

Code of Conduct

1. Introduction

This Code of Conduct applies to all Committee Members and Staff of the organisation including volunteers. It is also expected all service users, customers, clients, suppliers, partners of the organisation will respect and follow principles underpinning this Code.

The organisation is committed to maintaining high standards of conduct in all areas of its activities. It relies on all its Committee Members and Staff to observe these high standards in relation to the affairs of the organisation and its relationship with service users, customers, clients, suppliers, staff, committee members, volunteers, advisors and the communities in which it operates.

The main objective of this Code is to alert all associated with the organisation to the areas which are of particular importance. It should be noted, this may include conduct likely to bring the organisation into disrepute or undermine its managerial integrities. This includes conduct taking place out with the normal working environment such as posting information on social media where it risks bringing the organisation into disrepute, staff parties, organisational functions or other work related social events.

Where it is not possible to hold a face-to-face meeting, these may be conducted remotely. The organisation will ensure staff and their representatives have access to the necessary technology for participating and this policy will also cover those remote work engagements.

For staff this document forms part of a contract of employment and will be changed from time to time in line with current best practice and statutory requirements and to ensure business needs are met. Staff will be consulted in advance of any proposed changes with those required by law being implemented with or without staff consent.

2. Policy Principles

The following principles underpin this Code of Conduct:

- Accountability – accept accountability for decisions and actions and accept whatever scrutiny is appropriate internally and/or by external bodies and stakeholders.
- Honesty – Declare any private interest relating to duties and take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way which is lawful and protects the reputation values and mission of the organisation.
- Integrity – avoid having any (financial or other) obligations to individuals or organisations which might influence decision making on behalf of the organisation.
- Leadership – support and promote these principles and lead by example.
- Objectivity – Ensure in the delivery of services, the selection of staff and awarding of contracts, impartiality is maintained and base decisions on merit alone.
- Openness – be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions taken. Give reasons for decisions and restrict information only when individual or commercial confidentiality clearly so demands.
- Selflessness – take decisions solely on the basis of the values and objectives of the organisation. Do not make decisions in order to personally gain financial or other material benefits.

3. Dealing with Breaches

Where this Code is breached by staff, such matters will fall to be considered under the organisation's disciplinary procedure up to and including gross misconduct dismissal.

In the event of a committee member being alleged to be in breach of the Code, the matter will be referred to the Chair or suitable sub-committee in the first instance. The matter will initially be dealt with informally and confidentially between the Chair and a committee member (if the Chair is subject to an alleged breach then another office bearer). Should this fail or should the matter be more serious then, the Chair (or another office bearer) will nominate a panel consisting of the committee members to investigate the matter.

The investigation will be carried out either by the panel itself or an external and independent investigator may be engaged. Once an investigation is complete, the nominated panel will recommend next steps, which may include the Committee having the member censured or required to leave the committee.

4. Roles and responsibilities

The committee and senior official(s) should ensure a clear understanding of their respective roles in relation to maintaining standards amongst staff and committee members. Such arrangements will vary according to organisational size and status.

5. General Conduct

All associated with the organisation are expected to carry out their duties in accordance with the organisation's policies and procedures.

High standards of personal conduct are expected of all committee members and staff at all times including courtesy, efficiency, reliability, respect, sobriety and punctuality.

6. Sexual Harassment

The organisation will take all reasonably practical steps to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace through training and educating staff and volunteers on acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. The organisation will protect staff and volunteers from being subjected to any inappropriate or lewd behaviour by colleagues and third parties including contractors, visitors and service users. Anyone who is subject to such harassment should inform their line manager or another appropriate manager as soon as possible who will treat the matter seriously and confidentially and will carry out a fair and full investigation. Staff subjected to any such behaviours will be offered support such as counselling and temporary or permanent alterations to their working arrangements.

7. Organisational Property

All property belonging to the organisation can only be used for business purposes unless explicit consent is given. This includes physical property, the business premises and intellectual property.

All property of the organisation must be used carefully and must be protected and stored in a safe place when not in use. It must be only used for the organisation's benefit and in the way it is intended. It should not be used for the benefit of individual staff and committee members unless explicit consent has been sought and given by the appropriate manager.

Any confidential documents should be securely locked away when left unattended and properly disposed of when necessary in accordance with the organisation's data protection and document retention policies.

Staff may be involved in the preparation of memoranda, notes, lists, records and other documents. Staff will also have similar documents made available to them. Where these concern the business of the organisation or any of its associated partners, these are regarded as business property of the organisation. Staff must, therefore, promptly return all such documents to the organisation when no longer associated with the organisation. Staff are not permitted to disclose or discuss their contents.

Staff are only allowed to remove the organisation's property from its business premises with prior approval from the appropriate official/manager.

i) Private Telephone Calls/Faxes/e-Mails

The controlled use of official telephone lines for private use is allowed within reason. All nonlocal use must be advised in advance and paid on receipt of an itemised telephone bill.

ii) Use of Company Mobile Phones

Staff issued with company mobile phones must ensure the security of the phone (and any equipment) at all times. Personal (non-business) calls should be avoided and where necessary, should be short.

Health & Safety rules regarding the usage of mobile phones must be observed at all times. Under no circumstances should mobile phones be used while driving (including hands' free) or whilst using machinery.

Mobile phones should be on silent or switched off during meetings, seminars, training courses etc. other than in very exceptional circumstances where it is necessary to take an urgent business call. In these circumstances, it is courteous to alert colleagues to the fact an urgent call is expected.

Business calls from landlines to mobile phones should be kept to a minimum due to the increased cost.

iii) Use of Official Premises

Committee members and staff may not use official premises for unofficial purposes at any time without the prior approval of the appropriate manager/office bearer.

iv) Other Employment/Activities

Staff may not accept a post or undertake any occupation or activity which would require their attendance at any time during office hours and/or prejudice the performance of their duties for the organisation. In exceptional circumstances, permission may be granted by the committee for such activities. This permission should be sought in advance and in any case, where staff are in doubt as to whether this condition would apply. Committee members should also refrain from engaging in other activities which may compromise their duties in relation to the organisation's business and time needed to fulfil their role.

8. Dealing with Information

When handling information, there should be a balance between openness and confidentiality.

i) Disclosure of information

In the course of employment, staff may have access to confidential information about the business, service users, volunteers, partners, committee members, colleagues and other organisations. It is forbidden to disclose such information to another party, without obtaining the written permission of the Chief Executive or if required the Board of Trustees.

Examples of confidential information include:

- Information relating to specific individuals or their financial affairs, including service users, staff and committee members.
- Details of contracts for the supply of goods or services.
- Financial statements and business projections.
- Marketing plans or strategies.
- New business developments or plans.
- Business acquisition plans
- Plans to employ new personnel.
- Information concerning labour relations, consultations or negotiations with staff.
- Information concerning legal proceedings.
- Items specifically marked "confidential".
- Software and computer programmes.

It is the duty of all staff to keep all such information confidential. This obligation applies both during the time associated with the organisation and after association ceases.

The permission of the Chief Executive is required before confidential correspondence or documents are removed from the work premises.

ii) Social Networking

Information posted on social media sites is classed as public and not private. Staff are not permitted to disclose any confidential or otherwise information relating to the organisation, its service users, partners, suppliers, committee members, staff, etc. on any social media sites. It is prohibited to post any comments on people or events connected to the organisation or make any remarks which could potentially bring the organisation into disrepute. Any such actions could result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal. There may be fundraising activities or similar where you may be encouraged to post on social media by the Chief Executive. In these cases support is welcome however guidance on these posts should be followed completely.

iii) Public statements

Staff are not permitted to publish any material or deliver any lecture or address issues relating specifically to the organisation or its business without prior approval. This approval should be requested and given in writing by the Chief Executive or Board of Trustees where appropriate. However, for guidance, staff must be aware comments on issues which are subject to debate must be limited to professional advice, fact, legal and financial implications. This does not circumscribe normal duties and responsibilities and aims to prevent staff being considered as a participant, or biased in campaigns or politics which directly affect the organisation.

9. Financial Conduct

All associated with the organisation must ensure they:

- Use funds and resources for the purposes intended and in a responsible and lawful manner.
- Safeguard them from abuse, theft or waste.
- Strive for value for money.

- Apply and observe the organisation's financial regulations and internal controls.
- Staff and committee members are expected to report any breaches of this code. In exceptional circumstances. Where there is real danger of reprisal, anonymity can be granted to those reporting fraud, theft, any other illegal activities, etc.

i) Theft / fraud

The organisation recognises risk of financial and organisational loss due to fraud. It may damage services provided and reputation with service users, partners, public and the regulators. The organisation has a responsibility to protect its assets, reputation and any funding received. The organisation is fully committed to the prevention, detection and reporting of fraud, theft and corruption and the recovery of assets.

ii) Bribery/Receiving Gifts

The organisation forbids all forms of bribery, meaning a financial or other advantage intended to persuade someone to perform improperly any function or activity. Staff are not allowed to accept or give bribes from/to anyone with whom the organisation does business. Staff are also obliged to report any instances of suspected bribery within either the organisation or any of its business partners. Accepting or giving bribes will result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal/removal from the committee and can also result in criminal prosecution for individuals found guilty of such acts.

Deafblind Scotland is committed to ensuring individuals enjoy a professional relationship with the service provider. The giving and receiving of gifts could compromise this relationship.

Staff should avoid accepting gifts or receiving or accepting hospitality.

Gifts should never be solicited and gifts of cash should never be accepted. If gifts are offered it should be made clear that they will be donated to the charity for fundraising purposes.

Members of staff are not allowed to be beneficiaries of service users' wills.

Discretion must be exercised when receiving or giving of hospitality to those such as partner organisations. Lavish or repeated receiving or giving of hospitality should not occur.

All staff and committee members have a duty to immediately report any act of attempted, suspected or detected fraud, theft, bribery and corruption. This can be done in a confidential manner to an appropriate person, for example: Chief Executive, a senior manager, the Chair, a Board member.

10. Tendering and Purchasing

The organisation endeavours to process all tendering and purchasing activities in a transparent and impartial way. All orders and contracts must be awarded on merit and by fair competition.

The organisation is a non-profit making body which is responsible for publicly or charitably funded assets. It is therefore, necessary to ensure those responsible for the management and administration of the organisation's business are seen to make a clear distinction between their own personal affairs and those of the organisation.

No individual committee or staff member will have any involvement in any contract with any business in which they (or a close relative) have a commercial interest or in which they (or a close relative) are directly concerned in the management of. In exceptional cases where such relationship exists for staff and committee member relatives (but not committee members themselves), the organisation may still enter into business arrangements; but in these cases

the individuals concerned must have no part in any aspect of the tendering, letting or management of any such contract or piece of business.

In all situations, staff and committee members must not disclose confidential information on any tender details, and where possible and where alternatives exist, should avoid the use for private purposes of any firms working for the organisation.

11. Relationships

It is expected committee members and staff treat each other and their colleagues with mutual respect. Close personal familiarity could be prejudicial to the good running of the organisation, and it is accepted that as a social environment these may develop but where these do they should be disclosed to the Chief Executive or Board where appropriate for guidance on working arrangements.

Staff should not use informal channels to influence the committee. In turn, committee members should not instruct staff informally or discuss organisational matters out with the proper channels.

If a friendship or close relationship may cast doubt on the objectivity of decision-making, the line manager/office bearer must be advised to prevent allegations of bias or favouritism.

i) Conflict of interest

Committee/committee members and staff must ensure private or personal interests do not influence decisions and they do not use their position to obtain personal gain of any sort, either for themselves directly or for their families, friends or associates.

Examples of such situations could be conducting business on behalf of the organisation with a business with which they or their family member are closely associated or working for an organisation which is either a frequent partner of the organisation or a competitor to its partner(s).

Committee/committee members and staff must declare any actual or potential conflicts of interest arising from previous sections of this code.

ii) Contractors, Suppliers and Consultants

All current and past, private or business, relationships with current, or potential contractors (etc) should be declared to the relevant line manager/office bearer, whether involved in their appointment or not.

iii) Access to the Organisation's Services

The organisation's primary purpose is to improve the lives of Deafblind people or those with a single sensory loss at risk of a second. These services should be made available in an equitable way. Where there are financial limits that may require that decisions are made on whether individuals are a priority for support then these decisions should be made based on impartial assessment of support and care needs and not unduly influenced by staff or Committee Members. Committee members should not seek favour for themselves or family /friends

Equality and Non-discriminatory Practice

All must ensure the organisation's policies are complied with both in the letter and in the spirit the organisation Equality & Diversity Policy.

12. Employment Matters

Committee members and staff involved in making appointments should ensure these are based on merit alone.

Personal preferences should not influence any judgements made whilst acting on behalf of the organisation.

The law and the organisation's current recruitment and selection procedures must be thoroughly observed and decisions made must be transparent and impartial. All recruitment and selection procedures and decisions must also comply with the organisation's Equality & Diversity Policy.

The organisation is conscious of the equality, management and fraud risks associated with the employment of close relatives of existing committee members and expressly prohibits this. It may however consider the possibility of employing close relatives of former committee members. Where this is considered, there will normally be an exclusion period of 12 months applying to such arrangements and where this is not so it will generally be expected good practice for the committee to be aware of any such appointments.

In any event, it would also be expected the following would apply:

- There has been a rigorous, fair and competitive recruitment process.
- Close relatives are not employed in the same department as a relative (or one works in a different location to the other) and there is no line management responsibility.
- There is a low risk of complicity between the two posts.
- There is a low risk of management problems arising from the employment of the relative.

In all cases, if involved in a personal relationship with an existing committee or staff member, this must be declared to the line manager/office bearer at the point it is considered serious, e.g. co-habiting. The organisation reserves the right to review roles/job descriptions at this point to ensure suitable segregation of duties and controls exist in line with the organisation's policy on personal relationships at work.

13. Outside Activities

The organisation has no wish to interfere in the private lives of their committee members and staff. However, there are occasions where outside activities can affect the interests of the organisation. In all circumstances no paid or outside work should be undertaken at the place of work or require the use of office facilities. This applies to any voluntary or unpaid work for another organisation. Staff/committee members should inform the line manager/office bearer of any possible conflict and seek necessary written permission to continue with the activity. If the outside activities will overlap with commitments with the organisation, do not commence until written permission has been granted.

i) Political, Campaigning and Public Activities

It is crucial officials and staff of the organisation carry out their work without any bias towards any political or other group.

All must follow the expressed policies and procedures of the organisation and must not allow personal or political opinions to interfere with their role within the organisation.

None of the above impinges on rights to be an active citizen or for example an active trade unionist or acting in such capacity.

14. Gifts & Hospitality

Committee members and staff should not accept or offer any gift, favour or hospitality which is intended as or might be deemed by others to have the effect of an inducement. It is normally clear whether an offer of hospitality etc. from another party might be considered excessive or unreasonable. However, if there is any doubt contact the line manager/office bearer. All must be aware it is a criminal and a disciplinary offence to corruptly receive or give any gift, loan, fee, reward or other advantage in return for doing (or not doing) anything, or showing favour (or disfavour) to any person or organisation.

From time to time, as a courtesy to outside organisations with whom the organisation works, staff may wish to provide lunch or other minor hospitality to or accept entertainment from such people or bodies. This should not be common practice as anything other than occasional entertainment can give rise to justifiable concern and suspicion. Never solicit hospitality from another individual or organisation and avoid extravagance of any kind in hospitality or entertainment, whether it is given or received.

The organisation may occasionally spend a reasonable amount of money to provide hospitality to staff and committee members, e.g. Christmas parties.

Before providing any minor hospitality for someone outside the organisation, obtain the approval Chief Executive.

15. Data Protection Act 2018

The organisation will treat all personal data in line with obligations under the current data protection regulations.

Appendix 1

Declaration form

This form is to record any actual or potential conflict in interest arising under the code of Conduct. Please use a separate form for each conflict you need to declare. Leave blank any boxes which are not relevant to the declaration. Please add any other relevant information on another sheet of paper which should also be signed and dated. (Note that in some organisations committee members may be asked to sign such a declaration on an annual basis).

Your details

- 1 Name _____
- 2 Job Title _____
- 3 Date of Declaration _____

Details of the Declaration	
4 Please give details of who this declaration concerns - you, a family member, friend or associate?	
5 Please give details of any firm or business involved	
6 Please give details of any payment, benefit, transaction, contract, property, gift or hospitality involved (with date)	
7 Please give details of any proposed job application or other employment issue which may represent a conflict.	
8 Is there any reason why this declaration should be regarded as confidential? Please give details.	

Signed (committee member/staff):

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Signed (office bearer/manager):

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