



## Local Public Services Senior Managers: Code of Ethics

### Introduction

Outstanding people tirelessly deliver local public services<sup>1</sup> and serve communities across the UK each and every day. There are few sectors with the breadth and scope to impact positively on so many individual lives. It is a great privilege to work in roles that perform such a critical role and there are few professions where great works create such a visible and immediate impact. Senior leaders in local public services carry the responsibility of ensuring our efforts are focused in the most positive and effective manner, and are performed in the knowledge that, whilst the benefits can be enormous, the risks can also be great.

The great majority of individuals working as senior professionals in local public services act with honesty and integrity. However, any unprofessional behaviour detracts from the important service provided to the public and harms the profession's reputation and with it, the ability to perform effectively. This code of ethics outlines the principles of behaviour that promote and reinforce the highest standards from everyone in senior professional leadership roles across our local public services.

The professional bodies of senior managers (see text box) across local public services have come together to develop a code of ethics for their members.

The code is an overarching statement of ethics, based upon behaviours and therefore focus on the individual, as opposed to group or organisational culture.

It is intended to be applicable to all those who hold senior management roles in local public services led by locally elected politicians.

The expectation of our residents and the professional bodies is that every senior manager working in local public services will adopt the code of ethics. This includes those engaged

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<sup>1</sup> Defined by this guidance as local public services led by locally elected politicians.

#### Professional Bodies:

- Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers
- Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accounting
- Lawyers in Local Government
- Association of Directors of Adult Social Services
- Association of Directors of Children's Services
- Public Sector People Managers' Association
- Association of Directors of Environment, Planning and Transport
- Association of Directors of Public Health
- Association of Policing and Crime Chief Executives
- Chief Fire Officers' Association



on a permanent, temporary, full-time, part-time, casual, consultancy, contracted or voluntary basis.

All staff in senior roles are critical role models. Good leadership will encourage ethical behaviour throughout the sector. Those who are valued, listened to and well led are likely to feel a greater sense of belonging, and so are more likely to act with integrity.

The code draws from, and in most cases be consistent with, a number of existing resources, most significantly the 'Principles of Public Life' published by the Committee on Standards in Public Life in 1995. A number of senior professionals within local public services will already be subject to specific professional codes of ethics and behaviour and this code does not replace these professional codes which are likely to be more detailed in nature.



## **Selflessness**

Senior managers should act solely in terms of the public interest

- Put the people you serve first
- Advise wisely and implement faithfully
- Ensure the need to speak truth to power, challenge impropriety or investigate wrongdoing comes before your own popularity or career prospects
- Carry out your obligations and duties to the best of your ability and seek additional training or support where necessary.
- Support your colleagues in their work
- Demonstrate an efficient and effective use of public resources
- Consider the changing needs and expectations of local communities, and do what is necessary and proportionate to address them
- Be faithful to your organisation's purpose

## **Integrity**

Senior managers should avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try to influence them inappropriately in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They should declare and resolve any interests and relationships.

- Show courage in doing what you believe is right
- Ensure decisions and actions are not influenced by improper considerations or personal gain
- Neither solicit nor accept the offer of any gift, gratitude or hospitality that could, or be seen to, compromise your impartiality
- Do not use your position to inappropriately coerce any person or settle personal grievances
- Remain composed and respectful, even in the face of provocation
- Ensure that any relationship at work does not create an actual or apparent conflict of interest
- Take a personal responsibility to assess whether we have performed appropriately

## **Objectivity**

Senior managers should act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best available evidence and without discrimination or bias

- Proactively seek evidence in advance of making decisions
- Promote evidence-led decision making
- Keep an open mind and do not prejudge situations or individuals
- Be aware of the influence that unconscious biases can have on your actions and decisions



- Use all information, training, equipment and management support you are provided with and take personal responsibility for your continuous professional development and keeping yourself up to date on your role and responsibilities
- Actively seek or use opportunities to promote equalities and diversity and uphold the law regarding human rights and equalities
- Ensure frameworks for decision making are robust, legal and sound
- Ensure political decision makers have access to balanced, accurate and well-informed advice, even when it is counter to the prevailing orthodoxy or when they do not want to receive it

### **Accountability**

Senior managers are accountable for their decisions and actions and should submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

- Take full responsibility for, and be prepared to explain and justify, your actions and decisions and those made within your span of responsibility to the public.
- Encourage challenge and review of decision making to ensure that good practice is identified and lessons are learned.
- Ensure the appropriate accurate records of your decisions and actions are kept
- Safeguard confidential information and ensure the protection of personal data to comply with both FOI and Data Protection legislation

### **Openness**

Senior managers should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for doing so.

- Share information with colleagues, partners and the public when required for legitimate purposes and in a way that respects democratic decision making.
- Ensure briefings are made available to all political groups and not just those in positions of power
- Seek to create cultures that embrace learning, scrutiny and continuous improvement
- Model a presumption of transparency
- Share information in a manner that promotes accessibility

### **Honesty**

Senior managers should act with sincerity and respect the need for truthfulness.

- Do not knowingly make false, misleading or inaccurate oral or written statements
- Ensure all communications seek to actively engage and inform the audience
- Be mindful of wilful blindness and ensuring the appropriate checks and balances are in place which guard individuals and organisations
- Be prepared to challenge and be challenged
- Promote a culture that supports and encourages whistleblowing.

## **Leadership**

Senior managers should exhibit in their own behaviour the 'Principles of Public Life' published by the Committee on Standards in Public Life. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour, including by all those employed to deliver local public services and elected representatives wherever it occurs

- Step forward, take control and be proactive when required by the circumstances
- Never ignore unethical or unprofessional behaviour by a colleague or elected member, irrespective of the person's role
- Proactively question the conduct of colleagues or elected members that you believe falls below the expected standards and, if necessary, challenge, report or take action against such conduct
- Ensure your behaviour is not, and could not reasonably be perceived to be abusive, oppressive, harassing, bullying, victimising or offensive by the public or your colleagues
- Use your authority only in ways that are proportionate, lawful, respectful, accountable, necessary and ethical
- Seek feedback on your behaviour and management style in order to actively pursue continuous professional development

## **Democracy**

Senior managers should uphold the principles of a representative government and ensure the effective working of the democratic process

- Uphold the democratic process
- Do not engage in party political promotion and ensure you do not place yourself in a position where your political impartiality may be reasonably questioned
- Use your right and responsibility to voice your opinion on public issues but advocate for issues of personal interest only when doing so does not conflict with the performance of your professional duties