



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba



# Code of Conduct

## Còd Giùlain

**Stewardship** Stiùbhartachd  
**Inclusiveness** In-ghabhalachd  
**Excellence** Sàr-mhathas  
**Respect** Spèis

[parliament.scot](http://parliament.scot)



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**This Code is a guide and reference point for us all. It explains how we work, live up to our values and do the right thing when we have to make decisions.**



*David McGill*

David McGill  
Clerk/Chief Executive



**As staff of the Scottish Parliament, we occupy a privileged position at the heart of our country’s democracy. That privilege comes with an important responsibility – that we conduct ourselves at all times in an impartial manner. The people of Scotland who elect our Members and who provide our resources deserve no less.**

The Scottish Parliament strives to provide an environment that is inclusive and welcoming to all. For our people, that means understanding and valuing difference to allow us to build trusted relationships in which every individual feels included, valued, and empowered to be their best. The Code of Conduct (the “Code”) supports ways in which this can be achieved.

In the words of our Strategic Plan, we are here to play our part in “improving the lives of the people of Scotland” and through this Code, we dedicate ourselves to provide high quality services to the benefit of the country. We do that in ways that show no favour or detriment towards any of our elected Members or their parties.

We have unparalleled access to Members and to the resources of the Scottish Parliament and we treat that access as a great trust placed in us. Our [values](#) of Stewardship, Inclusion, Excellence and Respect guide us in how we work to support our Members and engage the people who elect them.

Politics has evolved in recent years from being focussed very strongly on political parties to a more complex landscape where the traditional party landscape has been added to by single issue and identity politics. It is vital that we move with these societal shifts. When at work, it is no longer enough for us to say that we show no bias – positive or negative – to any political party. We must demonstrate the same impartiality in relation to issues that go beyond political parties, regardless of our own personal views and thoughts on those issues.

## Foreword Welcome to our Code

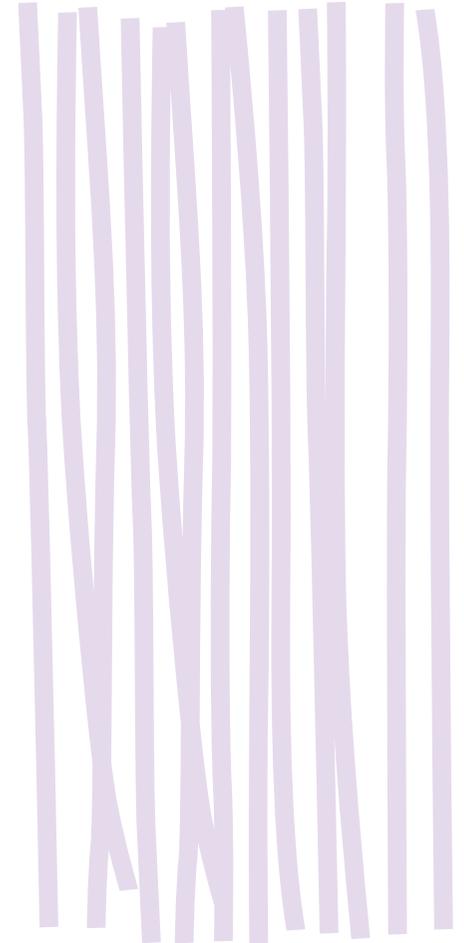


It can sometimes be difficult to strike the right balance between acting impartially and exercising our right as citizens to participate in public life. Particularly when issues that are discussed and debated in the Scottish Parliament impact on our lives or touch on our personal beliefs.

In recognising this increased complexity, the Code does not attempt to capture rules that can be applied to every situation. As part of a framework, it deals with scenarios and encourages discussion, advice and support for staff in making sure we understand our obligations as parliamentary staff and adhere to the highest standards of impartiality in the work we do.

I encourage all staff to familiarise themselves with the terms of the Code and to remember, if in any doubt at all, to take the advice and support on offer and – where we are dealing with complex or ambiguous areas – to abide by the spirit of the Code.

I take immense pride in the work that you do and the services you provide. This Code sets the standards for all of our contributions and acts as our promise to our Members, our fellow citizens and to each other to act at all times as befits the staff of our national parliament.





# Section 1

## About the Code

### Mun Chòd

Read this section to find out what the Code is, why we need it and how to use it effectively.

**Stewardship** Stiùbhartachd  
**Inclusiveness** In-ghabhalachd  
**Excellence** Sàr-mhathas  
**Respect** Spèis

**“Our Code provides the clearest guidance about how we all have a shared obligation to deliver our values.”**

Lorna Hunter  
Group Head of  
People and Culture



### What the Code is for

The role of the Scottish Parliament is to facilitate debate and engagement across a wide spectrum of views and must be inclusive of all positions within the law. Political impartiality is a key feature of the parliamentary service. This requirement flows from the [Scotland Act](#). We all have a duty to act impartially, whether our role is expressly referred to or not in the Scotland Act. Our Code is there to guide us in our duties at work. It does not seek to inhibit our right to hold or exercise our political beliefs. It enables us to do so in accordance with our duties in our contract of employment.

This Code is a guide and reference point for us all. It explains how we work, live up to our values and do the right thing when we have to make decisions. It provides clarity of the standards of behaviour expected of Scottish Parliamentary Service (SPS) staff when working for the SPS and in situations where staff could be associated or affiliated with the SPS.

It also supports us to develop a better understanding of our contractual duties under the Code and helps us balance these with our personal beliefs and values.

It recognises that the Scottish Parliament has a high profile and that the public rightly expects the highest professional standards of integrity and impartiality from SPS staff.

#### The Code seeks to ensure that SPS staff:

- serve all elected members equally
- deliver consistently high-quality services
- provides impartial, balanced and evidence-based information.

In drafting the Code, a thorough assessment of the risk to impartiality and the action to be undertaken to eliminate or minimise any risks was completed. The risk assessment process is ongoing and is maintained through the Leadership Team.

## Section 1 About the Code



### Who the Code is for

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The Code is for all staff employed by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body (SPCB). Contractors' staff, consultants, agency staff and staff on secondment to or from the SPS are also expected to act in accordance with these standards of behaviour, and in line with our values, as set out in this Code.

### Why do we need it

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It's essential that the Scottish Parliament and the public have confidence that our personal views do not affect the discharge of our official duties. The Code sets out the standards of behaviour expected of us. The Code allows us the greatest possible freedom to participate in public affairs without infringing upon the fundamental principle of impartiality.

We are a political organisation and have democratically elected MSPs who set our policies and govern our services. Like our elected MSPs we are accountable to the people of Scotland at all times. In light of the expected issues that the Scottish Parliament will deal with both constitutionally and societally throughout the session, there is a need to highlight the importance of impartiality as part of our culture and behaviours.

Of course, it is recognised that colleagues may wish to actively participate in public life through various means. The SPCB recognises that there is an increasing focus on matters which are not “party political” but which become politicised through the media and general commentary. This can often involve a clash of competing rights, particularly when there are protected characteristics involved. We appreciate there is a nuance between holding a belief and actively participating in a cause. This is in contrast to manifesting that belief in a way which may infringe on the rights of others.

In such situations, particularly where staff participation in such a matter could, or might reasonably be seen to have a negative or detrimental impact on the reputation of the Scottish Parliament, staff are expected to exercise caution and should use the [tool](#) in section 2 of this Code before deciding whether or not to actively participate. Where you are unsure have a chat with your manager in the first instance.



**“Diversity in the workplace can create positive friction that enhances deliberation and upends conformity. Diversity in this context, is about balancing various perspectives – which we know come from our identities, backgrounds, and life experiences – across teams, at all levels of the SPS. And it is about how people feel when they come to work. The Code helps us to balance multiple voices and perspectives and create a harmonious workplace where there are good relations between different people, and we treat one another with mutual respect.”**

**Lorna Hunter**  
Group Head of People and Culture

### We need the Code because:

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- It sets out our responsibilities to operate with the highest professional standards of integrity and impartiality
- It provides clarity about what doing the right thing involves in any situation. And emphasises our responsibility to always do so, while affording the greatest possible freedom to participate in public affairs without undermining our duty of impartiality
- It explains the consequences of not doing the right thing and not complying with the Code
- It explains how we can work in support of our values, our strategies and all relevant policies, procedures and standards
- It demonstrates that we're a responsible, inclusive organisation existing to make a positive difference to the people of Scotland.

### What the Code does

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This Code provides a framework to support you in making decisions around your behaviours and actions as a public official. It provides clarity by bringing together the essential standards of behaviour that guide our individual actions. The Code is reviewed on an ongoing basis to make sure it's relevant and covers all aspects of our operations.

In accordance with our dignity and mutual respect framework, we will not discriminate in the application of this Code in respect of age, disability, gender reassignment, race, nationality, ethnic or national origin, religion or belief, sex, pregnancy and maternity, sexual orientation, marriage or civil partnership status, trade union membership or non-trade union membership.

**Please note that the Code is not contractual other than to the extent that it places obligations upon staff. It may be reviewed and amended from time to time as appropriate. This means that the Code should be adhered to and any breach of it is considered a disciplinary matter.**

### Living up to the Code

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The Code explains what we expect from you but also many of our legal obligations. We need to demonstrate that we understand these obligations fully.

#### Living up to the Code means we must:

- Take time to understand the Code and how it applies to each individual role. This includes completing any training and taking part in team discussions
- Seek guidance from your manager immediately if you have any doubt about your obligations under the Code
- Work in line with the Code and our values – and acting as a positive role model
- Discuss with your manager where you identify behaviours you feel should be challenged.

### Bringing the Code to life

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The delivery of regular sessions for all staff is critical to make sure the Code is well understood and to ensure that staff understand how to comply with the Code.

The sessions aim to increase awareness of conflicts and provide practical ways of resolving dilemmas or potential conflict. This will encourage respectful discussion, recognising diversity and an understanding that there is not necessarily one correct response or outcome to any given situation. This will also encourage open dialogue to identify potential conflicts of interest and disclosure and management of risk to support wellbeing.

## Section 1 About the Code



### Failing to follow the Code

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Non-compliance with the Code or any of our policies is a serious matter, regardless of the reasons why it happened. Non-compliance can result in disciplinary action, including dismissal, and even criminal prosecution.

Sometimes colleagues don't do the right thing. This might be on purpose but is often because they misunderstand the Code. Or believe that other priorities mean they can 'bend the rules', for example to meet a tight deadline. If you fail to comply with the Code, you'll be supported to increase your awareness and understanding. We will be able to do this, if you can demonstrate that you have already taken reasonable steps to live up to the Code.

### How to use the Code

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The Code is to be used as a guide whenever you are unsure about what doing the right thing means. A decision-making [tool](#) is available to assist you in applying the Code when in doubt.

Throughout the Code, reference is made to the requirement to seek advice and/or permission from your manager, or your head of office/group. Staff at this level or above should seek advice and/or permission from the relevant manager or the [People and Culture Group](#). The Clerk/Chief Executive should seek advice and/or permission from the Presiding Officer or the SPCB as appropriate.





The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba



# Section 2

## Doing the right thing

### A' dèanamh an rud cheart

Use this section to find out how you can live our values, make the right decisions and raise any concerns you have at work.

**Stewardship** Stiùbhartachd  
**Inclusiveness** In-ghabhalachd  
**Excellence** Sàr-mhathas  
**Respect** Spèis

## Section 2 Doing the right thing



### Living our values

At the Scottish Parliament, the underlying goal of all our work is to make a *positive difference to the lives of the people of Scotland*. Our [People and Culture Strategy](#) puts people at the centre of everything we do. Our approach requires each of us to value people with different backgrounds, perspectives and experiences and demonstrates this commitment in our daily activities. This includes being professional at all times, treating colleagues and those around us with dignity and respect and taking responsibility for your own behaviour and actions.

Our [values](#) are embedded across the business and are core to how we all do our work. They're at the heart of how we realise our shared vision and are consistent with our key principles of openness and transparency.

The behaviours set out below help to define each of our values, explaining how we can bring them to life and setting out our expectations of each other:



- **Stewardship** – Focusing on the longer term to ensure we are leaving things better than we found them and putting our shared interests ahead of any individual or team
- **Inclusiveness** – Understanding the big picture and seeking out alternative perspectives. Every colleague feels they are able to make a valued contribution and deliver their best work
- **Excellence** – Taking care to enhance our reputation in everything we do, and using our skills and resources to deliver high-quality sustainable results
- **Respect** – Appreciating difference, building cohesive teams and fostering the values and experiences of diversity

## Section 2 Doing the right thing



### Standards of behaviour

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Our ability to achieve our vision relies on adhering to the highest standards of integrity, impartiality and professionalism and thereby maintaining public trust. Collectively we aspire to set an example of best practice in public service. Therefore, complying with the Code is not simply about observing the letter of requirement in our policies. *It is about understanding and embracing our values, principles and spirit behind the Code.*

#### This means that you have a responsibility to:

- undertake your duties and responsibilities to the best of your abilities, acting in accordance with all legitimate and reasonable management instructions
- conduct yourself in your day to day work with the highest standards of honesty, integrity, impartiality and professionalism
- protect information which is held in confidence and avoid misuse of any information which you are party to in fulfilling your duties
- ensure that your impartial judgement and integrity are not compromised or seen to be compromised by:
  - any personal, financial, political or other professional interests you may have;
  - views you express publicly
  - the offering or acceptance of gifts, hospitality or other benefits to or from a third party.
- be as open and honest as possible about decisions and actions you take and be prepared to give reasons for your decisions
- ensure that the nature of any activities you choose to engage in cannot embarrass the Scottish Parliament or bring it into disrepute
- ensure that you present yourself for work in a way which is appropriate to the environment in which you are working and in line with the SPCB's
  - approach to promoting equality and inclusion
  - commitment to ensuring dignity and respect for colleagues.

In a manner which is consistent with the values of the SPS and the standards of behaviour expected of staff.

- comply with the Code and all SPCB policies and procedures
- report promptly to management any breaches of this Code you become aware of.

**Use the decision-making tool on the following page to help you decide to do the right thing if you're ever in doubt.**

## Section 2 Doing the right thing



Ask Yourself	Yes	No	Guidance/Support
Is it legal?	Then proceed to the next question. But bear in mind that our standards go beyond what is legal.	Talk to your manager or office/group head right away.	Talk to your manager right away. Bear in mind that you can be held personally liable for any actions you take that are not lawful.
Is it allowed under any of our policies, procedures or practices?	Then proceed to the next question.	Talk to your manager or office/group head or a subject matter expert in the first instance.	If you're not sure, review our policies within the <a href="#">employee handbook</a> and seek guidance from your manager.
Does it support our values?	Then proceed to the next question.	Then it's probably not something that will enhance the reputation of the Scottish Parliament, perhaps even damage it. Check with your manager or office/group head.	Review our <a href="#">Values and Behaviours Framework</a> . If you're still not sure, speak to your manager.
Are you happy to justify taking this action to your colleagues and manager?	If yes and if you consider your actions to be professional and impartial then proceed to the next question.	If it would be hard to justify and would make you uncomfortable/embarrassed then it's probably not the right thing to do.	Does anyone know you are taking this action? If not, discuss it with your manager.
Does it set a good example to your colleagues or people you know?	Then proceed to the next question.	Think about the consequences of colleagues or other people you know doing this. If it's not right for them, it's probably not right for you.	-
Would you be happy if other people knew about the action you've taken?	Then it's probably ok to do this. But have a chat with your manager or office/group head for advice.	This probably puts the reputation of the Scottish Parliament at risk – so don't do it and talk with your manager or office/group head.	-

## Section 2 Doing the right thing



### Speaking up and how to raise a concern

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What should you do if you suspect something you've seen or heard about is unsafe, unethical, unlawful or not in line with the Code or any relevant policies?

You should speak to your manager so that it can be investigated as soon as possible. Please don't wait until something goes wrong before acting. There will be no negative consequences to those who raise genuine concerns, even if they turn out to be unfounded.

#### You can raise concerns in the following way:

- Ask your manager for guidance
- Talk to your Head of Office/Group
- Raise with the Deputy Chief Executive or Clerk/Chief Executive
- If fraudulent activity is suspected, notify the [Fraud Response Officer](#).

The [Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998](#) allows you to disclose certain issues or concerns to particular people including, in certain circumstances, external parties.

Further details and the procedure to be followed are set out in the [Public Interest Disclosure Policy](#).





# Section 3

## Acting responsibly

### Giùlan Cùramach

Use this section to find out about our workplace culture. For us, this means always considering our impact on fellow colleagues, our environment and society.

**Stewardship Stiùbhartachd**  
**Inclusiveness In-ghabhalachd**  
**Excellence Sàr-mhathas**  
**Respect Spèis**

### Our workplace culture

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The Scottish Parliament strives to provide an environment that is inclusive and welcoming to all. Recognising that people perform better when they can be themselves at work. By understanding and valuing difference, we build trusted relationships at work in which every individual feels included, valued and empowered to be their best.

#### **This means that:**

- We treat everyone fairly and with dignity and respect, recognising the value that a diverse, inclusive team brings
- We are all responsible for creating and maintaining the environment we work in – each of us can make sure that it is inclusive and welcoming for everyone
- Our commitments on diversity and inclusion ensure that the Scottish Parliament can truly reflect the diversity of Scotland's communities.

### Behaviour at work

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It is our aim to provide a workplace which is free from discrimination, harassment, bullying or victimisation. We take a zero-tolerance approach to discriminatory behaviour in any form.

#### **This means that:**

- Everyone has the right to be treated with dignity and respect at all times. The organisation is committed to eliminating any form of workplace bullying and harassment and any unlawful and unfair discrimination
- We treat others as they would like to be treated and always with consideration, respect and fairness
- We want all staff to perform to the best of their abilities
- We also speak up if we see any kind of non-inclusive language and behaviours, including harassment or bullying

All staff should be treated and should treat others with respect. We must all assist the Scottish Parliament to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. Staff can be held personally liable, as can the organisation, for any acts of unlawful discrimination.

Support will be provided to staff who feel they are being bullied, harassed or discriminated against. Staff are encouraged to raise any concerns with their manager. The [Dignity at Work Policy](#) sets out our approach; our legal obligations, and the procedures on how to raise a concern.

### Health, safety and wellbeing

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The health and wellbeing of our staff is a priority for the Scottish Parliament, and an integral part of our culture and values. It is also a legal duty. Accessible wellbeing support and guidance ensures a safe environment, underpinned by mental, physical, and financial wellbeing. We provide access to professional health advice; an independent employee assistance programme and a range of tools supporting physical and mental wellbeing. Have a look at our Positive about Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy and Guidance for Managers and the other resources available on the Intranet. Our people policies also support colleagues and managers to collaborate, converse and find solutions when needed, to ensure the right outcome.

Given the complexities of our environment, a number of workplace factors can impact on staff. The SPCB, as the employer, has a role to identify, minimise and address these factors.

**If there is ever a situation where you feel your health, safety or wellbeing is being compromised you should raise this with your manager.**

**Your manager will consider the nature of the issue and look to take the necessary steps to minimise risk. This will start with discussions and management support to work through the situation. Other options to consider are:**

- Accessing our Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)
- 1:1 counselling support

- Removal from the situation (opting out with no repercussions)
- Referral to our Occupational Health Service (as appropriate)
- Reasonable adjustments (as appropriate)

#### **This means that:**

- We work together to maintain colleague wellbeing and identify support when colleagues need it.
- We think about the potential impact on wellbeing in the work that we do, the way we work, and the places that we work
- Responsibility for taking reasonable care of personal health, wellbeing and safety is shared between colleagues and their manager.

### Handling disputes and grievances

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The Scottish Parliament has robust arrangements in place, including policies and procedures for raising complaints and addressing disputes and grievances.

#### **This means that:**

- We ensure we know what our rights at work are and that the Scottish Parliament's policies seek to promote fairness for all, providing necessary support to manage the issues we may face at work
- We consult and engage staff about issues that have an impact on them.

### Performance and development

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All staff are encouraged to be their best by performing and developing against key objectives. Staff know how they're performing and developing through regular conversations with their manager and ongoing feedback. Managers support colleagues by providing feedback on performance and how they live the values and behaviours. Managers know their staff the best and are best placed to offer this feedback. Where staff aren't performing at the required standards, their manager supports them to get back to their best.

#### **This means that:**

- We know the way we're managed is fair and transparent. With regular feedback relating to our efforts, development and doing the right thing, in the right way. Further details on our approach to managing for excellence can be found on the Intranet.



## Section 3 Acting responsibly



### Managing information and expressing views

The SPCB is committed to openness and transparency. It routinely makes a wide range of information available to the public to increase understanding of how it:

- fulfils its functions
- makes decisions and
- uses public funds.

Information which you process may be released to individuals or the wider public. In terms of the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA) individuals have a number of rights (including the right of access) in relation to their personal data which we hold about them. Personal data includes information relating to individuals who can be identified either directly from the information or indirectly from that information in combination with other information.

As a public authority we are also required to comply with the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 (FOI(S)A) which could result in the disclosure of information into the public domain in response to a request. FOI(S)A provides a number of exemptions to the disclosure of information which includes an exemption for personal data. Where we process personal data of individuals we must ensure that the processing complies with the requirements which are set out in the UK GDPR and the DPA. For more information about this please contact the Information Management and Governance Team at the links provided.

Guidance on FOI and data protection is available from:

- [foi.officer@parliament.scot](mailto:foi.officer@parliament.scot)
- [dataprotection@parliament.scot](mailto:dataprotection@parliament.scot)

You must follow the [Scottish Parliament Data Protection Policy](#).

## Section 3 Acting responsibly



### Protecting and handling confidential information

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We expect all colleagues to act in a professional, ethical and sensitive manner when dealing with confidential information, ensuring privacy and confidentiality is maintained. In discharging your duty of confidentiality to the SPCB as your employer, you must exercise due care and diligence in handling information to which you have access as an employee. You must not disclose or comment on any information which carries a protective marking to any third party, either internal or external to the Scottish Parliament.

#### In particular, you must not:

- exploit for personal advantage any information obtained in the course of your duties whether or not in the public domain
- use such information to seek to frustrate the policies or decisions of the Scottish Parliament or the SPCB.

If you are in any doubt regarding confidentiality of information, you should seek advice from your office head/team leader or group head. You can also find guidance on the protection of documentation in the Security pages on the Intranet.

These obligations continue to apply after you leave your employment with the SPCB.



## Section 3 Acting responsibly



### Contact with the media

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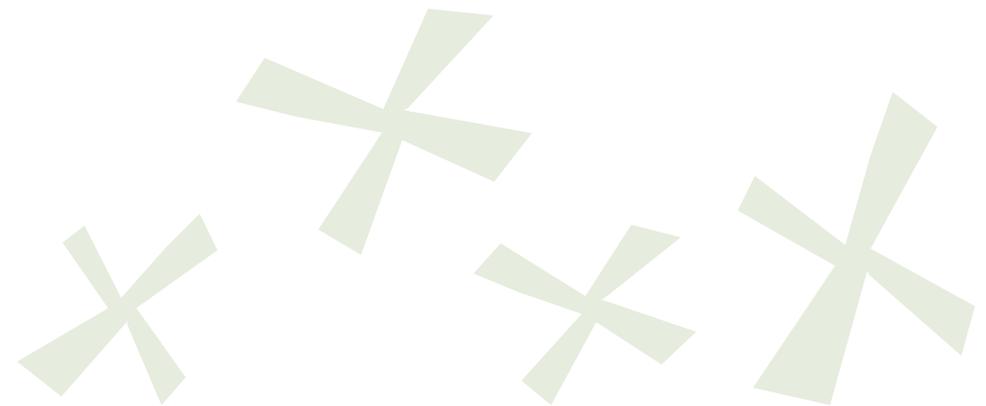
**You must avoid making any direct contact with the media or respond to media enquiries in any form (including TV, radio, newspaper, social media) regarding the business of the Scottish Parliament or the SPCB unless:**

- such activities form part of the normal official duties of your role
- you have express prior authorisation from your office or group head to do so and the content has been approved by the Parliamentary Communications Office (PCO).

You are not permitted to discuss concerns relating to your terms and conditions of employment with the media. This is except for national, organisational or branch representatives of a recognised trade union who are discharging their duties as representatives.

If you make an improper, unauthorised or premature disclosure of information to the media or any other third party external or internal to the Scottish Parliament, you may be subject to disciplinary proceedings, up to and including dismissal.

Prior permission is not required for participation in media broadcasts or publications which concern you as an individual and have no bearing on your role within the SPS. You must not, however, take advantage of the access your role as an SPCB employee affords you to media personnel at Holyrood to pursue media coverage on matters of personal interest.



## Section 3 Acting responsibly



### Expressing views on work-related matters

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You must not bring the SPCB into disrepute by publicly making any adverse, derogatory or objectionable comments in relation to individuals (whether MSPs, colleagues or others), political parties or any other organisation. This includes publicly supporting, commenting on or addressing matters which are or have the potential to be the subject of discussion and debate in the Scottish Parliament. This also includes speaking or commenting about such issues in a personal capacity where doing so may end up being associated with the Scottish Parliament. “Publicly” includes use of social media and applies regardless of whether or not account settings are private or restricted.

In your official capacity, you are not permitted to participate in research survey projects or opinion polls which concern attitudes or opinions relating to political or policy matters.

This does not stop you from participating in research projects where you are simply imparting factual knowledge on the political process.

You are required to seek permission from your office head/team leader to deliver speeches, presentations or lectures externally in your official capacity. You must obtain their advance approval in relation to the content and any subsequent publication. This is unless you have been invited to do so by your office head/team leader and/or such activities form part of the normal responsibilities of your job role.

#### You are required to seek permission in writing from the Clerk/Chief Executive to:

- publish or broadcast any personal memoirs relating to work carried out in relation to the business of the Scottish Parliament or the SPCB; and
- publish any articles or materials which you have produced as part of your official duties, copyright of which will be owned by the SPCB in accordance with the Copyright Designs and Patent Act 1988.

These obligations continue to apply after you leave your employment with the SPCB.

## Conflict of interest

**A conflict of interest can arise where you have an interest which may actually compromise or be reasonably perceived to compromise your ability to perform your role within the SPS in an impartial and objective manner.**

**For instance, where your interest provides you with an incentive and the responsibilities of your role provide you with the opportunity to grant an unfair advantage or disadvantage.**

### Political beliefs

It is an essential democratic freedom and a fundamental human right that we are able to freely hold and to express our individual political beliefs alongside others' – subject to a number of legal limitations to prevent violence, abuse, harassment or discrimination.

**For example, our political beliefs can arise from either, or a combination of:**

- party political affiliations
- a political philosophy such as liberalism, communism or capitalism
- personal beliefs held, often with others as part of an interest group or organisation, on issues or debates such as the environment, independence or gender politics

The Scottish Parliament is, by its nature, an inherently political institution which seeks to represent, engage with, and debate a wide range of political beliefs and interests across the country. It is critical that you are aware of and understand your contractual obligations and your duty of impartiality.

**This duty, for reasons of operational effectiveness, reasonably and proportionately requires these freedoms to be curtailed when you are:**

- at work and
- can also impact on your political activities outside of work

The duty of impartiality is necessary to protect us, as individual staff, as well as the organisation, from accusations of political bias. This is a common requirement for staff employed in legislatures and governmental organisations such as ours.

## Section 3 Acting responsibly



### **At work – political beliefs, impartiality and activity**

In fulfilling your contractual responsibility to serve all elected MSPs equally and impartially, it is essential that MSPs and the public have confidence that your personal political beliefs will not affect the discharge of your official duties. All staff, wherever they work, are required to carry out their duties and to deliver services with complete impartiality. MSPs and members of the public are entitled to expect this.

### **It is of the utmost importance that, when you are at work (or within the parliamentary campus), you must not:**

- in any way exercise personal influence or be perceived to exercise personal influence in the arrangements for and the conduct of parliamentary business
- provide services in a way which might appear to reflect your individual political beliefs, and as a result compromise your impartiality
- take part in any political activity
- in your official capacity, accept invitations to seminars, conferences or online events convened by, or under the auspices of, party political organisations or interest groups
- in carrying out the responsibilities of your role, provide assistance to MSPs which could reasonably be perceived to concern matters which are party-political in nature and/or not directly related to the work of the Scottish Parliament. Any request for assistance of this nature should be politely declined and you should report the matter to your office head/team leader.

This duty of impartiality applies to all staff when you are at work. This is because when this impartiality is compromised, or is perceived to be, your ability to do your job may be impaired, and the reputation of the Scottish Parliament may also suffer.

Further, and for clarity, your personal political beliefs are generally not a valid reason to refuse to carry out a reasonable request by your manager or MSPs. Please speak to your manager if you have any concerns.

## Section 3 Acting responsibly



### Outside work – political beliefs, impartiality and activity

Taking a public position on an issue of public policy, or political controversy, or any other ‘controversial subject’ is likely to be incompatible with our roles. We must take particular care to achieve due impartiality when a ‘controversial’ subject may be considered to be a major matter.

#### In determining whether subjects are controversial, we should take account of:

- The level of public or political contention and debate
- How topical the subject is
- Whether the subject is a matter of intense debate

### Careful thought will be necessary to ensure perceptions of our impartiality are maintained. This will include ensuring our actions do not:

- Embrace the agenda of any particular campaign group or charity, particularly if they are taking an active role to shape public policy
- Coincide with a government campaign or lobbying initiative

You must not wear lanyards, pins or badges which show support for social movements, campaigns or organisations.

Of course, it is recognised that colleagues may wish to actively participate in public life outside work through different means. You should always exercise caution in terms of participating in activities of a political nature, whether that be matters of party politics or those which are politicised through other means (for instance, those involving competing rights and interests). In every situation, use your judgement to assess whether this falls within the remit of the

Code. If you’re not sure, refer to section 2 of the Code (decision making tool) and please discuss with your manager or speak with colleagues in the [People and Culture Group](#).

### Roles identified where political impartiality/ neutrality is a reasonable and proportionate requirement for activities outside work

The SPCB seeks to apply the principle of political impartiality/neutrality in a proportionate manner. For this reason, there are a number of roles that have been identified where you will not generally be given permission to take part in any external political activity. For the reasons outlined above and because of the nature of your role within the Scottish Parliament, it would also be reasonable to expect political impartiality/neutrality in your activities outside of work.

## Section 3 Acting responsibly



### These roles are as follows:

- Membership of the Leadership Team
- Those who are in regular and direct contact with MSPs in support of the business of the Scottish Parliament and its committees
- Those who provide information, briefing or advice to MSPs
- Those involved in communications and public engagement

If you can demonstrate that your impartiality, or perceived impartiality, will not be compromised by the proposed external political activity and that it is reasonable for you to take part in this, then permission may be granted. However, you should always speak to your manager before proceeding.

The way in which you demonstrate this may differ depending on the role you carry out. The key point here is that you must speak with your manager, team leader, group head or colleagues in the People and Culture group before taking part in any activity which may, irrespective of your intention, potentially compromise your impartiality or public perception of your impartiality.

### Other roles

If you don't fall into the categories listed above, then there may be more scope for you to become involved in external political activity. However, you should always speak to your manager in the first instance. The specific nature of your role and the degree and significance of contact you have with MSPs and/or directly supporting parliamentary business will be key determining factors.

The principle of impartiality will be proportionately applied in the circumstances of each case and permission will not be unreasonably withheld.

### Non-exhaustive list of political activities

#### Examples of political activities when you must seek permission from your group head prior to participating are:

- applying to be a candidate for a political party for election to a local authority, the Scottish Parliament, House of Commons, Welsh Parliament or the Northern Ireland Assembly or otherwise undertaking activities that may give rise to the perception that you will be seeking to apply to be a candidate
- holding office (other than membership) in a party-political organisation which impinges on party politics in the fields of the local area, the Scottish Parliament, House of Commons, or the Welsh Parliament, the Northern Ireland Assembly
- canvassing in person or online on behalf of a candidate to local authorities or local political organisations, the Scottish Parliament, House of Commons, the Welsh Parliament, or the Northern Ireland Assembly

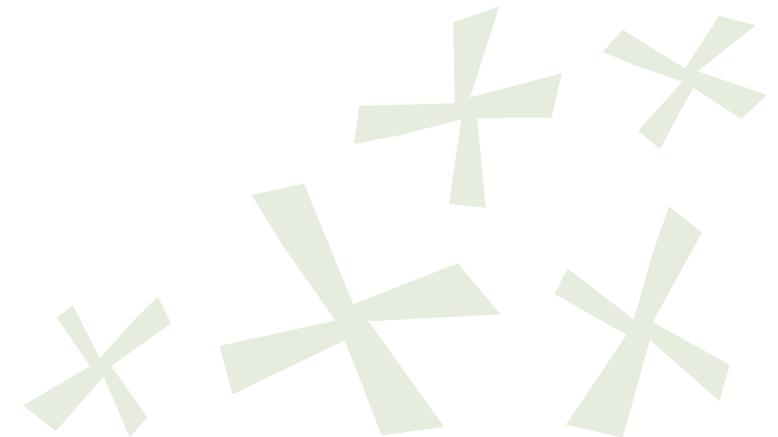
## Section 3 Acting responsibly



- contributing funds directly to a political party (excluding party membership fees)
- attending or speaking at an event organised by a political party or an interest group or organisation such as a convention, rally, fund-raising function, demonstration or protest, or participating in online events such as webinars
- developing promotional material on behalf of a political party or candidate or an interest group or organisation which impinges on or relates to debates or issues of local or national political significance
- holding office (other than membership) in an interest group or organisation which impinges on or relates to debates or issues of local or national political significance
- contributing to articles, including expressing personal views relating to debates or issues of local or national political significance, for example, in online blogs, social media, newspapers, journals or books
- speaking in public whether in person or online on political matters of local or national significance where it would reasonably be expected that you would be readily identifiable as an SPCB employee.

### Register of Interests

Where you are granted permission to participate in a political activity, your interest will be recorded in the centralised Register of Interests. Your group head may withdraw permission at any time if this is considered appropriate in the circumstances. This might happen if the emphasis of your role changes or if you move to a different job within the Scottish Parliament. Adjustments to your duties may also be put in place if this is considered necessary to offset the risk that the activity you propose to participate in may impact of the perception of your impartiality.



## Section 3 Acting responsibly



### Taking part in additional activities or employment

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There are a number of benefits from taking part in additional outside activities or employment.

This might include:

- additional employment (including self employment)
- career development initiatives involving transferable skills
- voluntary, community and charity work.

**You are generally permitted to engage in activities out with the duties of your role without seeking prior authorisation, providing that the activity does not:**

- require attendance at times which conflict with your normal pattern of work. Certain activities are exempt, including specific public duties, see [Special Leave Policy](#).
- have the potential to conflict with the duties of your role or the interests of the Scottish Parliament or SPCB (for example, if the work is connected with your official duties or the employer/organisation concerned has a contractual or other relationship with the SPCB)
- identify in any way with a political party, group or organisation

- have the potential to bring the SPCB into disrepute
- require use of parliamentary resources, including the use of official information or your official designation as an employee of the SPCB.

If the activity does fall within the circumstances described above, you must seek prior permission in writing from your group head. Permission will not be unreasonably withheld. Where you are granted permission to undertake additional employment or activity, your interest will be recorded in the centralised Register of Interests. This permission may subsequently be withdrawn by your group head if considered appropriate in the circumstances.

This is also a good opportunity to reiterate the importance of our values: **inclusiveness** means welcoming diverse viewpoints. But personal beliefs should always be expressed with **respect** for potential differences of opinion held by others. And remember, you should not impose your personal beliefs or opinions on other colleagues or represent your personal opinions as those of the Scottish Parliament.

### Outside influence

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You must not seek to bring any outside influence, political or otherwise, to bear in any way which would bring you personal advantage. You must not seek to garner the support or influence of any MSP on any issue relating to your employment with the SPCB.

You are not permitted to seek to garner the support or influence of any MSP on any issue of personal interest whilst acting in your official capacity as an SPCB employee. This does not prevent you from approaching your constituency or regional MSP on personal interests or other matters through normal channels of correspondence and surgeries or seeking support from your trade union. Neither does this prevent elected Trade Union representatives acting in their official capacity from discussing employment issues on behalf of their members with the SPCB as employer.

### Declaration of interests

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You have a duty to declare any actual or potential conflict of interest or any circumstances which might reasonably give rise to perceptions of a conflict of interest, to your group head.

In the majority of situations, a written declaration of interest will be all that is required. In certain situations, however, the actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest will require to be managed.

#### Appropriate management of the conflict of interest may involve asking you to:

- withdraw from discussions or decisions relating to particular matters;
- withdraw from involvement in particular projects;
- refer certain decisions to others; and/or
- agree changes to line management arrangements.

## Section 3 Acting responsibly



Perceptions of impropriety have the potential to seriously undermine the reputation of the Scottish Parliament. We maintain organisational and systems-related arrangements and take other measures to help avoid, minimise or mitigate potential conflicts. Conflicts can be nuanced and, in dealing with potential conflicts, you should act with integrity and use good judgement in a manner consistent with this Code and our policies and discuss with your group head or colleagues in the [People and Culture Group](#).

### Register of Interests

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The SPCB holds a central Register of Interests which records interests of a financial, political or professional nature which have been declared by SPCB staff to their group head or to the Clerk/Chief Executive or Deputy Chief Executive. Personal interests such as family or other close relationships will not be recorded in the centralised Register. Except in relation to Leadership Team interests, the Register of Interests is held by the People and Culture Group and access to it is restricted. It is maintained regularly and updated as appropriate. The interests of SPCB staff who are part of the Scottish Parliament's Leadership Team which are recorded in the Register of Interests are also published on the [Scottish Parliament's website](#) for transparency reasons.

Information provided by you in relation to actual or potential conflicts of interest will be processed in accordance with the [Worker Privacy Notice](#). Access to the Register of Interest is restricted to those who require this information in fulfilling the responsibilities of their job roles.



## Section 3 Acting responsibly



### Acceptance of gifts and hospitality

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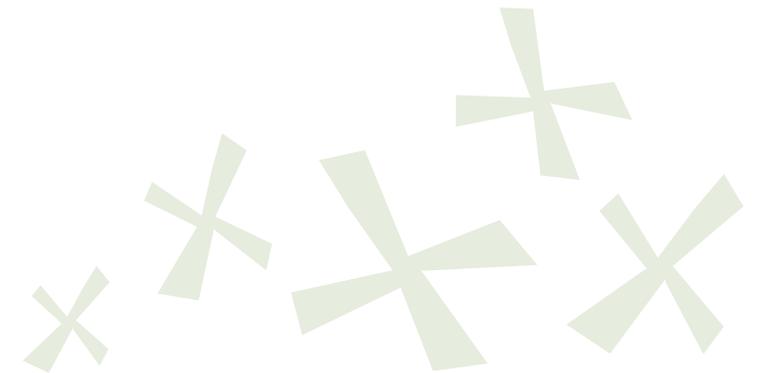
In your official capacity as an SPCB employee, you must not offer, promise or give a gift, hospitality or other benefit to a third party which may be perceived as inducing that person or organisation to perform a relevant function or activity improperly. If unsure, speak with your office head/team leader before taking forward.

You must also exercise care in relation to the acceptance of gifts, hospitality or other benefit from any member of the public, MSP or any individual or organisation with whom you have been in contact through your official duties. This is a potential risks of creating a perceived obligation to the giver and of others perceiving such to influence your advice and/or decisions.

You must not accept gifts and/or hospitality with an estimated value of £50 or more (including where the total value of gifts and hospitality from the same source exceeds £50), without the express approval of your office head/team leader. If the refusal of such a gift is likely to cause offence to the giver, for example, for cultural reasons, you should discuss the facts immediately with your office head/team leader. Isolated gifts of a modest or promotional nature (for example, a diary, calendar, confectionery) or modest hospitality such as a working lunch may be accepted without approval provided that this is not a regular occurrence.

The People and Culture Group keeps a central Register of Gifts and Hospitality. Where the estimated value of a gift or hospitality is in excess of £50, details must be reported by the relevant group head to the [People and Culture Group](#).

Details should be provided in terms of the nature of the gift or hospitality, the giver, the relationship between the giver and recipient, the reason it was given, the estimated value and the group head's decision on acceptance. The approval will need to take into consideration the time period in which the gifts/hospitality have been received in consultation with People and Culture.





The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

