



NESTON TOWN COUNCIL OFFICERS CODE OF CONDUCT

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INTRODUCTION

The public are entitled to expect the highest standards of conduct from all employees who work for local government. The purpose of this Code is to make a clear statement about the standards of conduct expected of employees of Neston Town Council and it aims to:

- ensure the highest standards of conduct by identifying corporate standards which sit alongside professional codes and guidelines as well as the Employees Handbook and other policies, including the Protocol of Member-Officer Relations;
- help all employees to act in a way which upholds the Council's standards and at the same time, protect them from criticism, misunderstanding or complaint; and,
- help build trust between the Council and the people who come into contact with those working for it.

STATUS OF THE CODE

This Code is based on the voluntary Code of Conduct approved by the Local Authority Associations and the Local Government Management Board, adapted and/or amplified where perceived necessary to meet local circumstances or requirements. It also incorporates the principles contained in the draft model Code of Conduct for Local Authority Employees which has been the subject of consultation by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

The standards contained in it are the minimum that should apply.

The Code of Conduct embraces the seven principles of public life which were drawn up by the Nolan Committee and are endorsed by Parliament. These are:

Selflessness – Acting solely in terms of the public interest.

Integrity – Avoiding placing yourself under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence you in your work. You should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for yourself, your family, or your friends. You must declare and resolve any interests and relationships as detailed in the Code of Conduct.

Objectivity – Act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.

Accountability – Be accountable to the public for your decisions and actions and submit yourself to scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

Openness – being as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that you take. You should give reasons for your decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.

Honesty – Act with honesty, and be truthful.

Leadership – Exhibit these principles in your own behaviour. Actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour, wherever it occurs.

The Codes themselves are printed in bold type and *beneath has been added procedural guidelines in italics.*

These Procedural Guidelines are intended to provide background information to help employees understand and interpret the requirements of the Code of Conduct. They cannot cover all circumstances and are not to be considered as a substitute for reading the Code itself.

WHO IS THE CODE AIMED AT?

The Code is intended to cover all employees under a contract of employment with the Council. Activities carried out by employees acting as members of companies or voluntary organisations should be subject to the minimum standards within this Code.

1 STANDARDS

- 1.1 The Council's employees are expected to give the highest possible standard of service to the public, and must perform their duties with honesty, integrity, impartiality and objectivity. Employees will be expected, through agreed procedures and without fear of recrimination, to bring to the attention of the appropriate level of management any deficiency in the provision of service. Employees must report to the appropriate manager any impropriety or breach of procedure that is more than trivial. (See Making a protected disclosure in the Employee Handbook).**
- 1.2 An employee must be accountable to the Authority for his/ her actions.**
- 1.3 An employee must at all time act in accordance with the trust that the public is entitled to place in him/ her.**
- 1.4 The guidance in this Code is based on the principles of public life. At the end of the day the Council relies on the integrity, reasonableness, common sense and professional judgement of individual officers. Staff should not hesitate at any time, to seek advice on the interpretation of the Code, or when circumstances arise which, it does not cover.**

PROCEDURAL GUIDELINES

1.A: In determining acceptable standards, employees are asked to familiarise themselves, not only with the Council's Code of Conduct for Officers. but also, with the operating procedures used, governance documents such as Standing Orders & Financial Regulations and policies.

2 DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION

- 2.1 It is generally accepted that open government is best. The law requires that certain types of information must be available to members, auditors, government departments, service users and the public. The Council itself is open about other types of information. Employees shall not however disclose any confidential information unless authorised to do so in writing by the Chief Officer or the Council. Employees must ensure compliance with the Council's Information and Data Protection policy.**

- 2.2 Employees shall 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. Any particular information received by an employee from a councillor which is personal to that councillor and does not belong to the Council, should not be divulged by the employee without the prior approval of that councillor, except where such disclosure is required or sanctioned by the law.**
- 2.3 Employees shall not prevent another person from gaining access to information to which that person is entitled under the Freedom of information Act or other legislation.**

PROCEDURAL GUIDELINES

- 2.A The Council's employees receive information relating to the Council's business, as well as confidential information about client, the public, businesses, Councillors and other employees. Much of this information needs to be treated as confidential and should not be betrayed either inside or outside work, even to family and friends. See the Council's Information and Data Protection Policy.*
- 2.B. Both councillors and the public have rights to certain information, particularly that listed in the Publication Scheme Information Guide and all officers should encourage people to access this.*

3 POLITICAL NEUTRALITY

- 3.1 Employees serve the Council as a whole. It follows they shall serve all councillors and must ensure that the individual rights of all councillors are respected.**
- 3.2 Employees must follow every lawful expressed policy of the Council and shall not allow their own personal or political opinions to interfere with or otherwise bias their work.**
- 3.3 Subject to the Town Council's conventions, employees may also be required to advise political groups should they ever be active at the Council. They must do so in ways which do not compromise their political neutrality.**

PROCEDURAL GUIDELINES

- 3.A It is only to be expected that the Chief Officer will work closely with members of the Council. Confidentiality over discussions with particular groups is vital. See the Protocol on Member-Officer Relations.*

4 RELATIONSHIPS

4.1 Councillors

Employees are responsible to the Council as a whole. For some, their role is to give advice to councillors and all are there to carry out the Council's work. Mutual respect between employees and councillors is essential to good local government. Close personal familiarity between employees and individual councillors can damage the relationship and prove embarrassing to other employees and councillors and should therefore be avoided where possible. Employees must have regard to the Council's Protocol on Member-Officer Relations.

4.2 The Local Community and Service Users

Employees will always remember their responsibilities to the community they serve and ensure courteous, efficient and impartial service delivery to all groups and individuals within that community as defined by the policies of the Council. All members of the community should be treated fairly and with respect in accordance with the Council's Equality Policy. Employees will ensure that they are always fit to perform their duties effectively and will not allow standards to be impaired in any way.

4.3 Colleagues

Mutual respect between fellow employees is also essential to maintaining constructive working relationships and providing a high-quality service to the community. It is also a key part of the Council's Equality statement.

4.4 Contractors

All relationships of a business or private nature with external contractors, or potential contractors, shall be made known in writing to the Chief Officer or the Mayor, where the relationship involves the Chief Officer. Orders and contracts shall be awarded on merit, by fair competition against other tenders or quotes, and no special favour should be shown to businesses run by, for example, friends, partners or relatives in the tendering process. No part of the local community shall be discriminated against.

4.5 Employees who engage or supervise contractors or have any other official relationship with contractors and have previously had or currently have a relationship in a private or domestic capacity with contractors, shall declare that relationship to the Chief Officer or the Mayor (in the case of the Chief Officer) in writing.

4.6 In the event of employees engaging a Contractor for private work at home, who is known by the employee to be one of the Council's contractors, care shall be taken to ensure that the price paid for the work represents full value and thereby cannot be construed as an inducement or reward for the award of Council contracts. Especial care shall be taken in this respect by employees who engage or supervise contractors in the course of their employment. A similar principle applies to accepting discounts from vendors in the town, particularly market traders, where similar discounts are not offered to other residents.

PROCEDURAL GUIDELINES

4.A *The Town is a relatively small community and it is impossible not to know some councillors in other walks of life. This must be correctly and openly managed without favour.*

4.B *It is not sufficient to ensure that a relationship with a contractor or potential contractor will not unduly influence their business involvement with the Council, but impartiality and integrity need to be demonstrated. It is necessary for such relationships to be open and beyond suspicion by the reasonable person.*

- 4.C *Staff should not accept discounts from vendors, particularly market traders that were not available to local residents. Whilst it is understood it may be offered by traders with the best of intentions, without return favours being expected or given, if it were to become public knowledge, most members of the public would consider it unacceptable. Such discounts to be accepted by staff or their partners would breach this Code and the General Employment Principles for staff.*
- 4.D *It is difficult to define precisely when a declaration should be made. The decision should be made after you have assessed the degree of influence that you may have over the Council's relationship with the particular contractor. If you are responsible for the administration of the contract, or are in any way involved in it, a declaration should always be made.*

5 APPOINTMENT AND OTHER EMPLOYMENT MATTERS

- 5.1 Employees involved in appointments shall ensure that these are made on the basis of merit. It is unlawful for an employee to make an appointment based on anything other than the ability of the candidate to undertake the duties of the post. In order to avoid any possible accusation of bias, employees shall not be involved in an appointment where they are related to an applicant, or have a close personal relationship outside work with him or her.**
- 5.2 Similarly, employees shall not be involved in decisions relating to discipline, promotion, training or pay adjustments for any other employee who is a relative, partner, etc.**

PROCEDURAL GUIDELINES

- 5.A *In cases where you are involved in deciding any matter relating to the appointment, promotion, discipline, pay, conditions of service or training opportunities for a person who is a relative, partner or with whom you have a close personal relationship outside work, you **shall** declare this to the Chief Officer or Mayor (in the case of the Chief Officer) and have no further involvement in the matter.*
- 5.B *In this paragraph "relative" means a spouse, partner, parent-in-law, son, daughter, step-son, step-daughter, child of a partner, brother, sister, grandparent, grandchild, uncle, aunt, nephew, niece, or the spouse or partner of any of the preceding persons and "partner" means a member of a couple.*

6 OUTSIDE COMMITMENTS

- 6.1 You shall not become engaged or concerned in any other business in which your duties may conflict with the interests of the Council, without advising the Council. You shall not become engaged in any secondary occupation that may unduly interfere with your work.**
- 6.2 The Town Council is consultee for making recommendations to the determining bodies for applications for various types of consent such as planning permission, licensing etc. and also determines grant applications. Staff members who are in any way concerned, connected or consulted in their work during the processing of such applications are precluded from preparing or assisting with those submissions in any private capacity on behalf of applicants (unless for their own**

submissions when, of course, their private interest in the matter would be perfectly clear and should be declared).

6.3 The general rule is therefore as follows:

- (a) Staff at all levels shall not undertake any outside work which would put them in a position of conflict of interest. Such a conflict would arise when an employee is to be paid by a member of the public or any outside organisation or body for work which is in any way connected with the scope of his or her official duties.**
- (b) Employees shall follow such rules as the Council may from time to time impose on the ownership of intellectual property or copyright created during their employment.**

PROCEDURAL GUIDELINES

- 6.A** *As some employees may only work part time or on a casual basis, this part of the Code is in no way intended to prevent them having other employment, merely to avoid conflicts of interest. It is always best to advise the Chief Officer about other employment.*

7 PERSONAL INTERESTS

- 7.1 An employee shall not in his/her official or personal capacity, allow personal interests to conflict with the Council's requirements, or use his/ her position improperly to confer an advantage or disadvantage on any person.**
- 7.2 Employees shall declare to the Chief Officer or Mayor (in the case of the Chief Officer) in writing, any non-financial interests that they consider could bring about conflict with the Council's interests e.g., school governor, membership of local sports club, membership of the district or county council.**
- 7.3 Employees shall declare to the Chief Officer or Mayor (in the case of the Chief Officer) in writing, any financial interests which could conflict with the Council's interests e.g., financial interests of a spouse or other member of the family in a contract.**
- 7.4 Employees shall declare to the Chief Officer, membership of any organisation not open to the public without formal membership and commitment of allegiance and which has secrecy about rules or membership or conduct.**

PROCEDURAL GUIDELINES

7.A *Non-Financial Interests*

The test as to whether an interest in an outside body must be declared, is whether or not the interests of the body may conflict with those of the Council.

*By way of advice, it **shall** always be appropriate to declare being a governor of a school within the Town, or membership of another council. Similarly, membership of a trust or statutory body operating within the Town shall be declared.*

In the case of, for instance, local sports clubs, these should be declared when a conflict of interest may arise, e.g., where planning permission is sought, or where land is being brought from or sold to the Council.

7.B Financial Interests

The Council needs to be aware of all cases where an employee or his/her close relative, partner or associate has a financial interest in a business (including private company, public sector organisation and/or voluntary organisation) which are, or are seeking to have business dealings or enter into a contract with the Council.

Examples of such interests are:

- Paid employment, directorships, consultancies or personal sponsorship.*
- An interest in land or other assets, held or used by the business organisation.*
- Share capital in the company exceeding £25,000 (the amount need not be declared) or more than $\frac{1}{100}^{\text{th}}$ of the issued shares or securities*

NB This does not include money invested in a Building Society or Bank where you have no influence over the dealings of that organisation.

7.C Organisations not open to the public with formal membership etc. E.g., Free Masons.

8 EQUALITY ISSUES

8.1 All local government employees shall ensure that policies relating to equality issues as agreed by the Council, are complied with, in addition to the requirements of the law. All members of the local community, customers and other employees have a right to be treated with fairness, respect and equity.

PROCEDURAL GUIDELINES

8.A Reference should be made to the Equality Policy adopted by the Council. The Council celebrate diversity.

9 SEPARATION OF ROLES DURING TENDERING

9.1 Employees shall exercise fairness and impartiality when dealing with all customers, suppliers, other contractors and sub-contractors.

9.2 Employees who are privy to confidential information on tenders or costs shall not disclose that information to any unauthorised party or organisation.

9.2 Employees shall ensure that no special favour is shown to current or recent former employees or their partners, close relatives or associates in awarding contracts to businesses run by them or employing them in a senior or relevant managerial capacity.

10 CORRUPTION

- 10.1 Employees shall be aware that it is a serious criminal offence for them corruptly to receive or give any gift, loan, fee, reward or advantage for doing, or not doing, anything or showing favour, or disfavour, to any person in their official capacity.**

PROCEDURAL GUIDELINES

- 10.A It is essential to remember that dealings with officers and members of local authorities and other public bodies are subject to the provisions of special legislation with onerous requirements and imposing sanctions under criminal law designed to protect the public interest and public confidence.*

The particular legislation is contained in:

The Public Bodies Corrupt Practices Act 1889

The Prevention of Corruption Act 1906

The Prevention of Corruption Act 1916

The Local Government Act 1972, Section 117(2)

- 10.B In summary, anyone who corruptly gives, promises or offers any gift, loan, fee, reward or advantage to any person as an inducement to or a reward for any member, officer or servant of a public body for doing or forbearing to do anything in respect of any matter or transaction is guilty of a criminal offence. Similarly, a criminal offence is committed by anyone who corruptly solicits, receives or agrees to receive for themselves or any other person such an inducement or reward.*

- 10.C It is particularly to be noted that the giving or acceptance of any money, gift or other consideration is deemed to have been given or received corruptly unless the contrary is proved. This represents a departure from the general principle that a person is deemed innocent until proven guilty.*

11. USE OF FINANCIAL RESOURCES

- 11.1 Employees shall ensure that they use public funds entrusted to them in a responsible and lawful manner. They shall strive to ensure value for money to the local community and to avoid legal challenge to the Council.**
- 11.2 Employees shall not make personal use of property or facilities of the Council unless properly authorised to do so.**

12. HOSPITALITY AND GIFTS

- 12.1 Employees shall only accept offers of hospitality if there is a genuine and clear need to impart information or represent the local Council in the community. Offers to attend purely social or sporting functions must be accepted only when these are part of the life of the community or where the Council should be seen to be represented. They shall be properly authorised and recorded. It is generally more acceptable to join in hospitality offered to a group of people rather than something**

unique to the individual, i.e., there is a degree of safety in numbers. Hospitality should only be accepted when it is reasonably incidental and on a scale appropriate to the occasion or circumstances.

- 12.2 When hospitality has to be declined, those making the offer shall be courteously but firmly informed of the procedures and standards operating within the Council.
- 12.3 Employees shall not accept significant personal gifts from contractors and outside suppliers, although the Council allow employees to keep insignificant items of token value such as pens, diaries etc.
- 12.4 When receiving authorised hospitality, employees shall be particularly sensitive as to its timing in relation to decisions which the Council may be taking affecting those providing the hospitality. Where it is known that a particular person or body has a matter currently in issue with the Town Council, an offer of hospitality shall be refused even if in normal times it would be acceptable.
- 12.5 Acceptance by employees of hospitality through attendance at relevant conferences and courses is acceptable where it is clear the hospitality is corporate rather than personal and where it is clear that any purchasing decisions are not compromised. Approval to attend a relevant conference or course will be considered to be approval of allied hospitality as outlined above. Where visits to inspect equipment etc are required, employees shall ensure that the Council meets the cost of such visits to avoid jeopardising the integrity of subsequent purchasing decisions.
- 12.6 Employees shall report to the Chief Officer or Mayor (in the case of the Chief Officer) the offer of any gifts or hospitality. These must be recorded in the register maintained by the Chief Officer.

PROCEDURAL GUIDELINES

- 12.A *Offers of hospitality and gifts in a Town Council will be rare but should be approached with caution. Members of staff should ask themselves what a member of the public, who may be critical or suspicious, might think. Offers of hospitality where any suggestion of improper influence is possible should be tactfully refused. Hospitality **shall** only be accepted when it is reasonably incidental, and on a scale appropriate, to the occasion or circumstances. If in doubt say no.*
- 12.B *Employees **shall** only accept reasonable or modest hospitality and, if in doubt as to whether such hospitality is reasonable or modest in the circumstances, the employee **shall** seek guidance from the Chief Officer or Mayor (in the case of the Chief Officer).*
- 12.C *Clearly, hospitality received in the ordinary course of business (for example working lunches) need not be declared or registered provided it is modest and reasonable.*
- 12.D *All hospitality received (other than that mentioned in 12.3 above) and hospitality offered but not accepted **shall** be registered in the Register of Hospitality (see below).*

- 12.E Any employee receiving an offer of hospitality **shall** inform the supplier or contractor offering the same that the employee is under a duty to register hospitality received or offered but not accepted.
- 12.F A Register will be kept and maintained by the Chief Officer. The details to be included in the Register will be:
- i the name of the employee concerned;
 - ii the name of the contractor or the supplier or other party making the invitation;
 - iii the nature of the hospitality received or offered but not accepted; and
 - iv the date or receipt of hospitality.
- 12.G As with Declarations of Interest, it is the duty of each individual employee to register hospitality received, or offered but not accepted, within a reasonable period before or after that hospitality is received or offered and it is suggested for this purpose that a reasonable period would be no longer than 7 days after the hospitality is received or offered. Notices to be sent to Chief Officer or Chairman.
- 12.H Some offers of hospitality are clearly unacceptable, e.g., offers of holiday accommodation. Invitations to sporting fixtures or evenings at the theatre are acceptable only in accordance with paragraph 12.1 of the Code of Conduct for Officers, or when they are clearly required for the conduct of Council.

Gifts

Examples of the type of modest gifts which would normally be acceptable are:

- Small gifts of office equipment or stationery given by way of trade advertisement to a range of officers or for use in the office. Nothing more elaborate than calendars, diaries, rulers or blotters would fall into this category;
- Small gifts of only token value given on the conclusion of an official courtesy visit e.g., to a factory or other premises.
- Gifts to a member of staff or a member of their family where the donor is a personal friend. Extreme care needs to be taken in such circumstances that friendships are equal in both directions and declarations are made in accordance with Section 4 of the Code.
- If a gift outside the exceptions arrives without warning, it must be handed to the Chief Officer or Mayor (in the case of the Chief Officer) to decide whether the gift should be returned (or passed to an appropriate charity) and to ensure the donor is informed of what has happened.

These rules also, of course, apply to offers by firms to members of staff of discounts going beyond those on general offer.

13 SPONSORSHIP - GIVING AND RECEIVING

- 13.1 Where an outside organisation wishes to sponsor a local government activity, whether by invitation, tender, negotiation or voluntarily, the basic conventions concerning acceptance of gifts or hospitality apply. Particular care shall be taken when dealing with contractors or potential contractors.**

- 13.2 Where the Council wishes to sponsor an event or service neither an employee nor any partner, spouse or relative must benefit from such sponsorship in a direct way without there being full disclosure to the Chief Officer or Mayor (in the case of the Chief Officer) of any such interest. Similarly, where the Council through sponsorship, grantaid, financial or other means, gives support in the community, employees shall ensure that impartial advice is given and that there is no conflict of interest involved.**

PROCEDURAL GUIDELINES

- 13.A The Council shall not be seen to offer any special favours or business in return for sponsorship.*

14. CONTACT WITH THE PUBLIC, PRESS AND MEDIA

- 14.1 Employees should refer to the national Protocol on Communications. Basically, you should not make any statement to the media which you are not authorised to make. No employee should give a view which is contrary to or critical of Council policy. Employees should seek authorisation from the Chief Officer prior to speaking to the media.**
- 14.2 Outside working hours, an employee is entitled to voice their opinion on issues affecting the local community e.g., at a neighbourhood forum. However, employees have a general duty of care to avoid a conflict of interest and should not criticise, damage or act in any way against the Council.**
- 14.3 Employees must comply with the Town Council's protocols and policies on social media and the use of emails. Again, employees have a general duty of care to avoid a conflict of interest and should not criticise, damage or act in any way against the Council, or otherwise bring it in to disrepute.**

15 CONDUCT OUTSIDE WORKING HOURS

- 15.1 The Town Council does not wish to intrude on your interests/activities outside normal working hours. However, you should not become involved in activities which prevent you from fulfilling your duties or which result in adverse publicity for the Town Council. For the avoidance of doubt this requirement involves the appropriate use of social networking sites which are in the public domain.**
- 15.2 In order to foster team spirit and good working relationships, the Town Council may offer you the opportunity to attend social events from time to time and may also organise work-related social events to which clients, as well as staff, are invited. Although such social events usually take place away from the workplace and outside of normal working hours, the code of conduct applies to such events. Whilst the Town Council does not wish to affect your enjoyment of such social events, certain rules of conduct are necessary for the protection and comfort of all those attending. Accordingly, if you attend a work-related social event, you must observe the following rules and principles:**
- **Alcohol should be consumed only in moderation.**

- **The use of illegal drugs, including cannabis, is forbidden.**
- **The policy on dignity at work should be observed.**
- **Do not behave in a way that could offend, intimidate, embarrass or upset any other person, whether as a joke or not.**
- **Do not swear or use intemperate language.**
- **Do not behave in any way that could bring the Town Council into disrepute.**
- **Any breach of the above rules may result in disciplinary action being taken against you under the disciplinary procedure.**

16 DISCLOSURE OF CRIMINAL CONVICTIONS

16.1 Criminal charges, or convictions, for offences of dishonesty, or violence committed during the period of your employment with the Town Council, whether committed during or outside normal working hours must be reported to the Chief Officer immediately. Such charges, or convictions, may result in disciplinary action being taken against you up to and including summary dismissal. Failure to disclose such criminal proceedings/convictions that arise during the period of your employment could also result in disciplinary action being taken against you up to and including summary dismissal.

16.2 A charge or conviction for any other type of offence during the period of your employment should also be reported to the Chief Officer. Such charges or convictions may result in disciplinary proceedings being taken against you, up to and including dismissal, were, in our opinion, the charge or conviction:

- **affects your suitability for your role.**
- **impairs the reputation of the Town Council.**
- **seriously undermines the trust and confidence in you.**