent Council

Brent Council is committed to a fair and open approach to recruitment and selection. Appointments are made without bias and on the basis of the candidate's ability and suitability for the job.

As an interview candidate you must make sure that you:

- are open and honest when completing the application form and at interview.
- disclose any criminal offence you have been convicted of (unless it is spent under the terms of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1978)
- disclose any criminal charges you face, which, if convicted would make you unfit for your job
- disclose if you are a friend or relative of (or have other links with) a councillor or an officer who may appear to be in a position to influence your appointment
- disclose if you are the tenant or landlord of someone who may influence your appointment, or if you have any other personal, financial or business relationship with them.