

## Sunshine Coast Council Employee Code of Conduct



# Message from the Chief Executive Officer

The Employee Code of Conduct for the Sunshine Coast Council is a best practice guide to help council operate to the highest standards in the public sector and business environments.

It is also a public statement by council of our commitment to leading the way in all that we do, supported by openness, transparency and accountability. This document has been created in consultation with the relevant unions through the Sunshine Coast Council Workplace Consultative Forum and in cooperation with the Local Government Association of Queensland.

Conducting business ethically is critical to not only personal success but also to the success and reputation of council. As local government employees we must ensure that the highest standards of integrity underpin everything we do. This Code of Conduct states and reinforces the principles by which council conducts itself in business and governance. While council's business practices may change over time, its commitment to these principles will remain constant.

The guiding principles encompass a vast range of behaviours and procedures but can be categorised under the headings of:

- Integrity and impartiality
- Promoting the public good
- Commitment to the system of government
- Accountability and transparency

It is important for all council employees to maintain the reputation and high standing of council, and our ability to achieve a culture of ethical practice, openness and integrity.

Chief Executive Officer

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## Introduction

### The objective

A Code of Conduct is a set of standards and behaviours related to the way we do our work. The Code places a responsibility on each of us to use sound judgement while at work.

It aims to deliver best practice by ensuring those standards are clear and guided by sound ethics. By consistently applying these standards, we enhance the public's trust and confidence in each of us. This Code may also impact you outside the workplace where particular behaviour may be directly related to your employment and council activities.

The Code does not cover every situation. However, the values, ethics, standards and behaviours it outlines are a reference point to help make decisions in situations it does not cover. If you act in good faith and in keeping with the spirit of the Code, you can expect to be supported by your colleagues, your team leader/supervisor/manager and by council.

*A Guide to Ethical Decision-Making* is included at Appendix B to help you in situations not covered by the Code.

### Council statement

**Council conducts its business with integrity, honesty and fairness and complies with all relevant laws, regulations, codes and corporate standards.**

Everyone working for council must follow the highest standards of behaviour when dealing with customers and each other. Our senior management team must encourage a culture where ethical conduct is recognised, valued and followed at all levels.

Council actively supports, encourages and develops its employees to work safely, be customer focused, use technology and council assets effectively, adapt to changes and improve their own capabilities and contribute to council's Corporate and Operational Plans.

# Corporate Values

Everything council does is underpinned by its values which define the culture of the organisation and the behaviours that shape our interaction with the community, partners and each other.

<b>Respect for each other</b> in our working relationships	Working collaboratively with honesty, trust and mutual support
	Listening to understand other points of view
	Valuing individual differences, ideas, opinions and diversity
	Building strong partnerships both within and outside the organisation
<b>Being our best</b> by continuing to learn, grow, challenge and change	Communicating openly, respectfully and regularly
	Taking personal responsibility for our ongoing improvement, learning and development and creating a great place to work
	Being responsible and accountable for our own actions
	Encouraging new ways of working and innovative ideas
	Making health, safety and well being a priority
<b>Working as one team</b> across the organisation and with our community	Celebrating both individual efforts and shared achievements
	Collaborating to share ideas, solve problems and achieve results
	Building teams involving our colleagues and community
	Providing clear direction and practical support
	Being respectful in our communications and team approach
<b>High standards</b> in our conduct, service and governance	Being cooperative, productive team members who are prepared to contribute
	Conducting ourselves ethically and professionally
	Ensuring integrity is at the heart of all we do
	Making decisions based on complete information and supporting employees to implement these decisions
<b>Service excellence</b> to our customers and each other	Inspiring a sense of purpose and direction
	Delivering our promises
	Being clear and timely in our communication
	Taking responsibility for assisting customers
	Providing services fairly, promptly and respectfully
Creating positive customer experiences	

## Legislative principles

The *Public Sector Ethics Act 1994* identifies four ethics principles fundamental to good public administration that guide our behaviour as public officials and form the basis for a local government Code of Conduct. The four principles are:

1. integrity and impartiality;
2. promoting the public good;
3. commitment to the system of government; and
4. accountability and transparency.

The *Local Government Act 2009* sets out the way in which a local government is constituted and the nature and extent of its responsibilities and powers. The Act requires that a council's actions are consistent with the following local government principles:

- transparent and effective processes, and decision-making in the public interest;
- sustainable development and management of assets and infrastructure, and delivery of effective services;
- democratic representation, social inclusion and meaningful community engagement;
- good governance of, and by, local government; and
- ethical and legal behaviour of councillors and local government employees.

These legislated principles, together with council's corporate aspirations, policies, guidelines and principles form the basis of this Code of Conduct. They apply to all council employees and guide our thinking, actions and decision-making.

## To whom does the code apply?

All council employees (regardless of their employment status or type –e.g. permanent, maximum-term, casual, full-time or part-time), contractors, agency casuals and volunteers must be familiar with and follow the spirit and content of the Code of Conduct.

A separate Councillor Code of Conduct applies to Councillors of Sunshine Coast Council.

## When does the code apply?

The Code is concerned with our conduct as public officials and behaviour as individuals at work and outside the workplace where particular behaviour may be directly related to our employment and council activities.

The Code also applies in other circumstances where our actions may impact upon the reputation and activities of council.



# The First Principle

## Integrity and Impartiality

# 1

# Integrity and impartiality

In recognition that public office involves a public trust, public service agencies, public sector entities and public officials seek to promote public confidence in the integrity of the public sector and –

- a. are committed to the highest ethical standards;
- b. accept and value their duty to provide advice which is objective, independent, apolitical and impartial;
- c. show respect towards all persons, including employees clients and the general public;
- d. acknowledge the primacy of the public interest and undertake that any conflict of interest issue will be resolved or appropriately managed in favour of the public interest; and
- e. are committed to honest, fair and respectful engagement with the community.

## This requires the following standards of behaviour:

### Conflicts of interest

When making decisions, you must declare any conflicts of interest that could affect your objectivity in carrying out your duties.

A conflict of interest involves a conflict between your official duties and responsibilities in serving the public interest and your private interests. A conflict of interest can arise from avoiding personal losses as well as gaining personal advantage – whether financial or otherwise. This includes advantages to relatives and friends.

If you believe you have a conflict of interest, whether real or perceived, you must tell your team leader/supervisor/manager as soon as you become aware of the conflict. Your team leader/supervisor/manager will then provide further direction on how to resolve the matter giving rise to the conflict of interest.

Until the matter is resolved, you must make sure you are not part of any decision-making processes related to the matter.

If you feel you have a conflict of interest between professional and corporate principles, discuss it with your team leader/supervisor/manager. You should also ensure that any potential conflict of interest is detailed in writing and submitted to your team leader/supervisor/manager as it will form a record for the future.

Where required by the *Local Government Regulation 2012* you may be obligated to supply details of interests to the Chief Executive Officer to be included in a Register of Interests and ensure particulars contained in a Register of Interests remain correct. Refer to Disclosures of Personal Interest Policy.

## Influences on decision-making

In undertaking your duties as a council employee, you must not influence any person in an improper way with the aim to obtain personal advantage or favour.

All council decisions need to be, and be seen to be, fair and transparent. This can be achieved in a number of ways, including clear record-keeping and showing how decisions were made.

You must not in any way misrepresent your qualifications, experience or expertise in any recruitment and selection process.

Appendix B has more information about how to undertake ethical decision-making; see *A guide to ethical decision-making*.

You must ensure that any contact with lobbyists complies with the relevant council policy and the requirements of the *Integrity Act 2009*.

## Accepting gifts and benefits

Occasionally you may be offered gifts or benefits from people with whom you do business as an employee of council.

Pursuant to the *Local Government Act 2009*, it is an offence for an employee to ask for, or accept, a fee or other benefit for doing something as a local government employee. However the Act does not apply to remuneration paid by council or a benefit that has only a nominal value.

The acceptance of gifts or benefits of a nominal value may be permitted in limited circumstances however as a rule you must not accept any gifts or benefits if there is a possibility that, in doing so, you could create a real or perceived conflict of interest or be seen to be receiving a bribe.

The test to apply is whether you could be (not whether you are) influenced by your private interests in carrying out your official duties, or whether people are likely to believe that you could be influenced.

For example, ask yourself if accepting the gift or benefit could suggest that the giver may or would receive favourable treatment.

Where required by the *Local Government Regulation 2012* senior staff (including the Chief Executive Officer and Councillor) must ensure that gifts are recorded in their Register of Interests. Refer to Disclosures of Personal Interest Policy.



## Employment outside council

All employees of council are required to disclose in writing any secondary work/employment that is undertaken outside of their employment arrangements with council.

It is not council's intention to stop people from holding secondary employment over and above their official duties as a council employee.

Approval may be granted for you to undertake private employment outside of your normal working hours as long as the following requirements are met:

- a. That no conflict of interest exists or develops between private employment and your official duties;
- b. That your private employment has no effect on the performance of your official duties, including effects from a safety/fatigue management perspective;
- c. Employees or any companies with which they are associated may not tender for services currently, or in the process of being, provided by council without declaring their intention to tender to the Chief Executive Officer. If the Chief Executive Officer deems that a conflict of interest may occur, he/she may determine that tendering is not allowed while the employee remains working with council;
- d. That your private employment does not involve use of council resources (physical, technological or intellectual);
- e. You must ensure that your work outside council continues to meet the requirements at a, b, c and d above; and
- f. Pursuant to the *Local Government Act 2009*, where you seek to be employed by more than one local government at the same time, approval of each of the local governments is required prior to you being appointed to the second position.

Disclosure of this information will ensure that an evaluation can be done of any actual, perceived or potential conflicts of interest that may arise and, if required, allow measures to be put in place to ensure that employees and council are protected from allegations of inappropriate conduct.

All disclosures will be considered by the Chief Executive Officer and an appropriate determination made on a case by case basis. All disclosures must be made in writing and approvals will be recorded on your employee file, with details kept on a register in the Chief Executive Officer's office.

Although you do not need written approval if you undertake voluntary work or a hobby you also need to ensure that these activities meet the above requirements. If you are unsure, you should discuss this with your team leader/supervisor/manager.

## Advice given to elected officials

Communication between Councillors and employees must be in accordance with the Chief Executive Officer's Guidelines on requests to employees for advice to help a Councillor make a decision.

Councillors may make requests for help or advice to officers on matters that are within their scope of responsibility or knowledge:

- Where the request is of the nature of a simple question that can be verbally responded to;
- Where the officer normally provides similar information to members of the public; or
- In the event of an emergency, to alert an officer to the situation so that the officer can take remedial action.

If you believe there is conflict between a request from an elected official and council policies, you must discuss this with your team leader/supervisor/manager as soon as you are aware of the conflict. Refer to Councillors Acceptable Request Guidelines.

## Public comments on council business

As a general rule, only councillors or senior managers comment publicly on council business. Council business can be topical, sensitive and controversial and there is a process to be followed when making public comments.

If you are asked to comment on any council matter via the media or other public relations firms, you should first refer to council's Media Engagement Protocol and/or talk to your leader/supervisor/manager.

You must also ensure that, to the extent you collect, handle or give access to personal information, you comply with the Privacy Principles outlined under the *Information Privacy Act 2009*.

This does not apply to a Public Interest Disclosure to a proper authority where you honestly believe on reasonable grounds, that you possess information about another council Officer's conduct that relates to:

- a. corrupt conduct;
- b. maladministration that adversely affects a person's interests;
- c. a substantial misuse of public resources, other than an alleged misuse based on mere disagreement over policy that may properly be adopted about amounts, purposes or priorities of expenditure;
- d. a substantial and specific danger to public health or safety; or
- e. a substantial and specific danger to the environment.

You have the right to make a Public Interest Disclosure to a proper authority subject to, and in accordance with, the *Public Interest Disclosure Act 2010*.

## External activities

Council supports and is committed to ensuring all staff are free to engage in trade union, party-political, professional, interest group or charity activities of their choosing. However you must make sure that your participation in such activities does not cause either a conflict of interest, real or perceived, and/or unduly restrict the performance of your official duties with council.

You must not allow your involvement in any external organisation to intrude or influence your duty as a council employee to give sound advice to council which is objective, independent, apolitical and impartial.

You are not to take part in political affairs at a local, state or national level whilst on duty. Council's IT systems, including internet access and email, council newsletters and workplaces must not be used for political messages or circulating defamatory or disparaging remarks against individuals or groups.

If you comment publicly in connection with external activities, you must make a clear distinction between your opinion as a member of the external organisation, and your opinion as a council employee.

You must not use your role in council, council information or information gained in the course of your official duties as a council employee, to advance your position or standing within an external organisation, nor for the benefit or promotion of an external organisation. You must not provide council information to members of other groups or related persons, except where this information is publicly available.

As a member of an external organisation you need to be aware that participating in activities in the public arena where you may be identified as a council employee, can give rise to a perception of conflict of interest in some circumstances. Where such a situation arises, you must declare and manage the conflict in accordance with this Code of Conduct. Refer to Disclosures of Personal Interest Policy.

## Behaviour towards each other

We must all treat each other with trust, respect, honesty, fairness, sensitivity and dignity. Employees who supervise or manage other employees have a special responsibility to model this kind of behaviour, and to ensure that the people they supervise understand the standard of performance and behaviour that is expected of them.

Council values diversity, and expects all its employees, contractors or volunteers to accommodate and respect different opinions and perspectives, and to manage interpersonal disagreements by rational debate. You must not behave towards any other person in a way that could be perceived as intimidating, overbearing or bullying, or that may constitute unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature.

Effective teamwork is an essential part of a productive workplace culture. Each team member needs to work co-operatively with fellow employees and actively and willingly take part in team activities (eg. meetings). Refer to Disclosures of Personal Interest Policy.



## Non-discriminatory workplace

Council is an equal opportunity employer and as such is proactive in ensuring that its practices do not discriminate based on an attribute, or based on a person's association with another person who maintains an attribute relating to:

- race/ethnicity;
- gender;
- national origin;
- marital status;
- sexual preference/lawful sexual activity;
- age;
- disability/impairment, including infectious disease;
- industrial/employment activity;
- physical features;
- pregnancy;
- family responsibilities;
- religious beliefs;
- political conviction;
- breast feeding; or
- gender identity.

As an employee of council you have a shared responsibility to ensure that discrimination is not part of our workplace or our practices. If you witness discriminatory behaviour you have an obligation to report such actions to your supervisor or manager or if such action involves your supervisor or manager, another senior officer.

Found cases of unlawful discrimination may lead to disciplinary action being taken against offending employees. Refer to Disclosures of Personal Interest Policy.

## Sexual and other forms of workplace harassment

Council is also committed to the prevention of any form of sexual harassment, victimisation or other forms of bullying in the workplace, or at any place where work-related activities are performed, including at social functions. This commitment applies to all employees in their relationships with each other, to applicants for employment at council and to persons who have dealings with council.

As an employee of council it is expected that you proactively contribute to building a workplace that is free from sexual harassment, victimisation and bullying. You have a joint responsibility to respect the rights of fellow employees, by not taking part in any action that may constitute harassment of any form, and in doing so supporting and promoting the achievement of equal employment opportunity.

Some examples of behaviour which may constitute either sexual harassment or workplace bullying include:

- Acting towards, or speaking to, a person in a manner which threatens or vilifies that person;
- Deliberately excluding a particular individual from relevant work-related activities or functions;
- Making jokes, suggestive comments or offensive gestures related to a person's race, appearance, colour, ethnic origin, disability, gender, sexual characteristics, or a personal appearance;
- Distribution or display of sexually explicit material (including through email) which may be offensive, including posters, pictures or MPEGs, racist or sexist jokes or cartoons;
- Persistent questions about a person's private life;
- Personal comments about appearance, size, clothing;
- Demands for sexual favours, either directly or by implication;
- Unwanted and deliberate physical contact;
- Indecent assault, rape and other criminal offences.

For further information refer to council's Workplace Harassment Prevention CEO Procedure and Disclosure of Personal Interest Policy.



A woman with blonde hair, wearing a blue top and a lanyard, is smiling at a service centre counter. The background is a blurred sign that says "Service Centre".

Service Centre

## The Second Principle

### Promoting the public good

2

# Promoting the public good

In recognition that the public sector is the mechanism through which the elected representatives deliver programs and services for the benefit of the people of Queensland, public service agencies, public sector entities and public officials:

- a. accept and value their duty to be responsive to both the requirements of government and to the public interest;
- b. accept and value their duty to engage the community in developing and effecting official public sector priorities, policies and decisions;
- c. accept and value their duty to manage public resources effectively, efficiently and economically;
- d. value and seek to achieve excellence in service delivery; and
- e. value and seek to achieve enhanced integration of services to better service clients.

## This requires the following standards of behaviour:

### Customer service

As a council employee it is expected that you will strive to provide excellent customer service. You must treat members of the public equitably and with honesty, fairness, sensitivity and dignity.

All council employees serve ratepayers directly or indirectly. If your role in council involves regular contact with the public, it is important to know how to deal comfortably and calmly with difficult situations and difficult people.

You are expected to treat complaints from customers, ratepayers, and the community or fellow employees seriously and respond to constructive feedback as an opportunity for improvement. Refer to council's Administrative Action Complaints Management Process.

Customers have a right to criticise, complain to or about council. Council expects its employees to show respect towards complainants. While you must make all reasonable efforts to help customers lodge complaints, if you think a situation is threatening or intimidating, you are entitled to withdraw. If in doubt, ask for help from a more experienced colleague, or a team leader/supervisor/manager. Council will support any employee who believes they are under threat from a member of the public.

Council's image can be impacted by the presentation of staff. Council requires all employees to appear neat and tidy and maintain an appropriate standard of dress or uniform where required. If you are unsure about what constitutes appropriate dress please discuss this with your manager or supervisor.

Where you have been provided with council uniforms, you are required to wear all components of the uniform without alteration (other than alterations designed to ensure a proper fit) and ensure that uniforms are clean and tidy. If you are a manager you are expected to ensure that staff are appropriately presented at all times.

## Fairness to suppliers

Council's contracting activities are regulated pursuant to Chapter 6 of the *Local Government Regulation 2012*. Further, council has established procedures and delegations of authority for various stages of procurement of goods and services which reflect the content of the *Local Government Regulation 2012*.

You must comply with the *Local Government Regulation 2012* and council procedures when seeking suppliers for goods or services.

If you have been authorised to be involved in offering contracts or buying goods and services from outside council, you must be sure you have taken reasonable, fair and consistent steps to allow all potential suppliers to bid for work.

You also need to ensure that you do not incur any liability or enter into any contract on behalf of council, or alter the terms or conditions of any contract which council has already entered, unless you are authorised to do so.

## Public money

**You must maintain high standards of accountability if you collect and use public money.**

You are not to borrow or use council money for private purposes. This also applies to items such as taxi vouchers or other vouchers.

Officers using council monies for the purpose of entertainment and/or hospitality expenditure on council's behalf must do so strictly in accordance with council's Entertainment and Hospitality Policy.

## Intellectual property

Council expects its employees to ensure that their actions do not breach or infringe the *Copyright Act 1968*, by unlawfully using the intellectual property of any individual or organisation.

You must respect the copyrights, trademarks and patents of suppliers and other organisations outside council and not reproduce or quote suppliers' material unless your licence specifically allows it. Similarly you must not store or copy audio, video or image files, printed media and software on council assets without an appropriate licence or approval. Where this is unclear you must seek written approval before arranging to publish, disclose or reproduce any articles or materials as part of your official duties.

Any original work, invention or product you have contributed to in association with your official duties as a council employee remains the property of council. Similarly, you must not publish or disclose any matters relating to council's intellectual property without appropriate authority. This does not stop you from sharing with other organisations information relating to your official duties. However, if you do, and if you are unaware of whether such action may breach this Code, you must first seek clarification from your supervisor/manager.

The *Public Records Act 2002* requires council to "make and keep full and accurate records of its activities."

The Act also specifies that council and its officers must manage records responsibly and specifically states that the unlawful disposal of a record by any person – including council employees – is a criminal offence punishable by a fine.

In this way the preservation of public records is enforced so that the obligations under the Act can be met (i.e. "public access to records"). Obligations under this Act are consistent with the principles of the *Right to Information Act 2009* and the *Information Privacy Act 2009*" and require all council employees keep proper records to assist performance and accountability, ensuring records are managed as "openly as practicable", and that contents may, in specified circumstances, become known to the public.

## Concern for the Environment

We all share the responsibility to protect our natural environment, creating healthy surroundings for our community, and for managing the impacts of air, water, land and noise pollution. This includes individual responsibility for our own actions (e.g. taking care in disposing of waste and using and storing chemicals, reducing energy consumption and waste in our work spaces) and applying high standards of environmental protection across the region)

In performing your duties at council, you must ensure that you comply with your general environmental duty and, where applicable, your duty to notify of environmental harm: Refer to the *Environmental Protection Act 1994*.





## The Third Principle

Commitment to the system  
of government

# 3

# Commitment to the system of government

In recognition that the public sector has a duty to uphold the system of government and the laws of the State, Commonwealth and local government, public service agencies, public sector entities and Public officials:

- a. accept and value their duty to uphold the system of government and the laws of the State, the Commonwealth and Local Government;
- b. are committed to effecting official public sector priorities, policies and decisions professionally and impartially; and
- c. accept and value their duty to operate within the framework of Ministerial responsibility to government, the Parliament and the community.

Subsection (1) does not limit the responsibility of a public service agency, public sector entity or Public official to act independently of government if the independence of the agency, entity or official is required by legislation or government policy, or is a customary feature of the work of the agency, entity or official.

## This requires the following standards of behaviour:

### Acting within the law

As an employee of council, you are expected to comply with applicable legislation, awards, certified agreements, council policies and local laws.

You have the right and responsibility to respectfully question how you do your work, particularly if you think there is an imminent risk to the safety of yourself or others, or there is a better way of doing something, or if you think that a direction may be in breach of the law.

When you have recorded your suggestion or concern you are required to work as directed by your team leader/supervisor/manager, except where there is an imminent risk to safety. If the matter cannot be resolved within the workgroup, it should be immediately referred to your manager or Human Resources Branch.

If you are charged with having committed any indictable offence, are subject to an indictable offence conviction, or are subject to a summary conviction, you should immediately report the circumstances to your Branch Manager. Such disclosure shall be treated as confidential and considered within the context of your ability to properly conduct your duties as an employee of council.

### Acting in accordance with delegations and signing documents on behalf of council

If you are requested to undertake an action on behalf of the Chief Executive Officer or delegate, prior to exercising any power on behalf of the Chief Executive Officer you must ensure an appropriate delegation pursuant to State or Federal legislation exists that allows you to exercise the power. Refer to council's Delegations Register.

The following persons are the only persons who may sign a document on behalf of council:

- a. the Chief Executive Officer;
- b. a delegate of the Chief Executive Officer ; or
- c. a council employee who is authorised, in writing, by the Chief Executive Officer to sign documents.

## Raising concerns

You have the right to comment on or raise concerns with your team leader/supervisor/manager about council policies, practices or priorities where they impact on your employment. However, you must do this in a reasonable and constructive way and take responsibility for your comments and views. Further, you must accept that council has the right to determine its policy, practices and priorities and that you must comply with all reasonable and lawful instructions, whether or not you personally agree with a given policy direction.

When raising complaints or grievances, employees are expected to act with honesty and in good faith. Complaints that are considered vexatious or frivolous will not be progressed, and such complaints may be managed as acts of misconduct in accordance with council's Managing Disciplinary Action Policy and Procedure.

## Privacy

Council maintains information about individuals, businesses and commercial issues which is private and sensitive and which could be harmful to a person's interest if released. Council is required to appropriately secure and ensure the confidentiality and privacy of this information. Employees should only access personal information and records they require to perform their official council duties.

Employees must ensure that the collection, storage and use of personal information is done so in accordance with the Privacy Principles outlined pursuant to the *Information Privacy Act 2009*. A copy of the Privacy Principles is available on council's intranet.

As a general rule you can maintain privacy by:

- not discussing work matters with persons not entitled to know such information;
- taking responsibility to safeguard confidential files and information;
- ensuring collected information is only used in a manner consistent with the purpose for which it was originally collected; and
- ensuring that you comply with council policy in relation to maintaining privacy of personal information.

It may be appropriate to share information based on your personal and professional experience (e.g. in seminars or training programs). However in sharing your experiences, you must ensure that where personal information is involved, you don't breach council's privacy obligations. You may breach this obligation even if comments are made or personal information other than your own is shared in your personal life, including via social media outlets such as 'Facebook'.

In addition to the *Information Privacy Act 2009*, section 200 of the *Local Government Act 2009* makes it an offence for a person who is, or has been, a council employee to release information that the person knows, or should reasonably know, is information that:

- a. is confidential to council; and
- b. council wishes to keep confidential.

Personal and other information may on occasion be sought from council by an employee or other members of the public pursuant to the *Right to Information Act 2009*. If such a request is made of you, you must ensure that you refer such requests to council's Corporate Governance Branch for the request to be properly considered.



## The Fourth Principle

### Accountability and transparency

# 4

# Accountability and transparency

In recognition that public trust in public office requires high standards of public administration, public service agencies, public sector entities and Public officials:

- a. are committed to exercising proper diligence, care and attention;
- b. are committed to using public resources in an effective and accountable way;
- c. are committed to managing information as openly as practicable within the legal framework;
- d. value and seek to achieve high standards of public administration;
- e. value and seek to innovate and continuously improve performance; and
- f. value and seek to operate within a framework of mutual obligation and shared responsibility between public service agencies, public sector entities and Public officials.

## This requires the following standards of behaviour:

### Using council assets

Council's assets include property, plant, equipment, information systems, computing resources, goods, products and/or valuables (this includes surplus material, waste material and off-cuts). All employees share the responsibility for looking after them.

If you are in charge of assets you must take good care of them while they are in your possession or use, and ensure they are used economically and efficiently and for the purpose of conducting council business. It is an offence to misuse or allow anyone else to misuse council assets. You must make sure assets are secured against theft and properly stored, maintained and repaired.

You must ensure that you use council assets only for official council business, unless written approval to do otherwise has been granted by your manager.

You must not store personal files on council's IT assets. Any files stored on, or information accessed using, council assets are discoverable by council.

You can use telephones on a limited basis for calls that you cannot make conveniently outside working hours.

If you use council vehicles or a council issued mobile telephone for non-official purposes, you must ensure that your use is in accordance with council policy.

Council allows limited personal use of electronic mail and World Wide Web browsing, subject to and in accordance with council Policy. Limited personal use means use that is infrequent and brief, and is performed during your non-paid time, that is, before and after work or during meal breaks. Please refer to the definition of Limited Personal Use (Electronic Mail and World Wide Web) for more information on what is allowed. Council does not allow employees to access web sites that are unlawful, gambling web sites, or sites that contravene council's Workplace Harassment Prevention Guideline.

Upon your employment terminating with council, you must return all council property and work-related documents immediately.

## Diligence, care and attention

Council aims to conduct its business with integrity, honesty and fairness and to achieve the highest standards in service delivery. You contribute to this aim by carrying out your duties honestly, responsibly, in a conscientious manner and to the best of your ability. This includes:

- maintaining punctuality and not being absent from your work station/location during work time without reason;
- giving priority to official duties over personal activities during work time;
- ensuring you do not undertake personal work during work time;
- not wasting excessive time chatting about personal matters and interrupting other staff;
- helping council achieve its mission and goals by acting to improve systems and practices;
- conducting yourself in a way so others gain confidence and trust in the way council does business;
- not allowing your conduct to distract or prevent others from working; and
- not exposing council to a judgment for damages against it, as a result of your negligence or breach of any law or policy.

If you are responsible for managing or supervising others, you must also ensure that:

- you model the values and principles outlined in this Code and ensure that employees within your area of responsibility understand and comply with the Code;
- you do not come under a financial obligation to any employee you supervise or manage;
- your work and the work of those you supervise contributes to the achievement of council's goals;
- employee performance is monitored and individuals are given constructive and regular feedback on their performance in line with procedures;
- where practicable, employees are given training opportunities to assist them in developing their careers;
- employees are provided with information that is vital for effective work performance;
- the opinions of employees are respected and considered;

- workloads are fairly distributed;
- resourcing for a work team is neither excessive nor inadequate for the job;
- employees who collect, handle or disburse public money are properly supervised;
- employee work times, overtime, allowances and absences are correctly recorded on time/flex sheets and pay summary reports;
- appropriate action is taken if breaches of this Code occur.

## Attendance and absence from duty

You are expected to follow council employment and working arrangements, agreements and rulings on attendance at work and leave. This includes not being absent without approval and accurately and truthfully recording work and leave periods.

Council's operational efficiency depends on your punctuality and attendance at your work station/location. If you are unavoidably detained please advise your team leader/supervisor/manager as soon as reasonably possible before your expected start time.

Absence without approval and without reasonable excuse can create concerns for your safety and lead to unproductive time for others. All employees have an obligation to ensure that they promptly notify council as soon as practicable upon becoming aware that they are going to be absent from work. Failure to promptly notify council may result in the non-payment of salary/wages for the period of absence and/or may result in council taking disciplinary action.

## Self-development

All Local Government employees have an obligation to be proactive in the continual improvement of all aspects of their work performance: refer to the *Local Government Act 2009*.

You should aim to maintain and continually improve your work performance and that of your work unit in the delivery of customer service. You have a continuing responsibility to maintain and enhance your skills and expertise and keep up to date the knowledge associated with your area of work.

Council will assist you by providing equitable access to training and development opportunities. This may include accessing the study assistance program, learning new work duties, participating in project work or undertaking internal or external training.

## Workplace health and safety

As council employees we are all committed to zero harm in the way we conduct our business and council activities. Council is committed to ensuring that persons are free from:

- death, injury or illness caused by the workplace, relevant workplace area, work activities, or plant or substances for use at work; and
- **the risk** of death, injury or illness caused by the workplace, relevant workplace area, work activities, or plant or substances for use at work.

You must take reasonable steps to ensure your own safety, health and welfare in the workplace. You also have a duty of care to both fellow employees and members of the public. As a worker you have the following obligations at the workplace:

- to comply with the instructions given by council for workplace health and safety at the workplace;
- to use personal protective equipment provided by council for your use if you have been properly instructed in its use;
- not to wilfully or recklessly interfere with or misuse anything provided for workplace health and safety at the workplace;
- not to wilfully place at risk the workplace health and safety of any person at the workplace; and
- not to wilfully injure yourself.

You have the right and responsibility to respectfully question how you do your work, particularly if you think there is an imminent risk to the safety of yourself or others, or there is a better way of doing something, or if you think that a direction may be in breach of the law.

You also have a duty to:

- identify hazards and manage risks to health and safety;
- perform all work safely and follow safe work practices;
- report any incidents or hazards immediately and support investigations;
- take corrective action to 'make safe' the workplace, relevant workplace area or work activities and implement improvements; and
- participate in rehabilitation and return to work programs if required.

We must keep our workplace drug and alcohol free if we are to maintain the trust and confidence of the broader public, and ensure the health and safety of all employees. The use of drugs or alcohol can adversely affect productivity, attendance and on-the-job safety.

As such you must not:

- use, possess or be impaired by the effects of illegal drugs whilst on duty;
- come to work impaired by the effects of alcohol or drugs;
- consume alcohol while on duty or in the workplace other than strictly in accordance with council Policy;
- gamble or bet on council premises (except for authorised sweeps and tipping competitions);
- undermine council's service to customers by leaving your work station/location in order to smoke. Smoking is only permissible during meal breaks; and
- smoke anywhere within council's buildings, in council vehicles, in any enclosed spaces whilst on site or within 4m of any part of an entrance to an enclosed place.

For more information refer to council's Management of Impaired Performance at Work Policy.



## Additional information

## Breaches of the Code

Council expects all employees whilst engaged in official duties to ensure they demonstrate the basic standards of acceptable conduct as stated in this Code. All employees have the responsibility to comply with this Code of Conduct and all other policies which council implements and/or varies from time to time.

A breach of the Code of Conduct damages business effectiveness, public perception of council and interpersonal work relationships. Any act or lack of action by an employee of council that contravenes this Code may result in council taking disciplinary action against that employee, which may include dismissal. All suspected breaches will be dealt with on a case by case basis.

Suspected corrupt conduct must be referred to council's Chief Executive Officer, and the Chief Executive Officer has a duty to notify the Crime and Corruption Commission of the suspected Corrupt Conduct.

In cases where a suspected breach of this Code is under investigation, and if the Chief Executive Officer deems it appropriate, any employee suspected of a breach of this Code may be suspended from duty on full pay until such time as the investigation has been completed.

All disciplinary action taken by council against an employee for found breaches of this Code will be in accordance with council's Managing Disciplinary Action Policy and Procedure Policy and in compliance with council's obligations pursuant to Chapter 8, Part 3 of the *Local Government Regulation 2012*.

## If you have a concern

The *Public Interest Disclosure Act 2010* and the *Public Sector Ethics Act 1994* aim to create a work environment where public sector employees understand and maintain appropriate standards of conduct.

If you have a concern, or suspect a breach of the Code involving one or more council employees, the *Public Interest Disclosure Act 2010* gives you the right to disclose, in the public interest, information about wrongdoings in the public sector and provides protection to you when you make such a disclosure. Should you wish to make such a disclosure please contact:

- internal channels: Manager, Corporate Governance, Branch Sunshine Coast Council or
- other external channels (e.g. Crime and Corruption Commission, Anti-Discrimination Commission).



## Review

This Code will be reviewed on 30 June 2017.

## Publication

In accordance with the requirements of the *Public Sector Ethics Act 1994*, the Chief Executive Officer will keep a printed copy of the Code available for inspection in the Executive Office and council will publish the Code on its Intranet site for all employees to access.

## Training

Education and training about public sector ethics will be offered at induction and as frequently as the Chief Executive Officer determines.

## Authority

In accordance with the *Public Sector Ethics Act 1994*, the following consultation process was followed in development of the Sunshine Coast Council Employee Code of Conduct.

All employees are offered the opportunity to attend Code of Conduct Awareness sessions and a copy of the Code of Conduct is made available on the council Intranet and workplace common rooms for employees without Intranet access.

This Code has been considered by local government unions and the Local Government Association, Queensland (LGAQ). This Code was approved by the Chief Executive Officer in accordance with the requirements of the *Public Sector Ethics Act 1994*.

## Document owner

Corporate Governance Branch, Sunshine Coast Council.

## Further assistance

If you read the Code and are still unsure of how it applies to you, it is important that you discuss this with your manager, team leader or Director. In most cases, they will be able to answer your enquiries.

If you have concerns about approaching any of these people, contact the next most senior person in your area.

Alternatively you might wish to contact the Human Resources Branch.

## Relevant documentation

- SCC Delegations Register
- Workplace Harassment Prevention Guideline
- Managing Disciplinary Action Policy and Procedure
- Management of Impaired Performance at Work Guideline
- Media Engagement Protocol
- Entertainment and Hospitality Policy
- Copyright Act 1968
- Environmental Protection Act 1994
- Information Privacy Act 2009
- Local Government Act 2009
- Local Government Regulation 2012
- Public Sector Ethics Act 1994
- Public Interest Disclosure Act 2010
- Right to Information Act 2009
- Integrity Act 2009
- Councillor Code of Conduct

## Appendix A – Definitions

**Benefit** – means something that is similar to a gift in that it is of value to the recipient, but it is less tangible in nature (e.g. a new job or promotion, preferential treatment, or access to confidential information).

**Conflict of interest** – means a conflict between a council employee's work responsibilities and their personal or private interests. A conflict of interest can arise from either gaining a personal advantage or avoiding a personal loss. Conflicts of interest can be real (actual) or perceived (apparent).

- A real conflict of interest is a conflict between the employee's duties and their private interests. For example; Augustus is on a recruitment and selection panel and his sister is applying for a position to be decided by that panel.
- A perceived conflict of interest arises where a person is likely to believe an employee's private interests could improperly influence them at work. Such a perception is judged as having regard to what a fair and reasonable member of the public could be expected to believe.

For example; *May works for council as a community grants funding program manager. On the weekend she plays tennis with the director of a community organisation applying for funding through the funding program May is managing. A reasonable person is likely to believe that May could be improperly influenced by the relationship she has developed with the director at tennis.*

**Council** – in the context of this Code of Conduct, refers to the Chief Executive Officer in his/her capacity as the employer

**Types of interests** – interests can be financial, non-financial, personal, private, family or business.

- A financial interest is when the employee could gain a personal financial benefit including having shares, receiving gifts, benefits or bribes, or receiving hospitality or travel. For example; Francesca's partner owns a company which is tendering for work with council.
- Some examples of non-financial interests are listed below.
  - You work in the strategic procurement area and one of your regular fishing friends asks you to keep an eye on his tender application.

- You work in the funding application area and you are also president of a local group applying for funding from council.
- You work in the development applications area and your children's school will be affected by a new development and the development proposal has been submitted to council for approval.

**Gift** – means an item of value, money, voucher, entertainment, hospitality, travel, commodity, property, that one person gives to another. Gifts may be offered as an expression of gratitude with no obligation to repay, or given to create a feeling of obligation.

**Impaired by the effects of alcohol or drugs** – means:

- For employees operating/driving heavy vehicles and buses (or operating mechanical tools or equipment) a blood or breath alcohol content greater than 0.00%. This includes trucks, mobile plant registered for driving on public roads (consistent with Queensland Transport Regulations), and other nominated plant and equipment.
- For employees driving light vehicles a blood or breath alcohol content must not be equal to or more than 0.05% (concentration of alcohol in your blood or breath) – as per the *Transport Operations (Road Use Management) Act 1995*.

An SCC employee may be under the general alcohol limit and is deemed by the *Transport Operations (Road Use Management) Act 1995* to be able to legally drive vehicles as above. However this does not restrict Council from taking appropriate action if the employee's breath or blood alcohol content level limits the employee's capacity to perform their work to an acceptable standard.

- For all employees a positive drug test for illegal drugs such as Methylamphetamine—also known as speed and ice, MDMA—the active ingredient in ecstasy, THC—the active ingredient in cannabis. There is zero tolerance for driving (or operating mechanical tools or equipment) under the influence of illegal drugs.

SCC will undertake regular awareness, education and support programs related to drug and alcohol issues which may arise in the workplace, and may conduct random drug and alcohol testing.

For further information contact your HR Business Partner or refer to the Impaired Performance at Work CEO Procedure, and the Management of Impaired Performance at Work Organisational Policy.

**Indictable offence** – means a crime or misdemeanour for which an offender cannot, unless otherwise expressly allowed, be prosecuted or convicted except upon indictment.

**Indictable offence conviction** – means a finding of guilt, and the acceptance of a plea of guilty, by a court, whether or not a conviction is recorded, in relation to an indictable offence.

**Limited personal use (Electronic mail and World Wide Web)** – means the following:

- Use that is infrequent and brief and is performed during the employee's non-paid time. That is, before and after work or during meal breaks.
- Use that does not breach this Code of Conduct, council policy *Public Sector Ethics Act 1994 (Qld)*, *Local Government Act 2009* (including Regulations) (Qld), *Crime and Corruption Act 2001* (Qld) or related State and Federal legislation and regulations.
- Personal use is activity conducted for purposes other than undertaking official business, professional duties, and/or professional development.
- Personal use refers to personal related activities which do not interfere with the operations of the council.
- Examples of permitted limited personal use of the internet include:
  - internet access that is incidental to employment or personal business transactions such as accessing government information sites and online banking and bill paying;
  - participation in approved online training or personal development programs; and
  - sending or receiving infrequent personal messages by email, providing the content of the message does not breach council's Code of Conduct or Corporate Policies.

- Examples of limited personal use of the internet that is NOT permitted (not an exhaustive list) include:
  - a. gambling (including gaming, online betting, bookmaker odds, lottery pages, bingo, football tipping);
  - b. games (including traditional board games, card games and role playing games, for example; Solitaire and World of Warcraft);
  - c. participation in online auctions (including eBay);
  - d. dating (including the use of online dating services);
  - e. downloading and storage of music, video files and pictures (including the use of YouTube, iTunes, Napster, BitTorrent and similar sites/programs);
  - f. accessing social networking sites (including Facebook, Twitter and similar sites) unless the use is directly connected with your duties, is for the purpose of communicating approved council publications and/or media releases and has been approved by your team leader/supervisor/manager; and
  - g. accessing, downloading, storing or sending racially and/or sexually offensive, obscene and/or other threatening, belligerent or libellous electronic communications.

**Corrupt conduct** – means wrongdoing by a public sector official (including police) in carrying out their official duties or exercising their powers. It must involve one of the following:

- dishonesty or lack of impartiality;
- a breach of the trust put in a person by virtue of their position; or
- a misuse of officially obtained information.

It must also be a criminal offence or serious enough to justify dismissal of the person from their position.

**Public official** – means an employee of council.

**Summary conviction** – means a summary conviction of an Indictable offence by a Magistrates Court.

## Appendix B – A guide to ethical decision-making

The following guide is designed to help you reach an ethical decision based on the relevant facts and circumstances of a situation.

### Step 1 - Assess the situation.

- What is your aim?
- What are the facts and circumstances?
- Does it break the law or go against council policy?
- Is it in line with the Code's principles?
- What principles does it relate to? Why?
- Who is affected? What rights do they have?
- What are your obligations or responsibilities?

### Step 2 - Look at the situation from council's viewpoint

- As a public official, what should you do?
- What are the relevant laws, rules and guidelines?
- Who else should you consult?

### Step 3 - How would others see your actions?

- Would a reasonable person think you used your powers or position improperly?
- Would the public see your action or decision as honest and impartial?
- Do you face a conflict of interest?
- Will your decision or action stand up to public scrutiny?

### Step 4 - Consider the options

- Ask your team leader/supervisor/manager, or any person who is able to give sound, relevant advice.
- What options and consequences are consistent with council's values, the five local government principles, the four ethics principles fundamental to good public administration and your obligations?
- What are the costs and long-term consequences of each option?
- How would the public view each option?
- What will be the outcome for council, your colleagues, others and you?

### Step 5 - Choose your course of action

Make sure your actions are:

- within your power to take, legal and in line with policy and this Code;
- fair and able to be justified to your manager and the public;
- documented so a statement of reasons can be supplied;
- consistent with council's mission, goals and values; and
- backed by advice from council specialists, if this is appropriate.

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### **Acknowledgements**

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### **Disclaimer**

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