



Essex County
Fire & Rescue Service

CODE OF CONDUCT POLICY

About

This policy sets out the standards of conduct expected of all employees. It is the Service's expectation that all Service colleagues will respect and encourage the ethical values and vision set out within this Code of Conduct.

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2 PURPOSE

This document sets out the standards of conduct expected of all workers employed or engaged by **Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority** ("our Service").

3 SCOPE

This Code of Conduct applies to all employees, agency and contractors of the **Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner Fire and Rescue** Authority (“our Service) who are representing the Service working at our locations and/or representing our service outside of work, e.g. at an organised event where the employee/worker is in attendance in that capacity.

It is the Service’s expectation that all Service colleagues will respect and encourage the ethical values and vision set out within this Code of Conduct.

Note: Many Service employees will be covered by ethical standards which govern their professions, this Code is not intended to replace but to complement these.

4 POLICY STATEMENT

Our communities are at the heart of everything we do. We will continually demonstrate our commitment to improving public safety, with public benefit and value at the centre of our work.

We will ensure the resources are in place to enable the delivery of services in line with our ethical values and vision. We will also strive to be an employer of choice through the creation of a positive, responsible, innovative, open and rewarding working environment in which ability and delivery is valued, encouraged, developed and recognised.

Our behaviour is central to how we deliver services to our communities and we are committed to continuous improvement, ensuring that colleagues at all levels treat each other with humanity, dignity, and respect. We will stand against all forms of discrimination, promote equality, foster good relations and celebrate difference.

Inappropriate behaviour has no place in a progressive Fire and Rescue Service.

The Service's values set out our aspirations and clear direction for all of our colleagues, at every level across the Service, describing our expectations and setting the foundation for successful delivery of our services to our communities. The Code of Conduct should be read in conjunction with the Dignity at Work Policy.

As a public service, Essex County Fire and Rescue Service expects a standard of conduct from its workforce which reflects the principles set out by the *Nolan Committee on Standards in Public Life*. All employees should ensure that they:

- Take decisions solely in terms of the public interest, not to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends.
- Do not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might influence them in the performance of their official duties.
- Are objective in carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.
- Are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.
- As open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.
- Declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.
- Promote and support these principles by leadership and example.

These Seven Principles of Public Life are the foundation of the principles set out in the Core Code of Ethics for Fire and Rescue Services (England). The code includes behaviours designed to help employees of the Fire and Rescue Service act in the best way towards each other and while serving the public. The ethical principles are:

- Putting our communities first
- Integrity
- Dignity and Respect
- Leadership
- Equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI)

5 POLICY PRINCIPLES – STANDARDS AND EXPECTATIONS

The scope of the Code of Conduct Policy covers conduct and behaviours in the workplace and while representing the Service. Although not specifically linked to this policy, it is acknowledged that there may be occasions where behaviour outside of the workplace impact on the employment relationship between the Service and the employee.

The following sections set out the standards and expectations of our people, reflecting the way in which we will work as public service we are all proud to be part of. This includes the Services expectation that everyone who represents our Service will:

- Treat people with respect at all times and without discrimination, harassment, or bullying.
- Make fair decisions objectively based on evidence, without discrimination or bias.
- Act with integrity including being open, honest, truthful, accurate and consistent.
- Remain consistent in our ethical and moral behaviours which make our Service a positive place to work.
- Never act or take inappropriate decisions to gain personal financial or other material benefits.
- Recognise and challenge behaviour where it falls short of our standards and expectations.

These expectations are set out in further detail below.

5.1 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The Service is committed to promoting equality of opportunity, diversity and to eliminating unlawful discrimination.

The Service will not tolerate any acts of violence, threatening behaviour, coercion, abuse or cruelty towards any colleagues, Service user or member of the public. Any complaint of violence or harassment, or safeguarding concern raised by another authority to the Service, will be taken seriously and will be subject to a thorough investigation and dealt with through the disciplinary procedure. Where concerns are raised to the Service about an employee by another employee, a family member, friend or acquaintance etc. the Service has a duty to consider and respond to the complaint.

The Service will not tolerate any sexual, physical or mental harassment by any employee towards any other colleagues. There is no place in our Service for such behaviours and we will challenge and address any form of inappropriate behaviour.

5.2 Leadership

We will be positive role models, always demonstrating flexible and resilient leadership at all levels. We will be accountable for our behaviour, decisions and actions, will listen and learn from our experience, and challenge behaviour that falls short of the highest standards.

The way in which we work together will support our Service values and commitment to develop and maintain a fair, open and transparent culture.

No employee may unreasonably refuse to work with a colleague or colleagues. If any employee believes that they have reasonable ground(s) for such a refusal they should discuss this with their line manager in the first instance and, if necessary, pursue the matter through the appropriate procedure.

Any close personal relationship between colleagues will be risk assessed, and consideration given where one of the individuals has:

- Supervisory/management responsibility for the other
- Access to confidential and/or sensitive information
- Access to certain resources or can influence decision making which may affect the other.

Following completion of a risk assessment to consider working environment, it may be necessary to transfer one or both parties to another team or workplace or take other proportionate action as appropriate.

5.3 Integrity

Employees must ensure that they use public funds entrusted to them in an efficient, responsible, and lawful manner and in accordance with the Service's Financial Regulations.

All relationships of a business or private nature with external contractors or potential contractors must be made known to the employee's manager who will take advice on the implications. The award of orders and contracts must be in accordance with the Service's procurement policies and procedures and with financial regulations. No favour must be shown during the tendering process to businesses in which the employee has any financial or controlling interest or which is run by anyone with whom the employee has any form of business or personal relationship. Any ongoing management of contracts already awarded or involvement in payment to contractors may be similarly affected and the employee should consult their line manager.

5.3.1 Hospitality, Acceptance of Gifts & Sponsorship

It is a serious criminal offence for any public servant to accept money or any other form of bribe as a reward for doing or not doing something or showing favour or disfavour to any person or organisation.

Employees must only accept offers of hospitality where there is a genuine need to impart information or to represent the Service in the community, or as part of its service or corporate activities. Acceptance of hospitality should be properly authorised and recorded in a hospitality register maintained by Corporate Services at Service Headquarters.

When receiving authorised hospitality, employees should be particularly sensitive as to its timing in relation to decisions which the Service may be taking affecting those providing the hospitality.

Employees should not accept personal gifts from contractors, service users or outside suppliers, although acceptance of insignificant items of token value such as a pen or a diary is permissible.

Where a gift is accepted it should be reported to hospitality.gifts@essex-fire.gov.uk providing details of the following:

- What the gift or hospitality was
- Who it was from
- Reason for acceptance
- Estimated value

This email must be sent within 28 days of acceptance of the hospitality, gift and/or sponsorship.

When hospitality or a gift must be declined, those making the offer should be courteously informed by invitation, tender, negotiation or voluntary, the basic conventions concerning acceptance of gifts and hospitality apply. The sponsorship should always be related to the Service or corporate activities and never for personal benefit only. Care must be taken when dealing with contractors or potential contractors.

In each case the level of authorisation required for acceptance of sponsorship will need to be considered. For example, simple sponsorship of a local idea, such as a flower box at a fire station, may appropriately be decided at station level. In contrast, sponsorship with a service-wide remit may need to be decided by Senior Management.

Where the Service wishes to sponsor an event or service, neither an employee nor any partner, spouse or relative must benefit from such sponsorship without there being full disclosure to the employee's line manager of any such interest.

Similarly, where the Service, through sponsorship, grant aid, financial or other means gives support in the community, employees must ensure that impartial advice is given and there is no conflict of interest involved.

5.3.2 Political Neutrality and Membership of Organisations

Employees of the Service, whether their role is politically restricted or not, must follow every lawfully expressed policy of the Authority and must not allow their own personal or political opinions to impact with the work and cause detriment of the Service.

When employees are politically restricted (by reason of the post they hold, the nature of the work they do, or the salary they are paid), they must comply with any statutory restrictions on their political activities.

In order to avoid any perceived conflicts of interest, employees who are members of any organisation which is not open to the public without formal membership and commitment of allegiance and which has secrecy about rules of membership or conduct, are invited to declare this membership in the voluntary register of employee's interests kept by the HR Department.

Where employees belong to extremist parties or organisations, their behaviour must not in any way contravene the Service's commitment to Equality of Opportunity in both employment and service delivery.

The Service has adopted a separate Social Media Policy which sets out clear expectations of all workers.

5.4 Contract of Employment

Employee contracts of employment and terms and conditions, and worker contracts of engagement, include contractual obligations which include but are not limited to: health & safety, data protection, disclosure of criminal convictions during employment, inventions or designs and acceptance of gifts.

The following sections set out further specific standards and expectations of our people:

5.4.1 Service Equipment

Employees are expected to take reasonable care to prevent loss or damage to Service equipment, documents, and premises at all times.

Service property should not be removed from Service premises for personal use unless appropriate permission has been given.

As part of the induction process, all employees issued with an email account and those needing to access the internet will be advised of the Service's ICT security requirements

and will be asked to confirm they understand these requirements and their obligations as a user.

There should be no unauthorised access or modification to the Service's computer equipment, programmes or data; and no hardware or software (including computer games) should be installed onto any of the Service's computers.

Employees must not utilise property, vehicles or other Service facilities or resources for personal use unless authorised to do so.

The use of any mobile phone whilst driving on Service business is strictly prohibited unless this is a compliant hands-free device.

5.4.2 Dress Code and Personal Hygiene

The Service expects its employees to present themselves and dress in a professional manner whilst at work and whilst representing the Service.

Where managers feel any employee is dressed inappropriately for the workplace, their concerns will be brought to the attention of the employee. Any employee unclear about the appropriateness of any form of dress should seek guidance from their manager.

The Service provides uniform to operational colleagues which enables them to be appropriately dressed for the range of activities in which they are involved. The officer-in-charge is responsible for ensuring that all employees wear clothing that is suitable for the activity being carried out. Where employees are operating potentially dangerous machinery/equipment and/or working in operational environments, they are not permitted to wear jewellery that could potentially heighten the risk of a safety incident.

6 REFERENCES

Service Policies, Procedures and Supporting Documents

Bullying and Harassment Policy

Data Protection Policy

Dignity at Work

Disciplinary Policy and Procedure

Social Media Policy

Equality and Diversity Policy

Grievance Procedure

Internet Security Policy

Recruitment Policy

Secondary Employment Policy

Social Media Policy

Whistleblowing Policy

Financial Regulations Procedure

Procurement Policies and Procedures

Conditions of Service Handbooks – Grey, Green, Gold

People Strategy

Service Behaviours

The Core Code of Ethics and Guidance for Fire and Rescue Services (England):

Legislation including:

Sex Discrimination Acts 1975 and 1986

Race Relations Act 1976

Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000

Disability Discrimination Act 1995

Equal Pay Act 1970 and Amendment 1983

Equality Act 2010

Human Rights Act 1998

Protection from Harassment Act 1997

Health and Safety and Work Act 1974

Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999

Gender Recognition Act 2004

Employment Equality Regulations 2003

Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003

Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003

Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992

7 REVISION HISTORY

Date	Revision Description	Owner
21/01/22	Reviewed and updated to embed Core Code of Ethics	HR
07/04/22	Hospitality & Gifts email address added	HR