



# Code of Conduct

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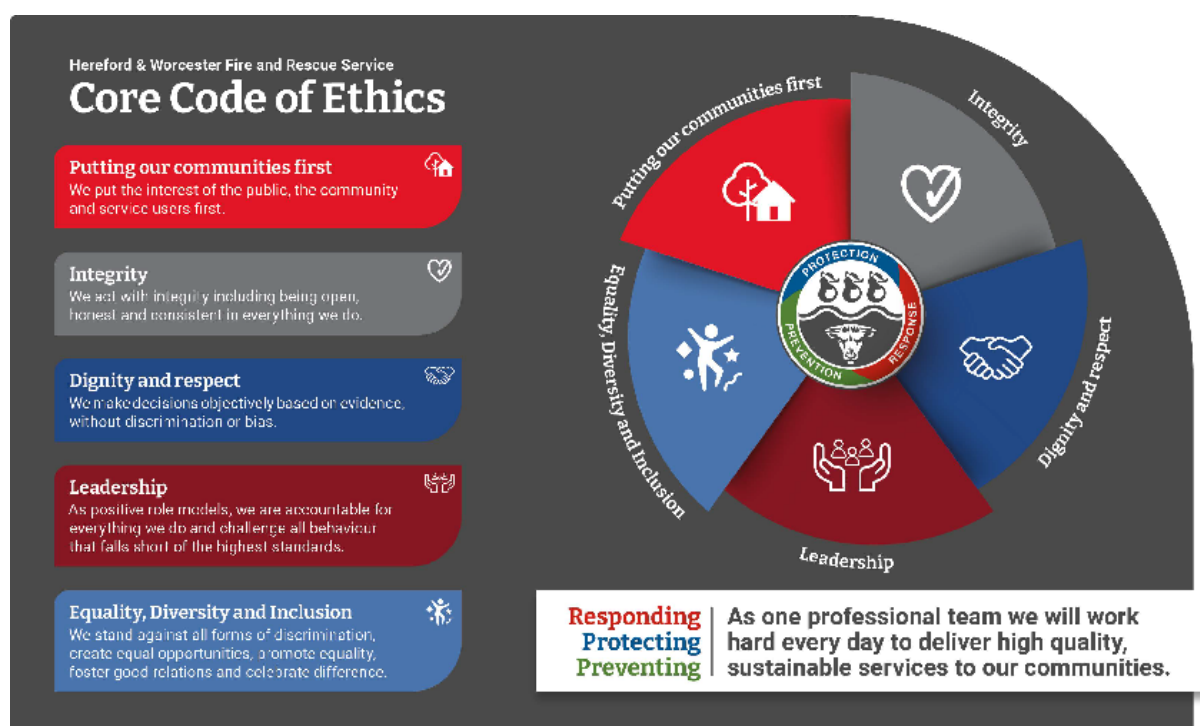
## Executive Summary

This policy clarifies the expectations of the Fire Authority and ensures all employees, volunteers and those working on behalf of, or representing the Authority understand the standards of conduct required.

The Code of Conduct reflects the Code of Ethics Fire Standard and National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) Code of Ethics for Fire and Rescue Services in England, which establishes Fire sector-wide expectations on governance, behaviour and integrity.

## Core Code of Ethics

The [Core Code of Ethics for Fire and Rescue Services](#) sets out five ethical principles, which provide a basis for promoting good behaviour and challenging inappropriate behaviour. The Service is committed to the ethical principles and professional behaviours contained in the Core Code of Ethics, which sets expectations on governance, behaviour and integrity in the Fire Sector. The principles of the Code are reflected in this policy as well.



## Safeguarding Policy Statement:

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility, and Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service (HWFRS) are committed to safeguarding children, young people and adults from abuse and neglect. The Service strives to promote the safety, dignity and wellbeing of staff and people in the community.

Safeguarding practices within HWFRS align to the Safeguarding Fire Standard which aims to ensure that Service support and promote the safeguarding of those within the community, employees and volunteers. [Safeguarding - Fire Standards Board](#)

All HWFRS staff will adhere to the Service's Adult Safeguarding Policy and Children and Young People Safeguarding Policy and associated Guidance. [SPIs \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

**Alternative Formats**

If you require this document in another format please contact the Human Resources Department.

## Contents

1.	Introduction.....	5
2.	Corporate governance.....	5
3.	Responsibilities and expectations of all HWFRS employees .....	6
4.	The Core Code of Ethics .....	7
5.	Contractual obligations – policies and procedures .....	9
6.	Disclosure of criminal investigation .....	10
7.	Disclosure of information under Vetting and Barring procedures and security checks .....	10
8.	Disclosure of personal interests .....	10
9.	Disclosure of information .....	11
10.	Disclosure of professional misconduct .....	11
11.	Disclosure of driving restrictions.....	11
12.	Health and Safety .....	12
13.	Appointments and other employment matters.....	12
14.	Political affiliations .....	12
15.	Trade Union Membership or Non-Membership .....	13
16.	Public Speaking / Media Interviews.....	13
17.	Safeguarding .....	13
18.	Secondary employment.....	14
19.	Use of Social Media.....	14
20.	Standards of dress .....	15
21.	Substance misuse .....	15
22.	Use of information .....	15
24.	Equality Duty .....	16
25.	Discrimination .....	17
26.	Harassment and Bullying (Dignity at Work).....	17
27.	Prevention of Harassment.....	18
28.	Financial Standards.....	19
29.	Expenses, Claims and Working Time.....	19
30.	Procurement and contracts .....	19
31.	Fraud, Corruption and Bribery .....	20
32.	Corruption and Proceeds of Crime .....	20
33.	Personal interests.....	20
34.	Potential Conflicts of Interest.....	20
35.	Gifts and hospitality .....	21
36.	Sponsorship.....	21
37.	Custody and Security of Assets, Stores etc .....	21
38.	Use of IT systems.....	22
39.	Safeguarding of Data and Systems.....	22
40.	Data Protection/GDPR .....	22
41.	Political Neutrality .....	22
42.	Member/Officer Protocol.....	22
43.	The Local Community and Service Users .....	22
44.	Contractors .....	23
45.	Breaches .....	23

# Code of Conduct

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority (the Authority) values its reputation as a trusted and respected public body. The public is entitled to expect the highest standards of conduct from all those who represent the Authority. The purpose of this policy is to clarify the expectations of the Authority and to ensure all employees, volunteers and those working on behalf of the Authority understand the standards of conduct required of them. In doing so this generates a positive working culture and continuously improves the quality of service to the public through our core strategies and Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP).
- 1.2 Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service (HWFRS/Service) is committed to the ethical principles and professional behaviours contained in the National Fire Chiefs Council's (NFCC) Core Code of Ethics which sets expectations on governance, behaviour and integrity for the Fire Sector. Ethical behaviour is crucial to maintain public trust and confidence, and to continue to build a reputation which people value and are aware of.
- 1.3 This Code of Conduct is based on the principles of the NFCC's Core Code of Ethics and will support the Service in continuing to improve the culture and the diversity within it and will also ensure that an ethical approach is embedded into all areas of service.
- 1.4 The Code of Conduct covers, through its different sections:
- our expectations of employee conduct and personal responsibility;
  - the importance of treating others fairly and with respect and the elimination of any form of discrimination;
  - references the key policies and procedures that govern the way in which we do things;
  - relationships between employees/Officers and elected Members;
  - the rules governing fraud, contracts and financial probity, and;
  - the ways in which issues can be raised and addressed.
- 1.5 The Code of Conduct operates alongside statutory employment rights and protections, including those contained within the Employment Rights Act 2025, the Equality Act 2010, whistleblowing protections, health and safety legislation, data protection laws, trade union legislation and all other applicable employment law.
- 1.6 Clarification on the application of this Code of Conduct or relevant policies and procedures should be addressed to line managers, the HR Department, or the owners of the relevant documents.

## 2. Corporate governance

- 2.1 Fire and Rescue Services (FRSs) operate in a rapidly changing environment where new ethical challenges arise on a regular basis. Therefore, staff often have to make decisions in difficult, changing, and unclear situations, often away from the operational arena. The principles within this Code of Conduct should form the basis of ethical

decision making, supplemented by the needs of the FRS, employees, the community, and service users.

- 2.2** As an employer, the Authority also ascribes to the principles of the Independent Committee on Standards in Public Life (the Nolan Committee) which sets out guiding principles for those involved in providing public services.
- 2.3** The Authority has agreed a Constitution (the Constitution) which sets out how the Authority operates, how decisions are made and the procedures which are followed to ensure that these are efficient, transparent and accountable to local communities. Some of these processes are required by law, while others are a matter for the Authority to choose.

### **3. Responsibilities and expectations of all HWFRS employees**

**3.1** HWFRS is committed to upholding the highest standards of conduct and expects all employees, whatever their role, to act at all times in accordance with this expectation in order to maintain the trust and respect of the public and service users. As a basic tenet all employees should act and treat others with respect, dignity and tolerance at all times.

**3.2** Employees are expected to take an active and constructive role in supporting the Service's core strategies and priorities. Employees should contribute to a culture of accountability, collaboration and continuous improvement, ensuring their conduct supports the effective delivery of services. This includes:

- Engaging positively with managers and colleagues, maintaining open and effective communication.
- Taking reasonable initiative in carrying out duties, rather than waiting for detailed instruction where tasks and responsibilities are clear.
- Demonstrating an understanding of how their role contributes to team and organisational goals, and working in a way that supports these priorities.
- Being responsive to direction, feedback, and changing business needs, and adapting their approach accordingly.
- Seeking clarification, support, or development where needed to perform effectively.

**3.3** Whilst at work, employees may discuss, debate and socially interact with other employees and the public, however, employees must treat others with dignity and respect and must not engage in conduct, language or behaviour which is discriminatory, harassing, bullying, intimidating, abusive, unlawful, breaches confidentiality, undermines trust and confidence, or is reasonably likely to bring the Service into disrepute. The Service recognises that individuals may hold lawful beliefs and opinions, including protected beliefs under equality law. Any concerns about expression or conduct will be assessed in context and in a proportionate manner, taking account of the employee's role, the impact of the conduct, whether the conduct was discriminatory or harassing, and the Service's legal obligations.

**3.4** All employees are expected to maintain professional standards of conduct, both whilst at work and in their day-to-day dealings with the wider community, particularly when representing the Service, or whenever in uniform. This can also apply when away from the workplace or in the employee's own time. Employees should seek to ensure their

behaviour does not, or have the potential to, bring the Service into disrepute or adversely affect the dignity of employees or service users, or damage the reputation of the Service or otherwise give rise to criticism of the Service.

- 3.5 Employees have a responsibility to act professionally at all times when at work. This can be defined (but not limited to) as acting fairly, honestly, in good faith and in an impartial way in the delivery of services on behalf of the Authority, and to demonstrate behaviour commensurate with the Code of Conduct.
- 3.6 All employees have a clear responsibility to challenge the inappropriate conduct of others or report a concern to a line manager or other manager where they see or suspect inappropriate behaviour has taken place both in the workplace and by employees outside of the workplace.
- 3.7 Employees are expected and required to raise concerns about misconduct, discrimination, harassment, bullying, safeguarding concerns, health and safety risks, fraud, corruption, data misuse and other serious wrongdoing through the appropriate channels. Any failure to report a serious concern may be considered under this Code where, having regard to the employee's role, knowledge and the circumstances, it was reasonable to expect the concern to be raised.
- 3.8 This requirement also extends to conduct whilst in the workplace, and employees are required to adhere to the policies, procedures and guidance issued by the Service and which are incorporated into and supplement individual Contracts of Employment.
- 3.9 No employee will be subjected to retaliation, victimisation or detriment for raising a genuine concern, making a protected disclosure, supporting an investigation, or declining to participate in unlawful or unsafe conduct.
- 3.10 Specifically, attention is drawn to the Service's Equality Duty policy and Dignity at Work policy, which expresses our commitment to ensure all people are treated fairly and are not subject to discrimination, harassment or bullying by colleagues, contractors or service users.

## 4. The Core Code of Ethics

- 4.1 The Core Code of Ethics are five national principles that have been adopted by the Service and underpin our expectations of all our employees, volunteers and those working with or on behalf of us. The Code principles and how these are demonstrated are summarised below.

**Putting our communities first** – we put the interest of the public, the community and service users first.

To demonstrate this, we:

- act with empathy, compassion, and respect, caring equally for those we deal with
- consider the diverse needs of our communities and tailor our work to best meet their specific needs
- understand and evaluate the impact we have on the public's safety and wellbeing

- continuously improve our performance to better serve the public and our communities
- are an ambassador for the Fire and Rescue Service and a role model in our communities
- identify and remove barriers to people joining or accessing our service(s).

**Integrity** – we act with integrity including being open, honest and consistent in everything we do.

To demonstrate this, we:

- are honest, open, and fair when dealing with everyone
- can evidence our decisions and are able to explain our behaviour
- build trusting relationships and demonstrate an understanding of everyone's roles and responsibilities
- welcome challenge and adapt the way we work and our behaviour as a result of what we learn
- challenge behaviour that does not comply with the Core Code of Ethics and Code of Conduct
- never behave in a way that may cause others to act outside our ethical principles remain impartial and objective
- never act in an improper way, or in a manner that could create a perception of improper behaviour for personal gain. We declare relevant interests and relationships and maintain personal and professional boundaries.

**Dignity and respect** - making decisions objectively based on evidence, without discrimination or bias.

To demonstrate this, we:

- use unbiased judgement and behaviour and act respectfully and with tolerance
- act with decency and impartiality, recognising that unconscious bias can prevent us considering all perspectives and needs when we are making decisions
- do the right thing when delivering services, using the ethical principles set out in this Core Code
- support the development and opportunity of ourselves and our colleagues
- create an environment of openness and trust
- treat people with respect and without discrimination, harassment, or bullying; we actively reject these inappropriate behaviours
- challenge all inappropriate behaviour when we are at work.

**Leadership** – we are all positive role models, always demonstrating flexibility and resilient leadership. We are all accountable for everything we do and challenge all behaviour that falls short of the highest standards.

To demonstrate this, we:

- take responsibility for continuously improving our own performance and the performance of our service
- are accountable to the public, our employer and our colleagues for our decisions and actions
- take responsibility for our actions and their consequences

- address inappropriate behaviour in ways appropriate to our roles
- recognise leaders exist at all levels in the organisation and communities
- always demonstrate the principles of a positive culture of equality, diversity, and inclusion
- are committed to implementing and working by this Core Code

**Equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI)** – we continually recognise and promote the value of EDI both within the FRS and the wider communities in which we serve. We stand against all forms of discrimination, create equal opportunities, promote equality, foster good relations, and celebrate difference.

To demonstrate this, we:

- acknowledge and care about people’s diverse needs so they can access the services they need from us and our service
- provide an environment where everyone has an equal voice
- acknowledge our own unconscious bias and consider everyone’s perspective
- behave in a way that celebrates diversity in all its forms, everywhere
- tackle discriminatory behaviour, policy, and procedure
- do all we can to encourage people from under-represented groups to join our Service and feel welcome
- help everyone to be their best and to always learn from one another.

## 5. Contractual obligations – policies and procedures

5.1 Every employee is issued with a Contract of Employment at the start of their employment (a Main Statement of Terms and Conditions of Employment) which summarises the obligations of the Authority to them as employees, and also the expectations of the Authority in terms of their adherence to the policies and procedures set down to govern conduct in the workplace.

5.2 This Code sets out the standards of conduct expected by the Service. Unless expressly stated otherwise in writing, this Code and associated policies are non-contractual and may be amended from time to time following appropriate consultation. Employees are nevertheless required to comply with this Code and with associated policies and procedures, as failure to do so may result in management action or action under the Disciplinary Policy.

5.3 Whilst this Code cannot set out every eventuality that may arise, it does provide clear direction about the standards that are expected from every employee.

5.4 If you are in any doubt about an issue, particularly if an action on your part may **transgress** this Code, then you should seek advice from your line manager, a senior manager, the HR Department or a trade union representative, if applicable.

5.5 Whilst the contract document details key contractual issues (explicit terms), there are also unwritten but implicit terms that govern the employment relationship and expectations about conduct. These are expectations that can reasonably be expected of any employee in any workplace. The fact that these terms are not written down, does not mean that they are not equally relevant or important.

5.6 There are policies and procedures that underpin your conduct whilst at work and, in some cases, your conduct outside of work where it reflects upon the integrity and

reputation of the Service. These are documents that are subject to consultation and negotiation with Trade Unions, either nationally or locally. These also form part of your employment contract. All such policies and procedures can be found on the Service's SharePoint site.

- 5.7 Employees are always required to strive to demonstrate behaviour which upholds the Code of Conduct. Behaviour which contravenes it will be challenged and may lead to action under the Service's Disciplinary policy.

## **6. Disclosure of criminal investigation**

- 6.1 Employees MUST notify the Service at the earliest opportunity if they are under investigation for a criminal offence, are arrested or are served with a caution or other penalty by a criminal court or police officer (for instance, a restraining order) for their conduct / alleged conduct. Employees who are required to drive Service owned, leased or hired vehicles, or their own vehicle as an essential part of their duties have obligations to notify the Service where they are facing investigation or sanction relating to driving offences. These obligations are set out in the Driving at Work policy.
- 6.2 For the elimination of doubt, all such instances must be reported to an appropriate manager who may take advice from the HR Department or a senior manager. A decision on whether it is appropriate for an employee to continue in the role will be taken on a case by case basis, which may lead to a decision to suspend an employee pending further investigation by the Service under the Disciplinary policy. It should be noted the Service does not need to await the conclusion and outcome of criminal proceedings before reaching its own decision regarding potential misconduct.

## **7. Disclosure of information under Vetting and Barring procedures and security checks**

- 7.1 All new employees are subject to a Baseline Security Check on appointment. All new and current employees and volunteers may also be subject to security and criminal record checks at any time, in accordance with their role. Additionally, some roles will require higher levels of vetting/security checks and criminal record checks which will include disclosure of any spent and unspent criminal convictions. Roles requiring higher levels of vetting or security checks will be subject to re-checking at appropriate intervals. Please refer to the Service's Recruitment and Criminal Record Checks policies.
- 7.2 Employees must notify the Service of any allegations, investigations or restrictions which may affect their role, particularly in relation to access to vulnerable people and children, as they arise. For the elimination of doubt, all such instances must be reported to the HR Department. It should be noted that employees who will work from, or require unsupervised access to shared premises with the Police, will be subject to Police vetting.

## **8. Disclosure of personal interests**

- 8.1 Officers who, by virtue of their role, provide appropriate advice to Members of the Authority (Members) and fellow Officers must do so with impartiality and in the best interests of the Service, and must not allow a private interest to influence a public decision.

- 8.2** Any member of staff who is aware that they, or a member of their close family, has a personal interest in any existing or proposed contract with the Authority must declare this through the register of staff interests even if they are not directly involved in the award of the contract. Please see Register of Staff Interests policy.
- 8.3** Any other personal associations or interest which may influence the impartiality of a decision must also be declared through the Declaration of Staff Interests. This may mean that the individual may be excluded from any meetings, representations or decisions in relation to particular matters in order to protect them and the Authority against any allegation of a conflict of interest. Please see the Register of Staff Interests policy.
- 8.4** Officers who, by virtue of their role, are involved in the awarding of contracts or spending decisions (including income generated through the provision of services) must adhere to Contract Standing Orders and Financial Regulations and must not take any decision in pursuit of a private interest or allow a private interest to influence their decision making.

## **9. Disclosure of information**

- 9.1** The law requires that certain types of information must be available to service users and the public. Employees must check with their manager what sort of information they can give openly and ensure they know what information cannot be disclosed without specific authority. In general, information that is considered to be confidential or exempt, or concerning an individual Officer or service user, or commercially sensitive information about contracts or tenders must not be disclosed (however different rules may apply to information that is given to Members, auditors and government departments). Employees must not prevent another person from gaining access to information to which that person is entitled by law.
- 9.2** Employees must not use any information obtained in the course of their employment for personal gain or benefit, nor must they pass it on to others who might use it in such a way.
- 9.3** Employees who have regular contact with Members, employees/Officers must read and understand the Member/Officer protocol, which contains guidance on disclosure of information to Members.

## **10. Disclosure of professional misconduct**

- 10.1** Employees who are members of professional bodies must disclose to the Service at the earliest opportunity any restrictions, investigations or actions taken in relation to their professional practice. For the elimination of doubt, all such instances must be reported to the line manager.

## **11. Disclosure of driving restrictions**

- 11.1** Employees who are required to drive as part of their normal duties must notify the Service of any restrictions on their ability to hold a current driving license. For the elimination of doubt, all such instances must be reported to the line manager.

- 11.2** Employee who drive Service vehicles, or use their own vehicles on Service business, must adhere to driving regulations at all times to ensure their own safety and that of other road users and passengers. Personal vehicles used on Service business must be road-worthy, taxed and insured for business use. Please see the Driving at Work policy.

## **12. Health and Safety**

- 12.1** It is the responsibility of all employees under Health and Safety legislation to take reasonable care for the health and safety of themselves or of persons who may be affected by their actions or omissions at work.
- 12.2** In addition, for those in operational roles, and due to the physically demanding nature of these roles, it is essential that all operational staff have sufficient levels of fitness to enable them to carry out their roles as safely and effectively as possible. As such, there is a contractual commitment and responsibility under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 for all operational staff to maintain levels of personal fitness. Where an employee reasonably believes they are not fit to undertake their role/s for any reason (fitness, health, fatigue etc), the employee has a duty to raise this with an appropriate manager.
- 12.3** The Service's Health and Safety policies can be found on SharePoint. The Service is committed to establishing safe systems of work, which include specific risk assessments and use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), and all employees are required to adhere to these at all times. A failure to comply with safety instructions, either by act or omission, will result in an investigation and may result in disciplinary action. Any employee failing to maintain or use provided PPE appropriately may be subject to disciplinary proceedings.

## **13. Appointments and other employment matters**

- 13.1** Any personal relationships must be disclosed in advance of engagement in any recruitment or promotion process where impartial judgement could be brought into question. This applies to relationships or association with both internal or external candidates.

## **14. Political affiliations**

- 14.1** The Service respects the rights of individual employees to hold political views, although affiliation to certain political organisations may be deemed incompatible with employment with the Service (see section 14.2 below), however care should be taken to ensure that such views are not in any way associated with an individual's employment with the Service – for instance, by making public statements in a way which references a link to the Service by reference, inference or image. Particular care should be taken when using personal media accounts that any comments or views are distinct from account profiles that may associate the individual with a role with the Service. Please refer to the Social Media Policy.
- 14.2** Membership and/or affiliation with any proscribed groups or organisations banned under UK law, or groups of an extremist and/or prejudiced nature with views that contravene the Service's Code of Conduct will result in disciplinary action.

**14.3** Expressed views should not contravene the Service's Code of Conduct or refer to employees of the Service or to Members of the Fire Authority and should not have the potential to bring the reputation of the Service into disrepute. Employees should take care not to air their political views at work, particularly where such views are unsolicited and may cause conflict or distress to others. Employees who are considering election to public office must raise this with the HR Department. It should be noted that certain roles are restricted through legislation from holding public office. Any complaints or media enquiries regarding the expression of political views by HWFRS employees will be investigated and where required, appropriate action taken in line with the Disciplinary Policy.

## **15. Trade Union Membership or Non-Membership**

**15.1** The Service respects its employees' right to join a trade union of their choice and to participate in collective bargaining. The Service supports the system of collective bargaining and believes in the principle of solving industrial relations issues by discussion and agreement. Equally the Service respects the rights of employees who are not members of a trade union, and no employee who is not a member of a trade union should feel disadvantaged or coerced into joining a trade union.

**15.2** The Service recognises that some employees are also accredited trade union representatives and supports the legitimate activities of these accredited representatives. The Service also expects that they will work within the rules and codes of practice of the union concerned and the Service's Joint Protocol for Industrial Relations when operating in that capacity.

## **16. Public Speaking / Media Interviews**

**16.1** When participating in public meetings, interviews, podcasts or any other form of public communication, employees are expected to:

- Seek approval before participating where they may be identified as representing, or associated with, the Service.
- Present themselves in a professional manner that upholds the reputation, values, and integrity of the Service.
- Avoid making comments, sharing content or expressing views that could undermine public confidence in the Service or bring it into disrepute.

**16.2** If the invitation is extended as a representative of the Service, then care should be taken to express the policies and position of the Service in a factual and unbiased way, and not to express personal opinions. The Corporate and Digital Communications team can provide guidance/training on dealing with the media.

## **17. Safeguarding**

**17.1** The Service has a responsibility to safeguard children (those under 18) and adults who may be considered (by virtue of age, immaturity, disability etc) to be vulnerable and has a duty to report concerns through the appropriate channels. Employees and volunteers must not enter into personal relationships of an intimate nature with any person deemed to be vulnerable (see above) with whom they come into contact through their role with the Service, or in any way use their position or status as an employee or volunteer of the Service to develop such relationships. Any complaints or

suspicious that such relationships exist or where inappropriate conduct is suspected will be investigated. Please refer to the Service's Safeguarding policies.

## **18. Secondary employment**

**18.1** Employees must not undertake any secondary employment without first obtaining approval in line with the provisions of the Secondary Employment policy. Particular attention is drawn to any potential conflicts of interest which may arise, and the restriction on using Service property, equipment (including uniform or PPE) or the name of the Service for business or private use.

## **19. Use of Social Media**

**19.1** The Service recognises that social media including groups and platforms, such as but not limited to Facebook, X and WhatsApp, play an important role in communication and engagement. All employees are expected to use social media responsibly and in a way that upholds the Service's Code of Ethics, Code of Conduct, reputation and public trust.

**19.2** When using social media, whether in an official capacity, in connection with work or for personal use where an individual may be identifiable as a Service employee, individuals must:

- Act in a manner consistent with the Service's Core Code of Ethics and Code of Conduct.
- Treat colleagues, members of the public and partner organisations with dignity and respect.
- Protect confidential, personal and sensitive information and comply with data protection and information security requirements.
- Avoid conduct or comments that could damage the reputation, confidence or integrity of the Service.
- Not engage in bullying, harassment, discrimination, offensive or inappropriate behaviour, including through private or group messaging platforms.
- Exercise professional judgement and recognise that online content may remain accessible and may be shared beyond its original audience.

**19.3** For the avoidance of doubt, if employees are using group messaging apps such as WhatsApp on devices used either for work or with content about work, then they should not have expectations of privacy. Where group messaging apps are used in connection with an individual's duties or where there is a clear connection between their use and an individual's employment, any messages that contain information about colleagues or the Service may be disclosable. This may include disclosure as part of a subject access request process, or in the course of legal or employment tribunal proceedings.

**19.4** Employees should be mindful that personal social media use may still have professional consequences where a connection to the Service can reasonably be made. What is written or shared online, including content that is liked, shared or reposted, may be treated as a matter of conduct and, where appropriate, investigated under relevant Service policies.

**19.5** The creation, management and use of official Service social media accounts, work-related content, photography and video, and the detailed expectations around both personal and professional use of social media are set out in the Social Media Policy. That policy must be followed at all times and should be read alongside this Code of Conduct.

**19.6** Failure to comply with the Service's standards relating to social media may result in action being taken under the appropriate policy, including the Disciplinary Policy.

## **20. Standards of dress**

**20.1** Adherence to required standards of dress are important to ensure that employees operate safely (for instance, the proper use of PPE), present a professional and acceptable standard of appearance to service users and meet expectations about personal hygiene and decency in the workplace. Please refer to the Service's Standards of Dress and Personal Appearance Policy. Whilst employees may be free to express their personal identity by their look, attire and style (for example), all employees must balance this against the requirement to represent the Service in a professional and acceptable manner. Safety, welfare and image will be primary considerations alongside personal expression.

## **21. Substance misuse**

**21.1** The Service has zero tolerance for employees who present for work under the influence of drink, drugs or any other substance which affects their ability to perform safely and competently at work. The Service reserves the right to operate a substance screening process and employees may be required to undergo testing of any reasonable manner in accordance with policy provisions, at any reasonable time. Unreasonable refusal to undergo testing for any form of drugs and alcohol may be construed as gross misconduct. Support is available for employees who declare a drug or alcohol dependency. Please refer to the Service's Substance Misuse policy.

## **22. Use of information**

**22.1** Employees must only access, use or share information held on HWFRS systems (electronic or manual) as part of their normal official duties and following relevant procedures. For requests outside normal duties (e.g. DWP enquiry), check with a Group Commander or officer above (or equivalent) or the Information Governance Officer before responding.

**22.2** Employees must comply with the Service's Data Protection policy using appropriate security when using data, for example, HWFRS ICT equipment and policies, and only using the required amount of necessary personal information needed for an official duty, for example, relevant information at a return to work meeting, debriefs.

**22.3** Employees must avoid identifying details like address or names when talking about work incidents for support from colleagues not involved in the incident, or from family or friends. Employees may not use information obtained in the course of their employment with the Service for personal gain or benefit, nor should they pass it on to others who might use it in such a way. This is particularly, but not only, pertinent to Officers who may be party to confidential information through attendance at Authority meetings, or links to elected Members.

**22.4** Information requested by or released to external bodies, including the media, should be agreed by an appropriately authorised person before disclosure. No information relating to an employee of the Service may be disclosed other than by the HR Department (or approved out of hours process) with guidance when needed provided by the Information Governance Officer. Responses to Freedom of Information (requests for information outside usual day-to-day requests) or Personal Data Information requests (Subject Access requests) must be forwarded to the Information Governance Officer for response. Breaches of data security policies and procedures will be dealt with under the disciplinary procedure.

## **23. Whistleblowing and Speaking up processes**

**23.1** Normally employees should always be able to report any form of concern to an appropriate manager or senior manager, and have confidence the matter will be considered properly, and where necessary confidentially. However, where an employee reasonably believes they cannot openly report an issue there are other confidential ways of reporting concerns.

**23.2** The Authority has a Whistleblowing Policy which enables the confidential reporting of any alleged improper behaviour or action taken by an Officer or manager. Employees are expected, through agreed procedures and without fear of recrimination, to bring to the attention of the appropriate level of management any alleged impropriety, fraud or breach of procedure or significant shortcomings in the provision of an agreed service.

**23.3** The Authority also has a confidential reporting service provided by an external third party for employees to report workplace issues or concerns, where they feel they cannot make a report in the normal way through line management. Reports can be confidential or fully open. Further information can be found on the HR SharePoint.

**23.4** Anyone raising a genuine concern in good faith will be supported. The Service will not tolerate the harassment or victimisation of an individual who raises a concern nor will it tolerate any attempt to bully or discourage an individual from doing so. Any such behaviour is a breach of the Service's values and, if upheld following investigation, could result in disciplinary action.

## **24. Equality Duty**

**24.1** The Service's Commitment to equality is outlined in the Equality Duty policy which reflects our responsibilities under the Equality Act and the Public Sector Equality Duty, and the Core Code of Ethics.

**24.2** All Service employees are required to uphold and conduct themselves in line with the expectations of the Equality Duty policy. To meet the commitment to ensure equal access, this may sometimes mean treating particular service users differently to meet their specific needs i.e. service users with a disability may need to be supported in a different way to those who do not have a disability. This may include considering reasonable adjustments for those with a disability.

**24.3** We may also use measures to encourage under-represented members of the community to engage with recruitment, or prevention activities. In this respect, the

Service is discharging its commitment to inclusion and equality and is not engaging in positive discrimination (which is unlawful).

## **25. Discrimination**

- 25.1** The Service is committed to creating a workplace which is free from direct and indirect discrimination. This is reflected in the way we treat each other and our service users. This forms part of our Code of Conduct. Discrimination may take the form of (but is not restricted to) behaviours, actions and comments which may discriminate on the grounds of: Ethnicity (including race, colour and nationality), Sex, Disability, Age, Sexual orientation, Gender reassignment, Marriage or civil partnership, Pregnancy or maternity or Religion or belief.
- 25.2** The Service will ensure that all our employees understand that any form of discrimination, whether through word or deed, is unacceptable and will investigate and take action to address such behaviour. Every one of our employees has a role to play in creating a workplace where people are accepted for who they are and what they contribute and treat each other, and the people we serve, with respect.

## **26. Harassment and Bullying (Dignity at Work)**

- 26.1** As a basic principle, employees must treat others as they wish to be treated themselves. Employees are expected to challenge or report behaviour which has the effect of undermining, demeaning, victimising or making themselves or others feel uncomfortable – this includes workplace ‘banter’. ‘Banter’ can never be used as an excuse for poor behaviour and all our workplaces are expected to be a professional, friendly, welcoming and respectful environment. Humour, teamwork and friendliness are welcomed and encouraged in our workplaces, but not where this extends to making others feel excluded, uncomfortable or where comments or behaviours stray into any conduct that could be personally demeaning, threatening or offensive either directly or indirectly to others or any other person or party. We believe such behaviour is not only unacceptable, but it is also contrary to our Core Code of Ethics, and we expect everyone to consistently treat others with consideration, courtesy, and respect.
- 26.2** The Service will not tolerate discrimination and inappropriate behaviour in the workplace and the Dignity at Work policy sets out how employees can deal with or raise complaints about unacceptable comments or behaviour. It is expected that inappropriate and unacceptable conduct will always be addressed. However, the best form of regulation is self-regulation and this means taking personal responsibility for our words and actions and their impact. Managers will act where they see, hear of, or receive complaints, about unacceptable behaviour and these will be investigated without exception; even minor issues should be addressed through education and/or training.
- 26.3** The Service expects all employees to develop and support a culture of inclusion and openness where everyone (employees and public) is treated with dignity, respect and courtesy. Whilst employees may not always be fully knowledgeable about all equality and diversity issues, through respectful curiosity they can promote shared learning and understanding. Others’ opinions may be different, but we all have a responsibility to create an environment where people of different identities, perspectives, and backgrounds feel comfortable being their authentic selves and expressing themselves without fear.

## **27. Prevention of Harassment**

- 27.1** The Service is committed to providing a working environment in which all employees, workers, volunteers, contractors and others working on behalf of the Authority are treated with dignity and respect and are free from sexual harassment and other unlawful harassment.
- 27.2** The Service will take all reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment and will take reasonable and proportionate steps to prevent other forms of harassment in the workplace and in work-related settings. This includes harassment occurring during operational duties, training, exercises, meetings, travel, events, work-related social activity, online activity, and communications through digital platforms or messaging services.
- 27.3** The Service will also take reasonable and proportionate steps to protect employees, workers and volunteers from harassment by third parties, including service users, members of the public, contractors, visitors, partner agencies and others encountered in the course of work.
- 27.4** All employees must:
- behave in a way that supports a respectful, professional and inclusive working environment;
  - not engage in conduct which is sexually inappropriate, discriminatory, harassing, bullying, intimidating, humiliating, degrading or offensive;
  - report incidents, concerns, or patterns of harassment, including harassment by third parties, through the appropriate reporting channels;
  - co-operate with reasonable steps taken by the Service to prevent, investigate and address harassment; and
  - complete mandatory training relating to dignity at work, equality, inclusion and harassment prevention, including refresher training where required.
- 27.5** Managers must take prompt and appropriate action where concerns are raised or where they observe, suspect, or become aware of potential harassment. This includes taking concerns seriously, addressing immediate risks, seeking HR advice where appropriate, maintaining appropriate confidentiality, keeping suitable records, and considering whether informal resolution, formal action, safeguarding action, or other measures are required.
- 27.6** No employee will be subjected to retaliation, victimisation or detriment for raising a genuine concern, making a complaint, supporting another person's complaint, acting as a witness, or making a protected disclosure relating to harassment. Any such retaliation or victimisation may itself be treated as a disciplinary matter.
- 27.7** Any allegation of harassment will be considered seriously and addressed in accordance with the Dignity at Work Policy, the Disciplinary Policy, the Whistleblowing Policy and any other relevant Service procedure. Outcomes will be determined on a case-by-case basis, taking account of the circumstances, seriousness, impact, safeguarding issues, operational risk and the need for a fair and proportionate process.

## **28. Financial Standards**

**28.1** The Financial Regulations and Guidance set out the policies and procedures which apply to all financial transactions undertaken by the Authority, its designated budget holders and employees.

**28.2** A failure to comply with financial regulations may lead to action under the Disciplinary policy and may, in certain circumstances, be investigated as criminal fraud or contraventions of the standards applied to public sector employees.

## **29. Expenses, Claims and Working Time**

**29.1** Employees must ensure that all claims for expenses incurred during authorised duty, overtime or the accrual of flexitime/TOIL are accurate, properly authorised and recorded in accordance with the relevant policies and procedures.

**29.2** Only expenses and working time necessarily incurred in the course of authorised duties may be claimed and recorded. Employees are responsible for ensuring all submissions are complete, accurate, within the limits established, and supported by appropriate evidence.

**29.3** Employees must not:

- Exaggerate or falsify hours worked, overtime claims or flexi time balances;
- Submit claims without proper authorisation;
- Record working time that was not worked, or record time for personal activities as work;
- Approve their own expenses or overtime.

**29.4** Claims must not be exaggerated, duplicated or submitted for personal gain. The submission of false, misleading or fraudulent claims, will be treated as a serious breach of this Code and may result in disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal, and/or referral to the appropriate authorities.

## **30. Procurement and contracts**

**30.1** The Service has policies in place for the management of procurement and contractual arrangements for services or goods provided. Employees must follow the procurement processes, and all goods and services must be processed through the finance system. A failure to follow these procedures may result in investigation and disciplinary action.

**30.2** If involved in the tendering process, the appointment of contractors, employees/Officers must be clear on the separation of client and contractor roles within the Authority. Confidential matters on tenders or costs for either internal or external contractors must not be disclosed to any unauthorised party or organisation. Officers must ensure that no special favour is shown to current or recent former Officers or their partners, close relatives or associates in awarding contracts to businesses run by them or employing them in a senior or managerial capacity.

**30.3** The Authority's Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Statement sets out the minimum standards to prevent modern slavery in our supply chains and own business.

## **31. Fraud, Corruption and Bribery**

- 31.1** The Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Corruption policy sets out the commitment of the Authority in dealing with allegations of fraud and corruption. It represents the position held by the Authority in respect of the confidential reporting of incidence of fraud and corruption that may amount to breach of the law. The Director of Finance and Treasurer is responsible for its implementation and monitoring.
- 31.2** The Authority expects all employees, elected Members, suppliers, contractors, partners and service users to be fair and honest in their dealings with the Authority and provide any help, information and support needed to deal with fraud and corruption. The Authority has in place a framework of checks and controls that are designed to reduce the likelihood of fraud occurring and will review the elements of this framework on a regular basis, especially if any problems come to light.

## **32. Corruption and Proceeds of Crime**

- 32.1** It is a serious criminal offence to corruptly 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 an official capacity.
- 32.2** If an allegation is made, it is for the employee/Officer to demonstrate that any such rewards have not been corruptly obtained. Individuals must not show favouritism or give preferential treatment of friends, partners or relations in the allocation of Authority services or benefits. Employees/Officers must report to the Director of Finance any dealings that they become aware of where they suspect the money involved may have been acquired through illegal practices whether or not that money relates to those of any contractor or third party with whom the Authority may be involved.

## **33. Personal interests**

- 33.1** The Service retains a list of registered interests of its employees, which is regularly updated as outlined in the Staff Register of Interests policy. Employees must declare any interest they may have where they may influence the decision of the Authority, and particularly where they, or a relative, friend or associate, may benefit financially from such a decision. In this case, they will be expected to withdraw from any part of the decision-making process. For the avoidance of doubt, always declare a potential interest so that a judgement can be made. Any changes to existing declarations of interests must be notified to the Monitoring Officer within 28 days.

## **34. Potential Conflicts of Interest**

- 34.1** Employees/Officers must declare to their line manager any personal interests that could bring about conflict with the Authority's interests. These may be a personal interest in a matter if that matter affects the wellbeing or financial position of an individual, their relatives or their friends more than it would affect other people in the Authority's area. Such an interest may be either non-financial or financial. Personal interests would include the following:
- membership or involvement with an organisation or pressure group which may seek to influence the Authority's policies;
  - any financial interests which could conflict with the Authority's interests;

- membership of any organisation not open to public without formal membership and with a commitment of allegiance which has secrecy about rules of membership or conduct;
- membership of any organisation which is involved with the Authority in any formal way such as through any decision-making process;
- involvement with a corporate body involved in commercial dealings with the Authority.

**34.2** Any disclosure of interest will be recorded and reviewed at least annually. If present at a meeting of the Authority, such as committee, when a matter in which any of the above interests are being discussed, an Officer should, in accordance with the Authority's rules, declare their interests and leave the meeting unless the Members ask them to stay.

**34.3** Any manager who receives a declaration of interest from an Officer must seek the advice of an appropriate Officer of the Authority as listed below before authorising any action if they are at all unsure about the appropriateness of the action concerned:

- Chief Fire Officer;
- Deputy Chief Fire Officer;
- Assistant Chief Fire Officer;
- Assistant Chief Officer;
- Monitoring Officer/ Clerk to the Fire Authority
- Director of Finance & Treasurer

## **35. Gifts and hospitality**

**35.1** From time to time employees may be offered gifts in the form of free tickets, discounts or hospitality (this is not an exhaustive list) by external companies or other organisations in relation to their job. Simple items such as inexpensive pens, diaries and calendars are often distributed as advertising materials and are perfectly acceptable. Any other gifts and offers must be politely refused and recorded on the Corporate Gifts and Hospitality Register. Please refer to the Register of Staff Interests policy.

## **36. Sponsorship**

**36.1** The Service may sometimes receive offers of sponsorship to groups that undertake activities that we may wish to support. Employees may not agree to sponsorship arrangements without authority to do so, or act in any manner which would lead to the financial gain for themselves, a family member, friend or associate. Permission to accept any form of external sponsorship or funding for Service related activities including charitable work must be declared and approval for significant sponsorship, should normally be approved by an SLB member.

## **37. Custody and Security of Assets, Stores etc**

**37.1** Employees have a responsibility to properly use and safeguard money, property and equipment belonging to the Authority. Loss, misuse, negligence or criminal activity which results in a financial loss to the Service may lead to the Service seeking

restitution by those employees involved. In the case of potential criminal action, the Service will refer the matter to the Police.

- 37.2** All issued clothing and equipment remain the property of the Service and may be required to be returned at any time. Service equipment and clothing may only expressly be used for routine Service and permitted purposes; any other uses away from Service duties must receive SLB permission, including trade union activities.

## **38. Use of IT systems**

- 38.1** The Service has policies governing the use of its IT systems and equipment. These must always be adhered to. Employees must familiarise themselves with these policies, and seek the advisement of the ICT department if in any doubt.

## **39. Safeguarding of Data and Systems**

- 39.1** All employees have a duty to retain the security of Service systems and data and must only access those parts of the ICT system that they are personally authorised to use. Personal logins and passwords must be protected and never be transferred or shared between employees or others. If an employee believes their password or equipment has been compromised in any way they shall immediately report it to ICT.

## **40. Data Protection/GDPR**

- 40.1** The Service has a Data Protection Policy. The proper use and safeguarding of data, particularly personal data, is critical and all employees are required to manage data in a secure, confidential and appropriate way. Breaches of the Data Protection policy may be investigated under the disciplinary procedure.

## **41. Political Neutrality**

- 41.1** Employees serve the Authority as a whole. It follows they must serve all Members and must ensure that the individual rights of all Members are respected. Some senior employees may also be required to advise political groups. They must do so in ways which do not compromise their political neutrality. Certain roles are “politically restricted” and must adhere to restrictions in place. Further information is in the Authority’s Constitution.

## **42. Member/Officer Protocol**

- 42.1** Officers who, as part of their roles, have regular contact with Members, must adhere to the Member/Officer Protocol which contains guidance on disclosure of information to Members of the Authority. Please refer to the Protocol for Member/Officer Relations as outlined in the Authority’s Constitution.

## **43. The Local Community and Service Users**

- 43.1** Employees must always remember their responsibilities to the community they serve and ensure courteous, efficient and impartial service delivery to all groups and individuals within the community as defined by the policies of the Authority.

## **44. Contractors**

- 44.1** All relationships of a business or private nature with external contractors, or potential contractors, must be known to the appropriate manager. Orders and contracts must be awarded on merit in accordance with the Authority's Financial and Contracts Rules and the Best Value regime and no special favour must be shown to businesses run by, for example, friends, partners or relatives in the tendering process.
- 44.2** No part of the local community must be discriminated against. If employees 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 the contractors, they must declare that relationship at the earliest opportunity to their manager.
- 44.3** Where contractors are operating on Service properties or carrying out works associated with the Fire and Rescue Service, any conduct deemed to breach the Service's expected standards of behaviour will result in immediate termination of any contract or works and subsequent investigation. Contractors deemed to have breached any such standards may be barred from undertaking work for the Authority in the future.
- 44.4** The Service will take action where the conduct of contractors, partners or service users places employees or volunteers at risk of harassment or abuse, including withdrawal of services or termination of contracts.

## **45. Breaches**

- 45.1** Any breach of these codes will result in investigation and possible disciplinary action. In certain circumstances, breaches may also lead to criminal investigations.