

Staff Code of Conduct



**CODE OF CONDUCT FOR HOUSING
EXECUTIVE OFFICERS
(THE STAFF CODE) 2020**

DOCUMENT CONTROL SUMMARY

Title	Code of Conduct for Housing Executive Officers
Purpose of document	This document sets out the Housing Executive's Staff Code providing details on the behaviours, standards, and ethics to be adhered to by all Officers in exercising their duties
Version No.	8.0
Date of this draft	November 2020
Author(s)	Human Resources Department
Approved by	Housing Executive Board
Equality Screened	September 2020
Next Review Date	November 2023

Staff Code of Conduct

Contents

1.0	INTRODUCTION.....	4
2.0	PRINCIPLES AND VALUES	4
3.0	ACCOUNTABILITY	7
4.0	INTEGRITY	7
5.0	OBJECTIVITY AND IMPARTIALITY	9
6.0	CONFLICT OF INTEREST.....	10
7.0	HOUSING RELATED MATTERS.....	11
8.0	POLITICAL ACTIVITIES.....	13
9.0	OUTSIDE COMMITMENTS.....	13
10.0	MEMBERSHIP OF CLOSED ORGANISATIONS & SOCIETIES.....	14
11.0	PROCUREMENT.....	14
12.0	INVOLVEMENT IN THE MANAGEMENT, FUNDING, OR GOVERNANCE OF EXTERNAL BODIES.....	15
13.0	TENANCIES	16
14.0	BUSINESS RELATIONSHIPS WITH HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS AND OTHER SOCIAL LANDLORDS.....	17
15.0	ACTING AS A HOUSING ADVISOR / SPOKESPERSON.....	17
16.0	GIFTS AND HOSPITALITY	17
17.0	SPONSORSHIP	18
18.0	LEAVING HOUSING EXECUTIVE EMPLOYMENT	19
19.0	FINANCIAL CONDUCT.....	20
20.0	OFFENCES, ARRESTS AND CONVICTIONS.....	20
21.0	PROPERTY AND EQUIPMENT	21
22.0	RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE HOUSING EXECUTIVE BOARD AND HOUSING EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBERS	21
23.0	TRADE UNION ACTIVITIES	22
24.0	DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION.....	22
25.0	WHISTLEBLOWING	23

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This document sets out the Code of Conduct (the Staff Code) for Housing Executive Officers and forms part of the contractual relationship between the Housing Executive and its Officers. It sets out the standards and behaviours required of all Housing Executive employees and workers, (permanent, temporary, or otherwise, who are employed directly by the Housing Executive or through an agency).
- 1.2 The purpose of the Staff Code is to protect the Housing Executive and its Officers in carrying out Housing Executive functions, to provide clear information on the conduct and behaviour that is required by an Officer of the Housing Executive, and to encourage consistent standards throughout the Organisation.
- 1.3 All Officers must familiarise themselves with the contents of the Staff Code and act in accordance with the principles set out in it. Officers must ensure that they understand this document and if they have any doubts about any aspect they should in the first instance approach their Line Manager for clarification, and thereafter the Human Resources Department.
- 1.4 It is important to note and understand that any breach of the terms of the Staff Code will be dealt with in accordance with the provisions of the Housing Executive's Disciplinary Procedure. Serious or recurring breaches of the Staff Code may be considered as Gross Misconduct under the Housing Executive's Disciplinary Procedure with the potential to lead to dismissal.
- 1.5 The Staff Code will be kept under review in consultation with the Housing Executives recognised Trade Unions and any subsequent revisions will be communicated to officers.

2.0 PRINCIPLES AND VALUES

- 2.1 This Staff Code builds on, and is in keeping with the Housing Executive's Core Values, and the Seven Principles of Public Life as articulated by the Nolan Committee on Standards in Public Life. Housing Executive Officers must abide by and demonstrate commitment to these principles and values in the course of their employment.
- 2.2 **The Seven Principles of Public Life**
Selflessness – Holders of public office should take decisions solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends.

Staff Code of Conduct

Integrity – Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might influence them in the performance of their official duties.

Objectivity – In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.

Accountability – Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.

Openness – Holders of public office should be as open and transparent as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.

Honesty – Holders of public office have a duty to act honestly and be truthful and declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.

Leadership – Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example in order to establish and maintain the trust and confidence of the public and to ensure the integrity of the Housing Executive in conducting business.

2.3 Housing Executive Core Values

In March 2015 the Housing Executive Board approved our renewed core values. All staff are required as part of our Staff Code to live out our renewed core values in all they do. Our renewed core values are aligned with our Journey to Excellence vision.

Our core value mission statement is:

“Making a difference through fairness, passion and expertise”

Making a difference

- We strive to make people’s lives better. Our staff should constantly strive to make a difference in all that they do.
- We put our customers first and deliver right first time. Our staff should adopt a customer first ethos and approach to all our work.
- Our staff will use research to measure customer satisfaction and consult with all key stakeholders before taking major decisions that affect customers. We will listen to the views of customers through formal and informal channels and take corrective action when necessary.
- We are committed to developing and supporting our staff. We recognise that our people are our greatest resource and are the key to all that we do. All staff members will treat their colleagues fairly and commit to working to help develop their

Staff Code of Conduct

colleagues through appropriate on the job support. In addition the organisation through our Learning & Development strategy will proactively identify formal training and mentoring for staff through the appraisal mechanisms and invest in this area.

- Our staff will work to build strong partnerships and share great ideas. All of our staff should proactively share best practice and build strong partnerships with all stakeholders including customers, communities, external partners and contractors.
- Together we will make a difference to the environment through our Environmental Management Policy. This policy aims to minimise any adverse effects our actions on the environment. We will work with contractors and suppliers to achieve this goal.

Fairness

- We will treat our customers, staff and partners fairly in all that we do. Fairness and Equity are values that have remained at the heart of our organisation since it was established.
- We respect diversity. All of our staff are expected to respect and embrace diversity in all interactions internally and externally.
- We work in an open and transparent way. All our staff commit to working in an open and transparent way that will promote trust in both themselves and our organisation.
- We will work in ways that allow people to know why we make decisions. All staff will honour both the letter and spirit of our Freedom of Information and Data Protection responsibilities.

Passion

- Our staff are professionals with a passion for making a difference to the lives of the people in the communities we serve.
- All of our staff should strive for excellence and look for new, creative and more innovative ways to do our work.
- We will develop, encourage and adapt imaginative approaches to housing issues in Northern Ireland working alongside partners, stakeholders and customers to ensure best possible services.

Expertise

- We believe in our people and support them to develop their skills and expertise to provide strong, confident housing leadership.
- Our staff commit to embracing a culture of constantly learning and developing to build their expertise.

Staff Code of Conduct

- All our staff will deliver a first class service that seeks to provide value for money and minimise cost.

3.0 ACCOUNTABILITY

- 3.1 Housing Executive Officers should be aware:
- of their accountability (through the management structure) to the Housing Executive Board
 - of their accountability to each other
 - of their accountability to the customers of the Housing Executive
 - of the respective roles of the Department for Communities ("the Department") and the Housing Executive Board
 - that the Minister for Communities is ultimately accountable through the Northern Ireland Assembly for the Housing Executive's independence, effectiveness and efficiency.
- 3.2 Officers of the Housing Executive must conduct themselves with integrity, impartiality and honesty, and must display the highest standards of behaviour in all dealings with customers and colleagues. They must not deceive or knowingly mislead the Board, Government Departments, Ministers, the public, or their representatives.
- 3.3 Officers are, at all times during their employment with the Housing Executive, expected to use their best endeavours to promote and protect the interests of the Housing Executive and must perform their duties and exercise powers vested in them in a manner which is consistent with the principles and core values set out at Section 2.0. They must avoid acting in a manner which is likely to be or is detrimental to the effective operation of its business, reputation or undermine public trust and confidence in the proper discharge of its functions.
- 3.4 An Officer through whose proven negligence loss of public money has been caused may be required to make good the loss in whole or in part.

4.0 INTEGRITY

- 4.1 Officers must not receive benefits of any kind from a third party which might reasonably be seen to compromise their personal judgement and integrity. Officers must not use their official position to , directly or indirectly request, receive or agree to accept, a financial or other advantage for the improper performance of a relevant function or activity (within the meaning of the Bribery Act 2010) by them or by another person at their request, or with their assent or acquiescence. To do so would, in law, constitute an offence relating to bribery.
- 4.2 Officers must not request, agree to receive or accept a financial or

Staff Code of Conduct

other advantage from anyone who may benefit from work or funding provided by the Housing Executive. To do so would, in law, be an offence relating to bribery.

- 4.3 Officers must not only be honest in fact, but must also ensure that no act, omission or error leaves them open to any reasonable suspicion of dishonesty.
- 4.4 Officers have a duty to discharge public functions reasonably and according to the law and to recognise ethical standards governing particular professions. Officers must, by their acts and omissions, strive to avoid providing the basis for any successful legal challenge to the Housing Executive.
- 4.5 Housing Executive Officers are required to give the highest possible standard of service to the public and, where it is part of their duties, to provide impartial advice. Officers who deal with the affairs of the public must do so sympathetically, efficiently, promptly and without bias or maladministration.
- 4.6 Officers must at all times act in a professional manner to colleagues, employees and customers and be mindful of their actions, language and general conduct. In particular, Officers must not be verbally or physically abusive, make derogatory remarks, display offensive written/pictorial materials, or make discriminatory statements. For the avoidance of doubt this also extends to the use of social media outside of work, please refer to the Social Media policy within the HR Handbook on Gateway for further detail.
- 4.7 Officers are also expected, without fear of recrimination, to bring to the attention of the Designated Manager through the Staff Declaration Register (See Appendix 1) any deficiency or potential deficiency in the provision of service.
- 4.8 Officers must declare to the Designated Manager through the Staff Declaration Register (See Appendix 1) any non- financial interests (for instance membership of an organisation receiving grant aid from the Housing Executive or membership of an organisation or pressure group which may seek to influence the Housing Executive's policies) if it may reasonably be perceived that any such interest could influence their judgement in favour of that organisation or group.
- 4.9 Officers who have an interest, financial or non-financial, must not involve themselves in any decision or allocation of Housing Executive services or resources from which they, or anyone with which they have a Relevant Family or Personal Relationship (see Appendix 2) might benefit, and must ensure that the matter is referred immediately to the Designated Manager through the Staff Declaration Register (See Appendix 1).
- 4.10 All Officers must abide by all Housing Executive rules, in relation to private interests and possible conflict with public duty, which apply generally, and/or which apply to their post in particular.
- 4.11 All Officers must ensure that any possible conflicts of interest are identified at an early stage and that appropriate action is taken to resolve them.
- 4.12 The Housing Executive is committed to the prevention of bribery in the

Staff Code of Conduct

exercise of its functions .Involvement of an Officer in bribery will constitute a serious breach of the Staff Code which may be considered as Gross Misconduct under the Housing Executive's Disciplinary Procedure with the potential to lead to dismissal.

5.0 OBJECTIVITY AND IMPARTIALITY

- 5.1 The Housing Executive is determined to carry out all of its functions with objectivity and impartiality. An Officer must not engage in any act, omission or conduct which might lead members of the general public to reasonably doubt that officer's ability or willingness to impartially discharge his/her official duties.
- 5.2 Where Officers are required to provide information and advice, or set out options or facts, they must do so accurately on the basis of evidence.
- 5.3 Officers must deal honestly with all cases that come before them and through their actions or omissions they must not improperly deny any person of a legal right or entitlement.
- 5.4 All members of the community, Housing Executive customers, and Officers have a right to be treated with fairness and equity. In this regard Officers must:
 - Be aware of and act in accordance with their obligations under relevant employment law and the Housing Executives' employment, equal opportunities, and equality policies.
 - Not take discriminatory action or decisions or encourage fellow employees or stakeholders of the Housing Executive to take discriminatory action or decisions

Some of the relevant legislation is listed at Appendix 3 of the Staff Code.

- 5.5 Whilst the Housing Executive recognises and respects the rights of all Officers to hold personal or political opinions, Officers must ensure that the expression of those opinions does not constitute a conflict of interest in relation to their role within the Housing Executive, nor has the potential to bring the Housing Executive into disrepute. For the avoidance of doubt this also extends to the use of social media outside of work please refer to the Social Media policy within the HR Handbook on Gateway for further detail.
- 5.6 All contacts with the media should generally be handled through the Housing Executive's Corporate Communications and Secretariat Department. In that context an Officer must not make any public statements, or publish or broadcast any material, whether or not it involves the disclosure of official information, or draws upon experience gained in their official capacity, without the prior approval of the Designated Manager through the Staff Declaration Register (see Appendix 1).
- 5.7 Officers involved in making staff appointments must at all times act in accordance with Housing Executive's Appointments and Promotions Procedure and must act with strict impartiality. Officers must not be

Staff Code of Conduct

involved in decisions in relation to appointments, promotions, discipline, or pay adjustments for any other individual where a Relevant Family or Personal Relationship is deemed to exist (see Appendix 2).

- 5.8 Officers will not be employed together where a Family Relationship is deemed to exist (see Appendix 2) in any situation where one would be responsible for managing, auditing or authorising the work of the other or where the responsibility includes the handling of cash. Officers should be aware of the potential for actual or perceived conflict of interest, or unfair advantage where a close personal relationship develops in the work place from the overlap of a personal and professional relationship. In that situation, it is the responsibility of the Officers concerned to make it known to the Designated Manager through the Staff Declaration Register (see Appendix 1). The Housing Executive reserves the right to transfer one or both of the Officers to suitable alternative posts and/or places of work where it considers this to be appropriate, reasonable and proportionate.
- 5.9 Officers who are uncertain about whether they should take action regarding a personal relationship are invited to seek guidance in confidence, from the Human Resources Department. Where any personal relationship as defined within this Staff Code (see Appendix 2), is not declared and results in a conflict of interest or an unfair advantage or disadvantage to either of the parties to the relationship, this will be considered a breach of this Staff Code.

6.0 CONFLICT OF INTEREST

- 6.1 Officers must not subordinate their duty to the Housing Executive to their private interests or put themselves in a position where duty to the Housing Executive and private interests conflict. It is the duty of every member of staff to make their declaration of interest on an annual basis and also to review it if any subsequent matter of interest should arise.
- 6.2 Private interests must not be such as might lead members of the public reasonably to perceive impropriety or partiality.
- 6.3 In carrying out their duties Officers must ensure that private interests do not influence their decisions or actions in any way. Officers must not use their position, or the Housing Executive's activities to obtain a personal or business financial gain or some other advantage either for themselves or for others with whom a Relevant Family or Personal Relationship (see Appendix 2) is deemed to exist.
- 6.4 Responsibility is placed on every Officer to declare to the Designated Manager through the Staff Declaration Register (as listed at Appendix 1) any potential conflict of interest in which they may be involved. Officers must satisfy themselves in respect of the content of the Staff Code and associated Housing Executive policies and determine whether or not a declaration must be made. In considering the need to declare an interest Officers must be mindful of whether or not it may reasonably be perceived that any such interest could influence their judgement.

Staff Code of Conduct

- 6.5 Officers are required to keep their interests under review and consider whether or not a declaration must be made as those interests and/or their role within the Housing Executive change or develop over time.
- 6.6 Officers are responsible on an ongoing basis for updating information in relation to their interests on the Staff Declaration Register and will be required to review the information recorded on the Register on an annual basis. In so doing Officers are also required to record that they have no interests to declare where this is the case. Failure to properly maintain the Staff Declaration Register will in itself constitute a breach of the Staff Code.
- 6.7 Where there is uncertainty on the part of the Officer to whether a declaration should be made, the Officer should make the declaration to avoid the potential for any later inference that they knowingly failed to do so. Officers may refer to the Northern Ireland Audit Office [Good Practice Guide on Conflicts of Interest](#) for further information.
- 6.8 It is the role of the Designated Manager (see Appendix 1) to determine the extent of any conflict or potential conflict of interest based on the declaration made and to advise on arrangements that can be put in place to manage or mitigate against it including, where necessary, the need to inform other Housing Executive Managers.
- Particular attention is drawn to the examples of situations where potential conflicts of interest can occur as set out at Section 7.0 to 18.0 of the Staff Code.
- 6.9 An Officer must declare where a conflict of interest exists or emerges in the course of his/her involvement in; a recruitment exercise (directly employed or agency); or a procurement exercise. In the case of a recruitment exercise this should be brought to the attention of the HR Department, and in the case of procurement to the Corporate Procurement Unit.

7.0 HOUSING RELATED MATTERS

- 7.1 Where any casework, involves an Officer personally, or involves anyone with whom a Relevant Family or Personal Relationship exists (see Appendix 2) then the case must be referred to the Designated Manager through the Staff Declaration Register for a decision as to how and by whom it should be handled (see Appendix 1). This includes but is not limited to such matters as:
- Allocation,
 - Transfer, Exchange,
 - Home loan,
 - House sale or purchase, Land sale or purchase, Home adaptation,
 - Major improvements to an Housing Executive dwelling,
 - Grants,
 - Housing Benefit,

Staff Code of Conduct

- Scheme for the Purchase of Evacuated Dwelling (SPED)
- Acquisitions,
- HMOs,
- Group Repair

7.2 No Officer shall take part in handling any issue in relation to any Housing Association or other social landlord if both of the following conditions exist:

- i. Any of the following are concerned in the management or governance of the relevant association or other social landlord:
 - The Officer
 - Anybody for whom a Relevant Family or Personal Relationship is deemed to exist with the Officer (see Appendix 2).
- ii. Possible Housing Executive actions/omissions in connection with the issue may result in substantial advantage or detriment to the relevant association or other social landlord.

If such conditions exist then the case must be referred to the Designated Manager through the Staff Declaration Register (see Appendix 1)

7.3 Where an Officer or anybody with whom the Officer has a Relevant Family or Personal Relationship (see Appendix 2) is concerned in the management or governance of, or has a business interest in, either

- i. A current Housing Executive contractor, supplier or service provider,
- Or
- ii. A contractor, supplier or service provider that is tendering for Housing Executive business,

Then the Officer must refer the matter to the Designated Manager through the Staff Declaration Register so that the Designated Manager can advise on arrangements that can be put in place to manage or mitigate against the potential for a conflict of interest (see Appendix 1).

7.4 In any case falling within the circumstances mentioned in paragraphs 7.1, 7.2, or 7.3 above, the Officer concerned must report the facts in writing to the Designated Manager through the Staff Declaration Register (see Appendix 1) and follow that Manager's directions in relation to alternative arrangements for handling the matter.

7.5 An Officer must not, without the prior written consent of the Designated Manager carry out work as an agent, draughtsman, architect, quantity surveyor, or site supervisor for a grant applicant.

7.6 An Officer must promptly inform the Designated Manager through the Staff Declaration Register (Appendix 1) in writing of the existence of any of the following two situations:

- i. If a Relevant Family or Personal Relationship is deemed to exist (see Appendix 2) between the Officer and a person who works as an agent (draughtsman or architect) for a grant applicant.
- ii. If a Relevant Family or Personal Relationship is deemed to exist (see Appendix 2) between the Officer and a person who is the

Staff Code of Conduct

owner or senior manager of a construction firm which carries out work for a grant applicant.

- 7.7 The Housing Executive has an obligation to comply with the statutory house allocation scheme ("the Scheme"); if any officer, in the course of their duties, by act and/or omission, fails to comply with the terms of the Scheme, this will constitute a serious breach of the Staff Code which may be considered as Gross Misconduct under the Housing Executive's Disciplinary Procedure with the potential to lead to dismissal.

8.0 POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

- 8.1 It is essential that all Housing Executive stakeholders and the public should have confidence that the personal views of Housing Executive Officers do not improperly influence the discharge of their duties. The purpose of the rules governing political activities by Housing Executive Officers is to allow the greatest possible freedom to participate in public affairs without infringing this fundamental principle. The rules are concerned with political activities that are liable to give public expression to political views, rather than privately-held beliefs and opinions. The rules are detailed in Appendix 4.

9.0 OUTSIDE COMMITMENTS

- 9.1 Officers must not engage in any external business, any external employment, or any external appointment, without the prior written consent of their Designated Manager. They should declare through the Staff Declaration Register (see Appendix 1) if any of the following circumstances apply to the business, employment or appointment:
- i. Engagement in it would, in the view of the Housing Executive, react detrimentally to the Housing Executive's interests.
 - ii. Engagement in it would, in the view of the Housing Executive, put the Officer into a position where duty to the Housing Executive and external interests would conflict, or are likely to conflict.
 - iii. Engagement in it would, in any way, in the view of the Housing Executive, weaken public confidence in the impartiality of the Housing Executive or in the effective conduct of the Housing Executive's work.
- 9.2 For the avoidance of doubt and for the purposes of paragraph 9.1 above engagement in any external business, employment, or appointment will be deemed to react detrimentally to the Housing Executive's interests where it may give rise to or contribute to an officer's sickness absence, or deterioration in performance.
- 9.3 If an Officer who is absent from work and in receipt of occupational sick pay is deemed to have abused the system occupational sick pay may be suspended.

Staff Code of Conduct

- 9.4 Officers must follow any rules of the Housing Executive on the ownership of intellectual property or copyright created during their employment with the Housing Executive (see also Section 21.0 below).
- 9.5 Officers must not carry out any work which may ultimately come before the Housing Executive for approval or decision.
- 9.6 No external business may be conducted on the Housing Executive's premises or make use of Housing Executive resources or property.

10.0 MEMBERSHIP OF CLOSED ORGANISATIONS & SOCIETIES

- 10.1 For the purposes of the Staff Code, Officers must declare to the Designated Manager through the Staff Declaration Register (see Appendix 1) membership of an organisation that is not generally open to the public without formal membership which meets the following definition :-

Any lodge, chapter, society, trust or regular gathering or meeting which:

- i. Is not open to members of the public who are not members of that lodge, chapter, society or trust.
- ii. Includes in the grant of membership an obligation on the part of the member a requirement to make a commitment (whether by oath or otherwise) of allegiance to the lodge, chapter, society, gathering or meeting.
- iii. Includes whether initially or subsequently, a commitment (whether by oath or otherwise) of secrecy about the rules, membership or conduct of the lodge, chapter, society, trust, gathering or meeting.

A lodge, chapter, society, trust, gathering or meeting as defined above, should not be regarded as a secret society if it forms part of the activity of a generally recognised religion. As defined by the Local Government Management Board Working Group

11.0 PROCUREMENT

- 11.1 All procurements within the Housing Executive must be taken forward in accordance with the Board's Standing Orders and the Corporate Procurement Strategy, copies of which are available on request or published on Gateway. In accordance with these documents all procurements must be carried out by the Corporate Procurement Unit.
- 11.2 Officers involved in the procurement process, that is Officers in the Corporate Procurement Unit or who sit on evaluation panels, must be

Staff Code of Conduct

clear on the separation of client and contractor roles within the Housing Executive. Officers who have both a client and contractor responsibility must be aware of the need for accountability and openness.

- 11.3 Officers must exercise fairness, openness, transparency and impartiality when dealing with customers, suppliers, contractors and sub-contractors. This includes all relevant discussions and correspondence. Officers must also be alert to any potential conflicts of interest that may exist between them and the supply base with which they are interacting and must advise the Designated Manager through the Staff Declaration Register in accordance with Paragraphs 11.5 to 11.7 (below).
- 11.4 Officers who are privy to confidential information relating to any tendering process must not disclose that information to any unauthorised party or organisation.
- 11.5 Officers must ensure that no special favour is shown to current or former Officers, or to anyone who has a Relevant Family or Personal Relationship with such an individual (see Appendix 2), or any person who is deemed to have a financial relationship with such an individual, in connection with the procurement of any goods, building work or other services.
- 11.6 All relationships with current contractors or potential contractors (including contractors, suppliers and service-providers) must be made known to the Designated Manager (see Appendix 1), if it may reasonably be perceived that any such relationship could influence their (the Officer's) judgement. Orders and contracts must be in accordance with the Housing Executives procurement procedures and no special favour must be shown in the tendering process to any businesses or potential suppliers particularly those run by persons where a Relevant Family or Personal Relationship is deemed to exist (see Appendix 2).
- 11.7 Officers who deal with, engage, or supervise contractors, suppliers, service- providers, consultants or voluntary groups, with whom a Relevant Family or Personal Relationship has previously been or is currently deemed to exist (see Appendix 2), must declare that relationship to the Designated Manager through the Staff Declaration Register (see Appendix 1) and thereafter act in accordance with that Manager's advice and directions.

12.0 INVOLVEMENT IN THE MANAGEMENT, FUNDING, OR GOVERNANCE OF EXTERNAL BODIES

- 12.1 If an Officer is appointed to represent the Housing Executive by serving on the Committee of Management of any external body, or is considering involvement with any external body, that Officer must observe any conditions imposed by the Housing Executive in relation to any such appointment.
- 12.2 Officers must not serve on the Committee of Management, or involve themselves in the management of, any registered Housing

Staff Code of Conduct

Association, or of any Specified Body in their private capacity without the prior written permission of the Housing Executive.

12.3 For the Purposes of this section, a body, authority, group or organisation is a “Specified Body” if both of the following requirements exist:

- i. It is not a public body.
- ii. engagement in it would, in the reasonable opinion of the Housing Executive;
 - (a) put the Officer into a position where duty to the Housing Executive and external interests will conflict, or are likely to conflict, or
 - (b) weaken public confidence in the impartiality of the Housing Executive or in the effective conduct of the Housing Executive’s work, or
 - (c) apparently provide the Specified Body with an opportunity to have access to confidential information not otherwise available to it.

12.4 The Housing Executive’s Director of Corporate Services (or another individual nominated by them within the Housing Executive) will give guidance on the question of whether or not the particular body, authority, group or organisation is, or is not, a “Specified Body”. In the event of the issue becoming material, Officers are advised to seek such guidance by making a declaration of their involvement in the management, funding, or governance of external bodies through the Staff Declaration Register (see Appendix 1).

12.5 Where Housing Executive permission, in respect of participation in the management or governance of any body, as set out above, is required:

- (i) Any such permission may be subject to the Officer concerned agreeing to certain pre-conditions of membership.
- (ii) Any permission granted will be for an initial period of one year, but can be terminated at any earlier stage if the Housing Executive in its discretion thinks fit.
- (iii) Any such permission will be renewable at yearly intervals but, again, can be withdrawn at any earlier stage if the Housing Executive thinks fit.

12.6 For avoidance of doubt, the Staff Declaration Register (see Appendix 1) should now also be used to record any situations where an Officer is involved in the management, funding, or governance of external bodies (which would have previously been recorded on the External Bodies Register).

13.0 TENANCIES

Staff Code of Conduct

- 13.1 Officers must inform the Designated Manager through the Staff Declaration Register (see Appendix 1) promptly if upon or after appointment to the Housing Executive they are a tenant of the Housing Executive, a Housing Association, or any other social landlord.
- 13.2 Officers who are also tenants of the Housing Executive enjoy the same rights and protections afforded to all Housing Executive tenants. Officers should be aware that like all Housing Executive tenants they are obliged to comply with the Housing Executives' terms and conditions of tenancy and they are expected to conduct their tenancy in such a way as does not discredit the Housing Executive. For example, breaches of the tenancy agreement resulting in the accrual of rent arrears or behaviour causing a nuisance or annoyance to neighbours.

14.0 BUSINESS RELATIONSHIPS WITH HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS AND OTHER SOCIAL LANDLORDS

- 14.1 An Officer must not enter into any business relationship (whether as lessor or otherwise) with any Housing Association or other social landlord, except with the prior written permission of the Designated Manager through the Staff Declaration Register (see Appendix 1).

15.0 ACTING AS A HOUSING ADVISOR / SPOKESPERSON

- 15.1 No Officer may act as housing adviser to or a housing spokesperson for, any tenants association, residents association, quasi-political body or pressure group.

16.0 GIFTS AND HOSPITALITY

- 16.1 Officers must comply with all Housing Executive rules, in relation to the acceptance of personal sponsorship, gifts and/or hospitality, which apply generally or which apply in particular to their post. While no malice may be intended on the part of the person offering gifts or hospitality Officers must recognise the risks that may arise of conflict, real or perceived, being construed by their acceptance and at all times protect both the Housing Executive's, and their own integrity.
- 16.2 Officers must not accept significant personal gifts from current or potential contractors, suppliers, or service-providers, or from members of the public. Isolated gifts of token value such as pens, diaries, etc. can be considered to be insignificant.
- 16.3 Officers must only accept offers of hospitality if there is a genuine need to impart information or represent the Housing Executive in the community. Offers to attend purely social or sporting functions must be accepted only when they are part of the life of the community or where the Housing Executive should be seen to be represented. The

Staff Code of Conduct

acceptance of any hospitality must be properly authorised by an officers Designated Manager.

- 16.4 The handling of offers of hospitality requires Officers to exercise careful judgement but the basic principle must be that where there is any risk that the acceptance of an offer of hospitality could reasonably be perceived as influencing an Officer in the exercise of their official duties, it must be refused. All offers of hospitality whether accepted or not must be declared to the Designated Manager through the Staff Declaration Register (see Appendix 1).
- 16.5 When considering whether or not to accept authorised hospitality (see paragraph 16.3), Officers must also be particularly sensitive as to their timing in relation to decisions which the Housing Executive may be taking, if those decisions are likely to affect those providing the hospitality.
- 16.6 Acceptance by Officers of hospitality through attendance at relevant conferences and courses is acceptable if any of the following conditions apply:
- i. The Designated Manager consents in advance.
 - ii. The Designated Manager is satisfied that any official decisions are not compromised.
- 16.7 Where a visit is necessary, to inspect equipment for example, it will usually be appropriate for the Housing Executive to meet the cost of the visit in order to avoid jeopardising the integrity of the Housing Executive in subsequent purchasing decisions.
- 16.8 Only Officers designated by the Chief Executive are permitted to incur expenditure on hospitality for official guests and approve acceptance of hospitality.

17.0 SPONSORSHIP

- 17.1 Where an outside organisation wishes to sponsor, or is seeking to sponsor, a Housing Executive activity (whether by invitation, tender, negotiation or voluntarily) the basic conventions, concerning acceptance by Officers of gifts or hospitality apply to such officers. Particular care must be taken when dealing with current or potential contractors, suppliers or service-providers.
- 17.2 Where the Housing Executive wishes to sponsor an event or service, an Officer or anyone with whom a Relevant Family or Personal Relationship is deemed to exist (see Appendix 2) must not benefit from such sponsorship in a direct way without there being full disclosure to the Designated Manager through Staff Declaration Register (see Appendix 1) of any such interest.
- 17.3 Similarly, where the Housing Executive (through sponsorship, grant-aid, financial or other means) gives support in the community, Officers must ensure that impartial advice is given and that there is no conflict of interest involved.

18.0 LEAVING HOUSING EXECUTIVE EMPLOYMENT

- 18.1 It is in the public interest that people with experience of public administration should be able to move into business or other bodies outside of the public sector, and that such movement should not be frustrated by unjustified public concern over a particular appointment. It is equally important however that when a former Officer takes up an outside appointment there should be no cause for any suspicion of impropriety.
- 18.2 It is essential that the Housing Executive maintains public trust in itself and in its Officers, in order to:
- i. Avoid any suspicion that the advice and decisions of a serving Officer might be influenced by the hope or expectation of future employment with a particular firm or organisation; or to
 - ii. Avoid the risk that a particular firm might gain an improper advantage over its competitors by employing someone who, in the course of their official duties, has had access to technical or other information which those competitors might legitimately regard as their own trade secrets, or to information relating to proposed developments in Housing Executive policy which may affect that firm or its competitors.
- 18.3 An Officer is therefore required to inform their Designated Manager through the Staff Declaration Register (see Appendix 1) when applying for or approached about, employment with any Housing Association, social landlord, current Housing Executive contractor, supplier or service provider, or a contractor, supplier or service provider tendering for Housing Executive business, where any of the following apply:
- i. if they are graded Level 6 or above (or equivalent) or if they are Specialists; or
 - ii. if they have had any official dealings with their prospective employer during the previous two years of employment with the Housing Executive, or will have prior to leaving the Housing Executive; or
 - iii. if they have had official dealings of a continued or repeated nature with their prospective employer at any time during their employment with the Housing Executive; or
 - iv. if they have had access to commercially sensitive information of competitors of their prospective employer in the course of their official duties; or
 - v. if their official duties during the previous two years of employment with the Housing Executive have involved advice or decisions benefiting their prospective employer, for which the offer of employment could be interpreted as a reward, or have involved developing policy (knowledge of which may be of benefit to the prospective employer); or

Staff Code of Conduct

- vi. if they are to be employed on a consultancy basis (either for a firm of consultants or as an independent or self-employed consultant) and they have had any dealings of a commercial nature with outside bodies or organisations in the previous two years of employment with the Housing Executive.
- 18.4 In response to any such notification, the Designated Manager will consider the relevant Officer's current and future official dealings with the prospective employer and/or any competitors and will identify any potential conflict. The Designated Manager may impose conditions on that Officer during the selection process and (in the event of the Officer being offered an appointment) during the notice period. Those conditions may include a transfer of the Officer to alternative duties, or to work at some other location.
- 18.5 Officers must continue to observe their duty of confidentiality after they have left the employment of the Housing Executive (See also Section 24.0 below).

19.0 FINANCIAL CONDUCT

- 19.1 The Housing Executive is a publicly funded body and it is essential that Officers ensure that they use funds entrusted to them in a responsible and lawful manner. Officers must strive to ensure value for money, to safeguard public resources, and in so doing avoid the basis for any successful legal challenge to the Housing Executive or damage to the Housing Executive's reputation.
- 19.2 Whilst there is a responsibility on the Housing Executive to provide appropriate training as required; Officers must ensure that they understand and are competent in the financial procedures relating to their role.
- 19.3 Officers must adhere to the highest principles of integrity and, in particular, they must comply with all relevant Housing Executive rules in relation to expenses, travelling and mileage allowances. Officers should be mindful that serious or recurring non-compliance with Housing Executive rules will constitute a breach of the Staff Code which may be considered as Gross Misconduct under the Housing Executive's Disciplinary Procedure with the potential to lead to dismissal.
- 19.4 An Officer who becomes insolvent, or bankrupt, must inform their line manager promptly.

20.0 OFFENCES, ARRESTS AND CONVICTIONS

- 20.1 An Officer must promptly report the facts in writing, to the Director of Corporate Services, if they:
- Are arrested and refused bail, or
 - Are convicted by a Court of any criminal offence (other than a

Staff Code of Conduct

road traffic offence, while driving a non-official vehicle, for which the penalty has not included imprisonment or disqualification from driving).

21.0 PROPERTY AND EQUIPMENT

- 21.1 Officers are personally responsible for the safe custody of Housing Executive Security Passes, information, documents, and equipment which may be issued or entrusted to them in the course of their duties. Loss of a pass or any such material must be reported promptly to the Housing Executive's Security Adviser. Likewise all such material must be returned promptly on the termination of employment.
- 21.2 Officers are not permitted to make any copy, abstract or summary of the whole or part of any document (including computer software) belonging to the Housing Executive except where expressly authorised to do so or for and in the reasonable and proper performance of their duties.
- 21.3 All documents, designs, drawings, inventions and other activities etc. created by Officers in the course of, and relating to their employment whether within working hours or not, or created by others, shall belong to the Housing Executive. Officers are required to transfer or assign all copyright or other intellectual property rights to the Housing Executive.
- 21.4 Involvement of Officers in the theft or willful damage, of Housing Executive property, or the property of a colleague or any other person or organisation that they come into contact with through their Housing Executive role, will constitute a serious breach of the Staff Code which may be considered as Gross Misconduct under the Housing Executive's Disciplinary Procedure with the potential to lead to dismissal.
- 21.5 Officers must not use any information obtained in the course of their employment for personal or business financial gain or other advantage, and they must not pass it on to others who might use it in such a way. This includes the personal or business financial gain or other advantage of anyone where a Relevant Family or Personal Relationship to the Officer is deemed to exist (see Appendix 2).

22.0 RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE HOUSING EXECUTIVE BOARD AND HOUSING EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBERS

- 22.1 Officers are ultimately responsible to the Housing Executive Board. Mutual respect between Officers and Members of the Board is essential to good corporate governance. Close personal familiarity between Officers and individual Members of the Board could damage this relationship and should generally be avoided.
- 22.2 Officers must deal with Board Members in a polite and efficient manner.

Staff Code of Conduct

Officers must not approach nor attempt to influence Board Members out of personal motives and must report any incident where a Board Member attempts to pressurise them to deal with a matter outside of normal Housing Executive procedures or policy to the Designated Manager through the Staff Declaration Register (see Appendix 1).

- 22.3 The Chief Executive has overall responsibility, working under the Board, for propriety, in a broad sense, including conduct and discipline.
- 22.4 An Officer who is dissatisfied on a work related matter must not attempt to influence a Board Member, or to bring political or outside influence, in support of their grievance. Instead the Housing Executive's internal dispute resolution mechanisms including the Grievance Procedure should be invoked where necessary.

23.0 TRADE UNION ACTIVITIES

- 23.1 The Housing Executive notes that Officers have the right to participate in activities by or on behalf of the trade union to which they respectively belong, in accordance with the terms of relevant agreements in place between the Housing Executive and the trade unions concerned.

24.0 DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION

- 24.1 Officers must handle information as openly as possible within the Housing Executive policy, and legal framework. The law and/or Housing Executive policy requires that:
- Certain types of information must be available to the Board, Auditors, Government Departments, Service Users and the Public.
 - Certain types of information must be kept confidential.
- 24.2 Officers must comply with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998, and other legislation, in relation to the processing of 'personal data' about individuals.
- 24.3 Any 'personal data' in relation to an individual which is held on computer or manual records must be disclosed to that individual, subject to any exemptions, upon receipt of a written request and payment of the subject access fee. Personal data is defined in the Data Protection Act 1998 as:
- "Data which relate to a living individual who can be identified
- from those data, or
 - from those data and other information which is in the possession of, or is likely to come into the possession of, the data controller
- and includes any expression of opinion about the individual and

Staff Code of Conduct

any indication of the intentions of the data controller or any other person in respect of the individual.”

24.4 The underlying principle of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 is that all information held by an organisation should be freely available unless one of the limited number of exemptions apply. The Housing Executive is covered by, and must comply fully with, the Act. When a request for information is received, it should be referred promptly to the relevant Divisional Freedom of Information Co-ordinator.

24.5 Officers must comply with any guidance in relation to Housing Executive policy on confidentiality and, in particular to:

- The types of information which (according to law or according to policy) must be made available, and to whom.
- The types of information which, in accordance with legal requirements, must be kept confidential.
- The types of information which the Housing Executive does not wish to be disclosed without specific permission.

(Further guidance can be found in the Housing Executive’s Data Protection and Freedom of Information manuals, copies of which are available on request or published on Gateway)

25.0 WHISTLEBLOWING

25.1 If Officers have any concerns about improper conduct, and subject to their entitlements under whistleblowing legislation as detailed below, relevant matters should be raised through the following routes:

Route One – Raise with line manager

Route Two – If not appropriate to raise with line manager, or the Officer is dissatisfied with the response/outcome after raising with the line manager, raise to their **Level 9 Manager / appropriate Director**

Route Three – If not appropriate to raise with line manager, or the Officer is dissatisfied with the response/outcome after raising with their Level 9 Manager / appropriate Director, raise with Director of Corporate Services.

Route Four – If not appropriate to raise with line manager, or the Officer is dissatisfied with the response/outcome after raising with the Director of Corporate services, raise with the Chief Executive.

If the above routes have been followed and the Officer still has concerns, or considers that the issue is inappropriate to raise with the Chief Executive, the matter should be raised with the Vice Chairman.

The Vice Chairman is the Housing Executive Board member entrusted with the duty of investigating officers’ concerns about illegal, improper or unethical behaviour.

Staff Code of Conduct

If the Officer, after having reported a relevant matter to the Vice Chairman, is dissatisfied with the response/outcome, they may report the matter in writing to the Director of Housing, Department for Communities, or the Northern Ireland Audit Office who will investigate the matter further.

- 25.2 The purpose of this section is to provide an appropriate framework to ensure that there is adequate protection for officers, who make disclosures which are in the public interest (disclosures which fall within the scope of the whistleblowing legislation, or disclosures which relate to other concerns about improper conduct). Such matters are referred to within this section as “relevant matters”.
- 25.3 Whistleblowing legislation, in certain situations, provides protections in respect of certain disclosures. Disclosure may qualify for protection under the legislation if it shows one or more of the following is either happening now, took place in the past, or is likely to happen in the future:
- A criminal offence
 - A breach of legal obligation
 - A health and safety risk, either to the public or other employees
 - Damage to the environment; or,
 - Deliberate covering up information tending to show any of the above.
- 25.4 In the context of this section of the Staff Code, the following are relevant matters:
- Any disclosure which qualifies for protection under the whistleblowing legislation.
 - Any instance in which an Officer believes that they are being required to act in a way which is illegal, improper or unethical.
 - Any instance in which an Officer believes that they are being required to act in a way which may involve possible maladministration, fraud, or misuse of public funds.
 - Any instance in which an Officer believes that they are being required to act in a way which would be in breach of a professional code.
 - Any instance in which an Officer believes that they are being required to act in a way which is otherwise inconsistent with the Staff Code.
 - Any case of irregular or improper behaviour within the Housing Executive, regardless of whether or not the relevant Officer has been personally involved.
 - Any instance in which the Officer has been required to act in a way which, for that officer, raises a fundamental issue of conscience.

Staff Code of Conduct

- Any case in which there is evidence of criminal or unlawful activity by others.

25.5 The Housing Executive is committed to making Whistleblowing work. Officers should therefore be assured and confident that where a disclosure is made in good faith they will not be at risk of losing their job or suffering any form of detriment as a result. Provided they are acting in good faith, it does not matter if they are mistaken. Of course, this assurance is not extended to those who maliciously raise a concern that they know to be false which may be considered as Gross Misconduct under the Housing Executive's Disciplinary Procedure with the potential to lead to dismissal.

Appendix 1

DESIGNATED MANAGERS UNDER THE STAFF CODE FOR HOUSING EXECUTIVE OFFICERS

In relation to any particular provision of the Staff Code, the term “Designated Manager”, in relation to any officer, means the person who has been nominated by the Housing Executive to exercise functions as Designated Manager, in relation to that officer, under that provision. The references within this Appendix to ‘Line Managers’ normally refers to officers at Level 7 and above. The list of such Designated Managers is set out below:-

Section	Paragraphs	Staff Group Applicable to	Designated Manager
4.0 Integrity	4.7	All Officers	Line Manager
	4.8 & 4.9	All Officers	Line Manager
5.0 Objectivity and Impartiality	5.6	All Officers	Line Manager
	5.8	All Officers	Line Manager
7.0 Housing Related Matters	7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.5 & 7.6	All Officers	Line Manager

Staff Code of Conduct

Section	Paragraphs	Applicable to (Staff group)	Designated Manager
9.0 Outside Commitments	9.1	All Officers	Line Manager
10.0 Closed Organisations & Societies	10.1	All Officers	Director of Corporate Services
11.0 Procurement	11.7	All Officers	Line Manager
12.0 Involvement in the Management, Funding, or Governance of External Bodies	12.4 & 12.6	All Officers	Director of Corporate Services
13.0 Tenancies	13.1	All Officers	Line Manager
14.0 Business Relationships with Housing Associations /Other Social Landlords	14.1	All Officers	Line Manager

Staff Code of Conduct

Section	Paragraphs	Applicable to (Staff group)	Designated Manager
16.0 Gifts and Hospitality	16.4	All Officers	Line manager
17.0 Sponsorship (Giving and Receiving)	17.2	All Officers	Line Manager
18.0 Leaving the Housing Executive	18.3	All Officers	Line Manager
22.0 Relationships with the Board and Board Members	22.2	All Officers	Line Manager

Appendix 2

DEFINITION OF RELEVANT FAMILY OR PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP

For the purposes of, the Staff Code a relevant family relationship shall be deemed to exist between an officer and another person if they are;

- Married
- Civil partners
- Cohabiting as if they were married
- Cohabiting as if they were civil partners (“partners”),

or the other person is a Biological, Adopted, Foster, or Step relative to an Officer or of that Officer’s married partner, civil partner, or partner under one of the following categories;

- Child
- Parent
- Sibling
- Son in Law or Daughter in Law
- Mother in Law or Father in Law
- Sister in Law or Brother in Law
- Uncle or Aunt
- Nephew or Niece
- Grandson or Granddaughter
- Grandparent

2.0 For the avoidance of doubt, a personal relationship for the purposes of the Staff Code includes:

- a family relationship other than that specified above
- a business/commercial/financial relationship
- a sexual / romantic relationship
- a friendship

(The clauses in the Staff Code which include references to relevant family or personal relationship are 4.9; 5.7; 5.8; 6.3; 7.1; 7.2; 7.3; 7.6; 11.5; 11.6; 11.7; 17.2; and 21.5).

Appendix 3

LEGISLATION RELEVANT TO THE STAFF CODE

Objectivity and Impartiality Legislation

1) Main law:

Sex Discrimination (NI) Order 1976

Amending Laws:

Sex Discrimination Order 1976 (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2011

Sex Discrimination Order 1976 (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2012

2) Main Law:

Race Relations (NI) Order 1997

Amending Laws:

Race Relations Order 1997 (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2012

3) Main Law:

Fair Employment & Treatment (NI) Order 1998

Supplementary Laws:

Fair Employment (Monitoring) Regulations (NI) 1999

Fair Employment (Monitoring) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2000

Fair Employment (Monitoring) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2002

4) Main law:

Northern Ireland Act 1998

5) Main law:

Human Rights Act 1998

6) Main Law:

Disability Discrimination (NI) Order 2006

Amending/Supplementary Laws:

Disability Discrimination (Service Providers & Public Authorities Carrying Out Functions) Regulations (NI) 2007

Staff Code of Conduct

Disability Discrimination (Premises) Regulations (NI) 2007

Disability Discrimination (Private Clubs, etc.) Regulations (NI) 2008

Disability Discrimination (Transport Vehicles) Regulations (NI) 2009

Autism Act (NI) 2011

7) Main law:

Employment Equality (Age) Regulations (NI) 2006

Amending Laws:

Employment Equality (Age) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2006

Employment Equality (Age) (Amendment No.2) Regulations (NI) 2006

Employment Equality (Age) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2009

Employment Equality (Age) (Repeal of Retirement Age Provisions)
Regulations (NI) 2011

8) Main Laws:

Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (NI) 2003

Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (NI) 2006

Amending Laws:

Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2006

Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) (Amendment No.2) Regulations (NI) 2007

9) Main Law:

Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons (NI) Act 1978

10) Main Law:

Disabled Persons (NI) Act 1989

11) Main Law:

Disabled Discrimination Act 2005

Other legislation

Local Government Act (NI) 2014

Staff Code of Conduct
Northern Ireland Act 1998

Bribery Act 2010

Appendix 4

POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

1.0 Scope

- 1.1 The rules below apply to Housing Executive employees up to and including Level 9. Where a successful applicant/ candidate for employment holds political office or engages in restricted political activities, the rules and process outlined below will be applied and completed as part of the pre-employment process, to determine what, if any, restrictions apply.
- 1.2 Requests by Officers above Assistant Director or applicants for these posts will be considered by NIHE Board, rather than the Panel outlined at paragraph 5.0 below. The rules and principles outlined in this policy apply to such requests but may involve in addition to Board members, the use of external professionals and or Departmental officials as appears appropriate and/or necessary.

2.0 Participating in Political Activities - rules

- 2.1 All Officers ¹are required to observe the rules (see Paragraph 5.6 and Section 24.0 of the [Code of Conduct](#)) concerning the use of official information or experience (relating to broadcasts, lectures and the like) and are barred from any form of political activity whilst on duty or in uniform or on official premises. In the context of participating in or undertaking political activities, Officers must not make any public statements, publish, broadcast or make any use whatsoever of any material which involves the disclosure of official information, or draws upon experience gained in their official capacity as an officer of the Housing Executive. In addition, officers are also required to observe the guidelines on the use of social media, which are outlined in the [Policy on Acceptable Use of Technology](#).
- 2.2 Officers are permitted to undertake political activities as follows:
 - (a) those in the politically free group (comprising any Officers who are not mainly involved in carrying out clerical work, administrative work, management work or any combination of those three categories of work, or any other post determined by the Housing Executive) are completely free to engage in the activities defined in paragraphs 2.8 and 2.9 (the defined political activities);
 - (b) Those in the intermediate group are eligible for freedom to engage in any or all of the national or local political activities, except candidature for Parliament or the European Parliament, or

¹ The term 'officer' throughout this Policy, should be considered to also include applicants for employment

the Northern Ireland Assembly, in accordance with the procedure outlined below (this group comprises of all Officers not in either of the other two groups).

- (c) those in the politically restricted group are debarred from engaging in national political activities, but free to seek permission in accordance with the procedure outlined below, to engage in local political activities (this group comprises Level 6 grades and above)

- 2.3 The Housing Executive may grant or refuse permission to undertake political activities to people in the intermediate group and, in certain instances, also those in the politically restricted group according to the nature of the current duties of the applicant.
- 2.4 All Officers in the intermediate and politically restricted groups who have not sought or been granted permission to engage in any of the defined political activities are expected at all times to maintain a reserve in political matters and not to put themselves forward prominently on one side or another.
- 2.5 Those transferred, seconded, or promoted to a post for which permission cannot be granted will be required to relinquish their political activities.
- 2.6 When permission is given to Officers in the intermediate or politically restricted groups, such permission is subject to the following rules
 - (a) Officers should bear in mind that while they are not debarred from advocating or criticising the policy of any political party, comment should be expressed with moderation, particularly in relation to matters concerning functions of the Housing Executive and indeed all comment avoided if the issue concerned is controversial. Personal attacks should also be avoided.
 - (b) Every care should be taken to avoid any embarrassment to the Housing Executive which could result, inadvertently or not, from the actions of persons known to be staff who bring themselves prominently to public notice in party political controversy.
 - (c) Permission to participate only in local political activities is granted subject to care being taken by the Officer concerned not to involve themselves in matters of political controversy that are of national rather than local significance.
 - (d) Any permission granted may be granted subject to such additional conditions as the Housing Executive consider appropriate.

- (e) Regular meetings between the Line Manager and Officer, to review the conditions imposed, the duties of the Officer and any other relevant matters.
- (f) Officers who are granted permission to engage in political activities may take annual leave, flexi leave or unpaid leave to attend meetings during working hours and are expected to minimise disruption to their office.

2.7 Where any of the following circumstances arise, permission may be withdrawn using the process outlined:

- (a) a failure to comply with any conditions imposed by the Panel which originally granted the relevant permission or
- (b) any failure to comply with the provisions of this Code, or
- (c) on a change of grade, duty or work location

2.8 National political activities subject to restriction are defined as follows (in this section 'national' means the United Kingdom or any part thereof):

- (a) Public announcement as a candidate or prospective candidate for Parliament or the European Parliament or the Northern Ireland Assembly.
- (b) Holding, in party political organisations, offices that impinge wholly or mainly on party politics in the field of Parliament, the European Parliament or the Northern Ireland Assembly or the Forum (Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations, etc) Act 1996).
- (c) Speaking in public on matters of national political controversy.
- (d) Expressing views on such matters in letters to the Press, or in books, articles or leaflets.
- (e) Canvassing on behalf of a candidate for Parliament or the European Parliament, or the Northern Ireland Assembly or the Forum (Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations, etc) Act 1996) or on behalf of a political party.

2.9 Local political activities subject to restriction are defined as follows:

- (a) Candidature for, or co-option to, a local council.
- (b) Holding membership on a local council.
- (c) Holding, in party political organisations, offices impinging wholly or mainly on party politics in the local field.

- (d) Speaking in public on matters of local political controversy affecting housing policy or any of the Housing Executives functions.
- (e) Expressing views on matters of political controversy affecting housing policy or any Housing Executive function in letters to the Press, or in books, articles or leaflets.
- (f) Canvassing on behalf of candidates for election to local authorities or a local political organisation.

3.0 The Intermediate Group

- 3.1 The Housing Executive will grant permission to the maximum extent consistent with the Staff Code. It is granted subject to the Housing Executive being satisfied that the individual concerned will continue to fully observe the general rules governing staff conduct. There are sensitive areas in which the political impartiality of the Housing Executive could be most at risk and accordingly permission cannot normally be granted to:
- (a) Officers who regularly speak for the Housing Executive in dealings with commercial undertakings, pressure groups, local government, public authorities or any other bodies, and who may appear to these organisations to have influence in the application of Housing Executive policy affecting them.
 - (b) Officers whose official duties involve a significant amount of face-to-face contact with individual members of the public and who make, or may seem to the public to be involved in making, decisions affecting them and whose political activities are likely to be (or become) known to those members of the public (for example those whose work involves them, or may seem to the public to involve them, in having both intimate knowledge and direct contact with members of the public in regard to their personal affairs and decisions affecting their personal lives).
- 3.2 It is the general intention that standing permission should be applied to posts outside these sensitive areas.
- 3.3 Permission may be granted, or refused, mainly according to the nature and degree of the contact with the public or making of policy involved in the undertaking of the particular post. The nature of an individual's duties may be such that permission can be granted to undertake either only national or only local political activities; but, in general, where permission is given to undertake national political activities, it will follow that it should also be given for local political activities. If permission to engage in political activities has to be withheld, the reasons should be fully explained to the Officer.

4.0 The Politically Restricted Group

- 4.1 Officers who are in the politically restricted group and barred from national political activities as defined in paragraph 2.6 above, may seek permission to take part in local political activities. When deciding whether or not such permission can be granted, the Housing Executive will have regard to, and apply as appropriate, the criteria and other matters referred to in paragraph 3.0 above. Permission, where appropriate, is subject to their notifying the Housing Executive in due course if they are elected to a council. If permission has to be withheld, the reasons should be fully explained in writing to the applicant.

5.0 Process

Requests for Permission

- 5.1 An Officer who wishes to engage in political activities must complete the Request to Engage in Political Activities pro forma. The employee's Line Manager must also complete all relevant sections, including a recommendation as to whether approval should be granted, and if so, whether any conditions or restrictions apply.
- 5.2 The Pro Forma will be considered by a Panel comprising of the functional Director, Assistant Director of HR and Head of Planning, Performance, Risk and Governance to determine whether to grant approval and which if any conditions or restrictions apply. In circumstances where there is a conflict of interest for any of the Panel Members, another suitable Officer will be assigned to participate on the Panel.

Withdrawing Permission

- 5.3 Where the Line Manager or other Senior Officer considers that the circumstances outlined at paragraph 2.7 apply, the matter will be referred to the Panel as per paragraph 5.2. The reasons for the referral should be fully explained in writing to the Officer.

Appeals

- 5.4 Appeals against refusal or withdrawal of permission (the decision) to engage in political activities may be submitted within 10 days of notification of the decision. The appeal should be submitted in writing to the Director of Corporate Services. Appeals will be considered by a Panel which will include, the Chief Executive, who will Chair the Panel, the Director of Corporate Services and the Director of Finance, Audit and Assurance.