

## WEST MIDLANDS FIRE SERVICE CODE OF CONDUCT

### 1. PRINCIPLES

The public is entitled to expect the highest standards of conduct from all employees of the West Midlands Fire Service (WMFS). Employees are expected to observe certain standards of behaviour and to bring to light any irregularity in behaviour or procedure. An employee of West Midlands Fire Service should not put themselves in a position where duty and private interests conflict.

#### Core Values

West Midlands Fire Service has adopted the National Fire and Rescue Service Core Values to give the Service a clear and consistent picture of its guiding principles. The Corporate Strategy is about what we will do and the Core Values are about how we will do it. The Core Values are concerned with the behaviours we wish to support and develop within the organisation and we expect all employees to adopt and demonstrate these behaviours which include:

- honesty;
- integrity;
- mutual trust;
- co-operation;
- respect;
- taking responsibility;
- open mindedness;
- learning from our experience;
- including and consulting others;
- considering constructive criticism; and
- challenging prejudice and discrimination.

This is not an exhaustive list.

This policy relates to employees of the WMFS; the elected members of the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority have adopted the National Code of Local Government Conduct as set out in the schedule to the Local Authorities (Model Code of Conduct) Order 2007 (SI. 2007 No.1159).

### 2. STANDARDS

As a public sector organisation, WMFS must provide a transparent and ethical service, one which is cost effective and efficient. Employees are accountable to the public for their actions and the way in which they carry out their responsibilities. In order to do this, all employees must:

- be diligent, honest and ethical in the performance of their duties;
- give their services in a professional and competent manner in willing co-operation with others;
- co-operate fully and honestly with any scrutiny appropriate to their role;
- make sure their personal and professional life does not adversely affect the Service's standing and reputation;
- comply with WMFS policies, procedures and legal requirements, including those on equality and diversity;
- making sure public funds and Service resources are used in a responsible and lawful manner;
- be polite and courteous in their behaviour at all times; and
- dress appropriately maintaining a high standard of tidiness.

In addition, employees must be aware of and maintain political neutrality, not allowing their own personal or political opinions to interfere with their work. Some posts are politically restricted and must comply with any statutory restrictions on political activities (see Standing Order 1/13 Restrictions on Political Activities).

## **2.1 Disclosure of information**

The law requires that certain information must be available to Members, auditors, government departments, service users and the public. Information must only be disclosed in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998. Please make reference to Standing Order 2/16 Data Protection Act 1998 and Disclosure of Information which details how we manage our information and data.

Employees should not use or pass on any information obtained in the course of their employment for personal gain or benefit.

## **2.2 Political neutrality**

Employees serve the WMFS as a whole and serve Members of the Fire Authority equally. Any dealings with Councillors and/or political groups should not compromise the employee's political neutrality.

Employees must follow every lawful expressed policy of the Authority and must not allow their own personal or political opinions to interfere with their own work. However, it is recognised that this does not include personal opinions that reflect the Core Values of the organisation, for example, valuing diversity. See Standing Order 1/13 Restriction on Political Activities which details posts that are restricted under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

## **2.3 Appointment**

Employees should not be involved in an appointment where they are related to an applicant or have a close personal relationship outside work with him or her.

Similarly employees should not be involved in decisions relating to discipline, promotion, or pay adjustments for another employee who is in a close personal relationship. See paragraph 2.11.1.

## **2.4 Outside commitments**

### **2.4.1 Outside Employment**

All employees should not take outside employment which conflicts with the Authority's interests and Core Values, irrespective of whether or not the work is paid. See Standing Order 2/25 Secondary Employment for guidance.

No outside work should be undertaken in the service and use of facilities is forbidden. Correspondence and incoming calls relating to outside work are not allowed.

### **2.4.2 Networking sites**

Employees who use social networking websites (for example Facebook, Twitter and Myspace) and identify that they work for WMFS need to ensure that their representation does not conflict with that of the WMFS Core Values and does not bring the WMFS into disrepute. See Standing Order 1/20 Internet Acceptable Use Policy.

## **2.5 Personal interests**

Employees must declare to their line manager any personal interests that could bring about conflict with the WMFS interests. Such an interest may be financial or non-financial.

Personal interests would include the following:

- acting as a school governor;
- membership or involvement with an organisation receiving grant aid from the Authority;
- memberships of any organisation not open to the public without formal membership and commitment of allegiance and which has secrecy about rules or membership or conduct (for example, Freemasons); and

- membership of any organisation which is involved with the Authority in any formal way such as through any decision making process.

Employees needing to declare interests should see Standing Order 02/15 Declaration of Membership of External Organisations and Acceptance of Donations, Gifts and Hospitality.

## **2.6 Procurement**

Employees who have responsibility to both procure and provide services must be clear on the separation of the roles related to the provision of services within the WMFS and be aware of the need for accountability and openness. Fairness and impartiality must be exercised when dealing with all customers, suppliers, other contractors and sub-contractors. Please refer to Standing Order 1/8 Procurement Procedures.

## **2.7 Corruption**

It is a serious offence for employees to ask for or receive any gift, loan, fee, reward or advantage for doing, or not doing anything or showing favour, or disfavour, to any person in their official capacity.

See Standing Order 1/8 Procurement Procedures and Standing Order 1/22 Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy.

## **2.8 Use of financial resources**

Employees must ensure that they use public funds in a responsible and lawful manner. They should strive to ensure value for money (see Value for Money Strategy available on SPIRIT's intranet site).

Employees should also be aware of Standing Orders on contracts and financial and administrative regulations and any other Routine Notices and comply with them.

## **2.9 Social events**

When representing WMFS at official functions or taking part in work-related social events your activities there may affect your work, your working relationships and the image of the Service.

Such social events can take place on WMFS premises or away from the workplace and outside normal working hours, but certain principles of conduct should be observed for the protection and comfort of all, which include:

- responsible use of alcohol;
- no use whatsoever of any illegal drugs; and
- awareness of your behaviour, activities or language that may offend, intimidate, bully, harass, embarrass or upset another person, whether meant as a joke or not.

Breaches of the above may lead to disciplinary action under the Service's policies and procedures. The principles are to make sure that everyone can enjoy work-related social events in an atmosphere of friendliness without feeling uncomfortable about anyone else's conduct. See Standing Order 16/11 Misuse of Alcohol, Drugs and Other Substances.

## **2.10 Dress and appearance**

All employees are required to be clean, tidy, presentable and safe whilst at work, either at WMFS premises or elsewhere. Uniformed employees should adhere to the principles outlined in Standing Order 7/3 Wearing of Uniform. Non-uniformed employees should dress appropriately to the situation, circumstances and environment in which their work takes them, taking into consideration the professionalism and image of the Service and business conventions.

If an employee's appearance is considered by the Service Manager to be unacceptable, the employee will be asked to return home to change. In these circumstances, the employee will not be paid for the duration of his or her absence from work. Any decision by the Manager on an employee's appearance will take into consideration issues of race, gender, age, disability, religious belief and sexual orientation, whilst

ensuring that the professionalism, image, health and safety regulations and public perceptions of the Service are maintained.

WMFS uniform must not be worn to canvass or promote other causes for personal gain by using their position as a WMFS employee to gain sympathy and therefore potentially gain financial or other rewards.

## **2.11 Working relationships**

All employees are entitled to enjoy harmonious working relationships with colleagues and managers without fear of bullying, harassment or prejudice.

See the Standing Orders 2/13 Equality and Diversity and Standing Order 2/17 Workplace Harassment and Bullying.

### **2.11.1 Close personal and family relationships**

The Service values, and relies upon, the professionalism and integrity of its employees and should employees have a close personal or family relationship with another employee, their behaviour must be appropriate. Improper behaviour, abuse of authority or conflicts of interest will not be tolerated.

Close personal relationships are defined as employees who are married, dating or co-habiting. Family relations are defined as immediate family members (parents, children, siblings, grandparents or grandchildren, aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces and nephews).

### **2.11.2 Responsibilities**

#### **Employees**

Close personal relationships where an employee manages, or is managed by, an employee with whom they share a close personal relationship must be declared.

Employees should make sure that their relationship does not interfere with their work. They are expected to conduct themselves in a professional manner and to deal sensitively with any confidential information which they may possess.

#### **Managers**

Managers should deal with close personal relationships at work sensitively and effectively, looking at the individual circumstances and taking into account natural justice and equal opportunities.

Managers need to consider whether operational employees who share a close personal or family relationship should work on the same watch. This is due to the interest of health and safety and any conflict of interest.

## **2.12 Canvassing Members of the Authority**

To ensure that WMFS is impartial and unbiased, restrictions are placed on employees of WMFS having, or seeking, contact with Members of the Authority in relation to their work in WMFS.

Employees should only attend meetings with Members of the Authority, or a constituent authority, in their official capacity, unless a meeting is convened by, or with the approval of, the Chief Fire Officer. This does not preclude attendance at Authority meetings as a member of the public or where employees are constituents of the Authority Members. An exception to this would be a trade union official acting in accordance with their trade union duties.

Employees should not make personal appeals, written or oral, direct or indirect to Members of the Authority or co-opted members of a Committee or Sub-Committee and should not canvas support from other employees for matters concerning their employment with the Authority. Employees should utilise internal employment procedures and policies to resolve workplace disputes.

## **2.13 Publications, broadcasts, distribution of information and lectures**

Employees, who choose to share their opinions, must make it clear that they are their personal views and not the views of the WMFS. No opinions should be expressed about the Service or Authority policies and any interviews given to the media about incidents

attended by the Service should be purely factual and in line with the guidance in Standing Order 01/24 Communications Strategy.

## **2.14 Equality issues**

Employees should ensure that policies relating to equality issues are complied with in addition to the requirements of the law.

## **2.15 Criminal charges**

WMFS employees facing criminal charges, including for example arrests and cautions will give notice of this, without delay, to their line manager. Employees are required to give notification in all circumstances, whether they personally feel the matter is relevant or not.

All employees who find themselves party to such knowledge must at all times maintain the strictest confidence.

See Standing Order 2/1 Disciplinary Procedure.

## **2.16 Confidentiality**

Employees must be aware which information the WMFS is, and is not, open about and to whom it can be released. They must also be aware of their legal or professional duty to disclose information.

Employees should not use any Service information for personal gain or benefit, nor pass it on to others who might use it in such a way. All employees should be aware of the legal requirements covered by the Data Protection Act.

See Standing Order 2/16 Data Protection Act and Disclosure of Information.

## **2.17 Breach of the code**

Breach of this code by an employee will be regarded as a disciplinary offence. Serious breach will be regarded as gross misconduct.

## **3. CROSS REFERENCES**

Standing Order 1/13 Restrictions on Political Activities

Standing Order 1/15 Copyright, Designs and Patents

Standing Order 1/8 Procurement Procedures

Standing Order 1/22 Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy

Standing Order 1/23 Media Relations Policy

Standing Order 1/24 Communications Strategy

Standing Order 2/1 Disciplinary Procedure

Standing Order 2/2 Grievance Procedure

Standing Order 2/7 Capability Procedure

Standing Order 2/13 Equality and Diversity Policy

Standing Order 2/15 Declaration of Membership of External Organisations and Acceptance of Donations, Gifts and Hospitality

Standing Order 2/16 Data Protection Act and Disclosure of Information

Standing Order 2/17 Workplace Harassment and Bullying

Standing Order 2/20 Whistle Blowing Policy

Standing Order 2/25 Secondary Employment Policy

Standing Order 2/34 Criminal Records Information Policy

Standing Order 7/3 Wearing of Uniform

Standing Order 16/11 Misuse of Alcohol, Drugs and Other Substances

## **4. KEY CONSULTEES**

## **5. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

A Full Impact Assessment has been carried out which found no adverse affects.

## **6. OWNERSHIP**

This Order has been noted and approved by the Standards Committee.

## **7. RESPONSIBILITY AND REVIEW/AMENDMENT DETAILS**

### **7.1 Responsible Corporate Board Member/Department**

Director Human Resources/HR Employee Relations Team.

### **7.2 Created/fully reviewed/amended**

This Order has been created by the Employee Relations Team in December 2009.