



*Dunbartonshire and Argyll & Bute
Valuation Joint Board*

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR EMPLOYEES

(Reviewed March 2022)

Title	Code of Conduct for Employees
Version	5.1d March 2022
Unison Consultation :	May/June 2022
Joint Board Approval:	24 June 2022
Supersedes Version	5.0 January 2022
Driver for change	Updated to reflect new Public Interest Disclosure Policy and miscellaneous updates.
Legislative Context	Equalities Act, Data Protection, FOISA,

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. “The Seven Principles of Public Life”**
- 3. Personal Conduct**
 - 3.1 Fraud & Corruption
- 4. Dress Code**
- 5. Relationships**
 - 5.1 Elected Members
 - 5.2 The Public and Service Users
 - 5.3 Conduct Towards Colleagues
 - 5.4 Voluntary Bodies or Organisations
 - 5.5 Partner Organisations
- 6. Confidentiality**
 - 6.1 General Duty
 - 6.2 Joint Board Proceedings
 - 6.3 Private Information Relating to Employees
- 7. Political Neutrality**
- 8. Conflict of Interest**
 - 8.1 Private Interests
 - 8.2 Procurement and Contracts
 - 8.3 Membership of Private Clubs/Organisations or Work with Voluntary Groups
 - 8.4 Paid Employment Outside the Joint Board
 - 8.5 Community Emergency Service
 - 8.6 The Giving of Lectures, Broadcasts etc.
- 9. Use of Valuation Joint Board Equipment or Resources**
- 10. Disclosure of Information**
 - 10.1 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985
 - 10.2 Data Protection Act 2018
 - 10.3 Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002
 - 10.4 Contact with the Media
 - 10.5 Reporting Improper Behaviour
- 11. Rights as a Citizen**
 - 11.1 Expression of Personal Views
 - 11.2 Access to your Councillor
- 12. Register of Gifts, Hospitality and Services**
- 13. Operation of Policies**
 - 13.1 Recruitment
 - 13.2 Operation of Personnel Policies
- 14. Equal Opportunities**

Code Statement

1. Introduction

This Code of Conduct has been developed by the Valuation Joint Board (VJB) following the adoption by COSLA of the National Code of Conduct for Local Government Employees.

The public has high expectations of the standards of conduct for local government employees. VJB Members comply with the Codes of Conduct of their own authorities and so it is right that there should also be a Code for employees. This Code sets out the standards of conduct that are expected of you as an employee of the public, your colleagues and by the members of the VJB.

The Code does not affect your rights and your responsibilities under the law. Its purpose is to provide clear and helpful advice to you. Because of the nature of your work, some parts of the Code may apply to some of your colleagues more than to you, but all employees must comply with the Code. While a breach of this Code may give rise to disciplinary action, it is designed to provide you with guidance on the standards of conduct appropriate for a public service employee. Should you have any difficulties in meeting the standards of the Code, you should approach your manager, a member of West Dunbartonshire Council's HR & OD Service or a Trade Union representative for advice and assistance.

The Code also incorporates "The Seven Principles of Public Life" identified by the Nolan Committee on Standards in Public Life. These are listed below, as slightly altered by COSLA to place them in local government context.

2. "The Seven Principles of Public Life" as Applied to Valuation Joint Board

- 2.1 Selflessness:** You should not take decisions which would result in any financial or other benefit to yourself, your family or friends. Workplace decisions should be based solely on the VJB's best interests.
- 2.2 Integrity:** You should not place yourself under any financial or other obligation to people or organisations that might try to inappropriately influence you in your work with the VJB.
- 2.3 Objectivity:** In carrying out all VJB business, including, but not limited to, making appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for awards or benefits you must make your choices solely on merit.
- 2.4 Accountability:** You are accountable for your actions to the VJB and ultimately to the public.
- 2.5 Openness:** You should be as open and transparent as possible in all the decisions and actions that you take. You should give reasons for your decisions and should not restrict information unless this is clearly required by VJB Policy or by the law.
- 2.6 Honesty:** You have a duty to declare any private interests which might affect your work with the VJB.

2.7 Leadership: If you are a manager, you should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.

3. Personal Conduct

Employees should be aware that the way they behave during working hours reflects on the image of the VJB. This can also be the case for certain types of behaviours out with working hours, including the use of social media. The Joint Board recognises employees' rights to personal use of social media, however, employees should be aware that posting of certain information or comments, even in their own time and using their own equipment, may be in breach of the Joint Board's Social Media Guidance.

There is an expectation that employees will not attend work under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs, as these may affect their ability to undertake their duties safely and effectively and may damage the public image of the VJB. Any employee who does attend work under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs should understand that he/she may be subject to disciplinary action under the VJB's disciplinary proceedings. Any employee who has an addiction problem may seek help and support through the support services which are provided by West Dunbartonshire Council (WDC).

It is a condition of your employment that if you are arrested, charged, convicted of a criminal offence, bound over or cautioned, pending appointment to, or whilst employed by the Joint Board, that you report details of the matter to your line manager, or a more senior manager, who may decide to investigate the matter taking account of the VJB's Code of Conduct. Where information on un-notified criminal charges comes to the Joint Board's attention this will be discussed with you and appropriate action taken. Employees with posts which are exempted from the provisions of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act must advise their line manager in the event they are charged with a criminal offence.

Employees working in occupations with professional standards and who are required to register and maintain a membership with a professional organisation, must abide by relevant professional standards and should note that the VJB is required to inform the Regulating Body of any misconduct.

All employees have a responsibility for the health and safety of themselves and others and must inform the Joint Board of any underlying health condition that may impact on their ability to undertake their role safely. In addition to information provided through pre-employment health checks, employees must advise their line manager of any change to disclosed conditions or when medical investigations are underway, that may impact on their ability to undertake their role safely. Where an employee's health impacts on their ability to continue to carry out their role safely, the VJB will support the employee through appropriate policies.

Employees, like all other residents, have a duty to make any payments due to the appropriate Council in good time. Where an individual is experiencing difficulties in making payment, advice is available from various sources such as Citizens Advice Bureau, Independent Resource Centre and WDC advice services for benefit, debt and money advice.

You should be aware that regular checks may be made by the VJB's constituent councils to ensure that employees are not in arrears with payments such as Council Tax, rent etc.

Regardless of personal beliefs and opinions, all employees are expected to display positive attitudes to all service users and colleagues in terms of Equalities. All employees are expected to treat everyone in a fair and non-discriminatory manner and failure to comply with the VJB's Equality Scheme will be treated as a serious matter.

3.1 Fraud and Corruption

As detailed in the VJB's Counter Fraud and Corruption Strategy, the VJB has a zero tolerance approach to fraudulent or corrupt activity regardless of the perpetrator. All suspected instances of fraud will be investigated, involving HR as required

As an employee of the VJB, in addition to any potential criminal proceedings, a disciplinary process may be initiated depending on the circumstances of each individual case. Theft, fraud and corruption are serious offences and are considered gross misconduct and accordingly could result in summary dismissal from the organisation.

4. Dress Code

The VJB requires employees to adopt reasonable dress standards which are related to the type of work being undertaken. Identity cards should be displayed on any occasion when an employee comes into contact with a member of the public.

If you are in doubt, or require advice in connection with personal appearance or dress standards, your line manager can provide further advice regarding the appropriate standards for your area of work.

The VJB recognises the diversity of cultural traditions and will take account of this in its expectations of dress standards.

Where protective and safety clothing is provided, this must be worn and maintained in an appropriate manner. If this is lost or damaged, you must report this to your line manager.

5. Relationships

5.1 Elected Members

Both Elected Members and employees are servants of the public and are indispensable to each other. Employees are responsible to the VJB and their role is to support and give advice to Elected Members and to carry out work under the direction and control of the Assessor & ERO.

Mutual respect between VJB Members and employees is essential to good local government. Close personal familiarity between individual VJB Members and employees can damage working relations and may be perceived wrongly or be embarrassing to others.

5.2 The Public and Service Users

Employees who have contact with members of the public as electors, ratepayers, council tax payers and their agents should always behave in a courteous and helpful manner. Each member of the public should be treated fairly, equitably, consistently and in accordance with the principles of the Equality Scheme.

The VJB monitors Customer Satisfaction and operates a Complaints Procedure to deal with dissatisfied service users in a consistent and fair manner.

5.3 Conduct Towards Colleagues

Services are best delivered by employees who work together in the best interests of stakeholders. Employees should also respect each other, and others beliefs and opinions, behaving in an appropriate manner and in accordance with the provisions of the VJB's Policies on Equality and Dignity at Work.

The VJB has a clear policy (Dignity at Work) that identifies discrimination, harassment and victimisation as serious misconduct, and will not tolerate it in any form. The Policy is available on the VJB's website.

5.4 Voluntary Bodies or Organisations

If you are a volunteer with any organisation, you should ensure that there is no conflict of interest regarding your job. If, through your work on behalf of the VJB, you are asked for assistance from a voluntary or charitable organisation you should seek advice from your line manager.

5.5 Partner Organisations

The VJB is committed to working in partnership with other organisations. This will involve building close working relations with employees of other organisations, and sustaining good working relations will be vital.

6. Confidentiality

6.1 General Duty

Every employee, whether permanent or temporary, is required to respect the confidentiality of various types of information which come into his/her possession in the course of his/her work, and this is the case both in and out of the office, including working from home. Information may relate to service users, other employees and other VJB matters such as tendering and contracts. Releasing confidential information is a very serious matter, and employees should check with their line manager if it is appropriate, before giving information to a third party.

The provisions of the Data Protection legislation apply in respect of any information held which relates to individuals. There is a general duty that information shall be obtained and processed fairly and lawfully and held for one or more specified and lawful purpose. Data Subjects have the right to request the information that is held about them. There are specific restrictions on the use and disclosure of personal information and guidance should be sought from the Assessor or Depute Assessor.

Some of the information held by the VJB may be subject to disclosure under the terms of the Freedom of Information legislation, whereas other types of information should still be withheld on the basis of confidentiality or other exemption. The VJB policy in relation to Freedom of Information should provide any guidance needed.

6.2 Valuation Joint Board Proceedings

The VJB is publicly accountable and as such its proceedings are subject to public scrutiny. As an employee, however, you should not communicate information regarding any proceedings of a VJB meeting or the contents of any document relating to the VJB, unless required under the provisions of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 or expressly authorised to do so.

6.3 Private Information Relating to Employees

Information concerning an employee's private affairs will not be supplied to any person outwith the service of the VJB unless the employee's consent has been obtained first. This will not apply where there is a statutory duty to provide information, or if required by a Court order or warrant or as required by Audit Scotland as part of ongoing work on the National Fraud Initiative.

7. Political Neutrality

Employees should carry out their duties and serve the VJB and all its Members, regardless of their political outlook, in a politically neutral way.

If an employee is asked by an elected member to provide assistance with a matter which is clearly party political, or which does not have a clear link with the work of the VJB, he/she should politely explain that the matter has to be referred to their manager. The request should then be brought to the attention of the Assessor or Depute.

If political groups seek advice or information from employees, the following procedure should be adopted:

- The office bearers of the political group should be referred to the Assessor or Depute to outline the type of advice they are seeking.
- If attendance at a meeting is requested, the Assessor will decide if it is appropriate and which employee(s) should attend.
- Once the employee has given advice to the group, they must leave the meeting before any decision is made.
- Strict confidentiality must be observed by the employee.

8. Conflict of Interest

The VJB will maintain a Register of Interests which will be used to record any instances where staff members are involved in surveys and valuations of property owned by themselves, close relatives or friends. Involvement in surveys and valuations where potential conflicts of interest relating to club memberships, alternative employment etc might arise should also be registered. Staff should always bear in mind that the potential for the perception of a conflict of interests occurring should be sufficient for a declaration and an entry in the register to be made. Failure to do so may result in disciplinary action against the member of staff involved.

Whilst the above refers specifically to the Assessor's valuation processes, a similar obligation applies to all of the VJB's functions when the involvement amounts to anything more than general processing of electoral register changes.

Where any conflict of interest has been declared, mitigating action, which might include additional supervision or referring the caseload to an alternative member of staff, must be taken by the relevant line manager in each case and be described in the Register of Interests.

The Register will be held in a shared, secured, network drive.

8.1 Private Interests

VJB employees must not allow any private interest to influence their decisions at work and must not use their position to further their own interests or the interests of others. Any such interest in the work of the Valuation Joint Board, on the part of the employee, close family members or members of an employee's household, must be declared and entered in the Register of Interests. If an employee is in any doubt about the relevance of private interests, he/she should clarify the position with his/her line manager.

8.2 Procurement and Contracts

Employees involved in the procurement process, must follow the VJB's Standing Orders relating to Contracts, its Procurement Policy and its "Ordering, Certification and Payments of Goods & Services Authorised Procedures". Any non-compliance may result in disciplinary action being taken under the Joint Board's Disciplinary Procedures.

Employees must be fair and impartial in their dealings with contractors, sub-contractors and suppliers. Employees must notify the Assessor if it comes to their knowledge that a contract, in which they have a personal or financial interest, whether direct or indirect, has been or is about to be, entered into by the Joint Board. Employees must not disclose confidential information on contractors to any individual or organisation unless authorised to do so.

Any employee who has both a "client" and "contractor" responsibility in any tendering process must observe a requirement for accountability and equity in undertaking these two roles. Where appropriate, the VJB will require employees working in particularly sensitive areas to enter into restrictive covenants.

In any event, any potential conflict should be entered into the Register of Interests.

8.3 Membership of Private Clubs/Organisations or Work with Voluntary Groups

Any membership of a private club/organisation or work with a voluntary group which results in a conflict, or potential conflict, of interest in relation to any aspect of employment with the VJB must be declared to the line manager and entered into the Register of Interests.

8.4 Paid Employment Outside the Joint Board

The VJB will have no objections to employees undertaking paid employment outside the VJB, unless there is a clear conflict of interest or it is likely to have an adverse

effect on the work of the VJB. To help protect the integrity of services the VJB seeks co-operation from employees through being advised of any paid external employment which could cause any conflict of interest or impair performance in the work of the VJB. Where an employee is unsure as to whether there could be an impact, advice should be sought from his/her line manager.

Employees are not permitted to use the equipment or resources of the VJB in any outside paid employment.

8.5 The Giving of Lectures, Broadcasts etc.

The VJB will normally allow employees to accept invitations to give lectures appropriate to their professional/occupational standing, however, an employee should first obtain approval from the Assessor.

Any article written for an external publication, or the content of any radio or television broadcast or public speaking engagement made on a personal basis must not claim to express a VJB view, except when this is expressly authorised by, or on behalf of, the Assessor & ERO and/or the VJB.

Any fees received for lectures, broadcasts etc. given within normal working hours, excluding out of pocket expenses, will be paid to the VJB, otherwise time taken to present the lecture, broadcast etc. must be set against the employee's annual leave entitlement. Fees may be retained for any lectures, broadcasts etc. given outwith normal working hours.

9. Use of Valuation Joint Board Equipment, Resources or Data

Employees wishing to use VJB equipment, for example to work at home as part of their personal development or for study purposes, must obtain permission from their line manager.

Employees must take all reasonable care to ensure the security and condition of the VJB's equipment and data in their care, whether in the office, working from home, or working at other locations (survey/canvass etc.).

10. Disclosure of Information

10.1 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

The VJB's policy on disclosure of information is based on the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 which details the rights of members of the public to attend VJB meetings and to inspect documents and papers.

These principles apply unless the information is deemed to be "confidential" or "exempt" in terms of the Act. VJB employees are required by the Act to comply with its provisions. Refusal to do so is a criminal offence. "Confidential" information is generally information supplied to the VJB by a Government resource which forbids its disclosure, or where disclosure is prohibited by a court order. There are 15 categories of "exempt" information including information about past and present employees, office holders, recipients of services or relating to the adoption, fostering or education of any particular child.

As well as having the same rights as members of the public in this regard, elected members have the right of access to information on a “need to know” basis.

Employees should seek advice from the Assessor if there is any doubt as to what may constitute “confidential” or “exempted” information, or a “need to know” basis.

In addition to these rights, the public are also entitled to inspect the Valuation Roll, Council Tax List and Register of Electors. Separate procedures exist for the viewing, and, where allowed, the provision of these documents.

10.2 Data Protection Act 2018

The right of access to personal information held by the VJB, whether relating to employees, service users, or other individuals, is covered by the Data Protection Act. The Act places strict requirements on the Joint Board with regard to the security of personal data held, whether this is paper based or in electronic format. This means that an employee asked by an individual to provide access to personal information held by the VJB about them, must seek advice from the Depute Assessor and follow an agreed procedure.

Generally any request must be made in writing, and proof of identity will be required before the access is provided.

10.3 Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 (FOISA)

The FOISA provides a general right of access to information held by the VJB. The Board’s FOI Procedure is available on its website. Employees who receive a request should refer it to the Depute Assessor.

10.4 Contact with the Media

Employees must not deal directly with the press or media in matters relating to the VJB unless required to do so as part of their duties, or where expressly authorised to do so. This provision does not apply to employees who are acting in their capacity as an accredited Trade Union official and are communicating the views of their trade union.

Contact with the media regarding “sensitive” or “confidential” issues should be made through the Assessor.

Examples of these circumstances may include:-

- Disclosing information relating to a Service User.
- Disclosing ‘confidential’ information received during the course of employment
- Disclosing commercially sensitive information.
- Unauthorised disclosure of personal information relating to an employee of the Valuation Joint Board.
- Disclosing information relating to a Health and Safety incident.

Any contact with the media made on a personal basis must not claim to express a VJB view, except when this is expressly authorised by, or on behalf of, the Assessor & ERO and/or the VJB.

If an employee is in doubt he/she should contact his/her line manager, who in turn should refer the matter to the Assessor or Depute.

Any employee wishing to disclose information in the public interest should use the “whistleblowing” procedure described in 10.5.

10.5 Reporting Improper Behaviour (“Whistleblowing”)

If an employee becomes aware of any wrongdoing, malpractice or improper behaviour within the VJB, he/she can raise the matter as directed in the VJB’s “Public Interest Disclosure Policy”. Under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 and the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013, employees are protected from dismissal or any other detriment because they have disclosed information, as long as the information disclosed falls into a specified category and is made in a specific manner. Employees will not be protected, however, if the disclosure is made in bad faith or for personal gain.

Employees are encouraged to disclose information through the appropriate internal channels first, rather than going directly to an outside person.

Employees should refer to the VJB’s “Public Interest Disclosure Policy” and the Joint Board’s Health and Safety Policy for full details of how to report incidents of malpractice or wrongdoing. A brief outline of the procedure is shown below.

An employee can report a matter on a confidential basis, if it is within any of the following 6 categories.

- A criminal offence (such as fraud or corruption)
- A failure to comply with a legal obligation including statutory codes of practice
- A miscarriage of justice
- A danger to the health and safety of an individual
- Damage to the environment
- A deliberate attempt to cover up any of the above

The procedure outlines 4 routes for employees to make disclosures in the public interest:-

Route 1 - Disclosure made to line manager

Route 2 - Disclosure made to line manager’s manager or other appropriate senior manager

Route 3 - Disclosure made to WDC’s Internal Audit

Route 4 - Disclosure made to External Regulating Body

When a concern has been raised, an assessment will be made of the action to be taken. This may involve an internal query or a more formal investigation.

If appropriate, the manager or Internal Audit will conduct an investigation into the concerns and produce a report detailing their findings to be passed to the Assessor & ERO. Where a disciplinary offence has been identified the complaint will then be dealt with under the relevant disciplinary policy

When requested, the VJB will provide relevant feedback to the employee who raised the concern. Concerns raised will be treated in strict confidence and, when requested, an individual's identify will normally be kept confidential.

Any employee making a confidential report will be protected against being subjected to any detriment such as dismissal, harassment, victimisation or any other form of punitive sanction as a result of making the disclosure in good faith. Following any investigation into a confidential report, a review will take place to ensure the employee has not suffered from victimisation, harassment or other detriment. Support will be available at all times from WDC's HR & OD Service.

Employees who make a disclosure outwith the jurisdiction of the VJB, for example to the press, may not automatically be protected by the above Acts. Before taking such a step, employees, in their own interest, are advised to seek advice from their trade union or a legal adviser. The VJB still welcomes employees using the whistleblowing procedures in good faith.

11. Rights as a Citizen

11.1 Expression of Personal Views

It is recognised that as a citizen, an employee is entitled to express views about the VJB or its constituent councils. However, this does not include making use of any information gained through working for the VJB.

In their work capacity, employees should not criticise the Valuation Joint Board or its constituent councils either through the media, at a public meeting or in any written communication with members of the public.

11.2 Access to your Councillor

As a citizen, an employee can raise with his/her Councillor any complaint which he/she has about the services of the relevant Council. However, if the complaint concerns any aspect of the employee's work with the VJB, this should be pursued through the Grievance Procedures.

12. Register of Gifts, Hospitality and Services

Generally, no employee should accept gifts, goods, gratuities etc., from any customer or service user other than a token item. Any such offers, whether accepted or not, should be entered in the Register.

No employee should accept personal gifts, hospitality or services from anyone, which would, or might appear to, place that individual under any obligation.

Any cash, monetary gifts or vouchers of any type should not be accepted.

It is a matter for the individual to decide if it is appropriate to accept a personal gift, hospitality or services. If there is any doubt, an employee should clarify the situation with the Assessor or Depute Assessor.

Personal gifts, hospitality or services which are offered or accepted, should be registered.

It is a matter for the recipient to determine the value. If an employee requires assistance, this should be raised with his/her line manager.

A good rule of thumb is: “if in doubt, do not accept the gift or service”.

Frequent personal gifts, hospitality or services should not be accepted from the same source.

As a guide, the provision of occasional lunches by a professional agent may be acceptable, as long as the employee is not placed under any obligation, but these should be registered.

Generally, the type of free handout available at conferences or seminars, such as mugs, key rings, pens etc. do not need to be registered.

The Register will be held on a shared, secure, network drive.

13. Operation of Policies

13.1 Recruitment

All appointments to the VJB will be made on the basis of merit and in line with the Joint Board’s Recruitment Policy.

13.2 Operation of Personnel Policies

Employees involved in the operation of the VJB’s personnel policies, for example, Wellbeing Support, Scheme of Special Leave, Recruitment, Disciplinary or Grievance Procedures, must do so fairly and equitably, declaring any interest or relationship to their line manager, whereupon a decision will be made as to whether they can continue to be involved in the process.

14. Equal Opportunities

The VJB complies with specific public sector equality duties. The Joint Board aims to prevent unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equalities Act. This will be achieved through:

- Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics.
- Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people.
- Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.

Employees should expect fair and reasonable treatment at work in line with the provisions of the VJB Equality Scheme and other relevant policies.

The VJB operates a system which continually reviews current policies and practices, examines service standards, monitors data and reports regular progress to the public.

The VJB views discrimination, harassment or victimisation at work as a serious matter. Any employee who feels that he/she has been the victim of unfair treatment

should make reference to the Dignity at Work Policy or Grievance Procedures. Alternatively an employee may wish to raise the matter with his/her line manager, trade union representative or contact WDC's HR & OD service.