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## Staff Standards of Conduct Policy

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## 1 Introduction

- 1.1 This policy sets out PSOW's standards of conduct for staff or those working for PSOW. All staff are expected to act in accordance with PSOW's values and with integrity, honesty, impartiality and objectivity and this policy provides the framework for acceptable conduct.
- 1.2 This policy and procedure has been agreed following consultation with the Staff Representative Council. It applies to all staff without exception, whether they are employed on a permanent, fixed-term, or temporary contract, or are seconded or on loan, or have been engaged via an employment agency. This policy and procedure also applies to Professional Advisers directly contracted by PSOW.
- 1.3 This policy does not form part of staff contracts of employment and it may be amended at any time. PSOW may also vary this procedure, including any time limits, as appropriate in any case. Substantial changes to this policy will only be made following consultation with the Staff Representative Council.
- 1.4 No policy can set out the appropriate conduct or behaviour for every situation. Within the framework of this policy, PSOW relies on staff to make a reasoned judgment as to what is right and proper in any situation and to seek advice from a Manager if they are not sure what to do.

## 2 Standards of Conduct

- 2.1 All staff have the right to:
  - be spoken to politely
  - be treated with respect
  - not be discriminated against as a result of any 'protected characteristics' as laid out in the Equality Act 2010. These are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation
  - have their point of view listened to and given consideration

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- have their efforts and achievements valued
- be treated fairly
- speak out if they are the victim of bullying, harassment or discrimination and to expect their complaint to be taken seriously.

### 2.2 All staff must:

- comply with a reasonable instruction or contractual requirement
- comply with PSOW's policies and procedures, with special reference to the PSOW Disciplinary Policy as this refers to examples of what is considered misconduct and gross misconduct.

### 2.3 All staff members have a responsibility to:

- work in accordance with PSOW's values
- have consideration for others whilst at work
- have consideration for others in the exercise of their duties
- express their point of view without being aggressive
- listen to what others say and respect their point of view
- take prompt action if they witness or are made aware of unreasonable behaviour, including bullying, harassment or discrimination in any form. Staff members should not assume it is someone else's problem
- ensure that they act at all times with honesty and integrity, and in a professional manner
- ensure that their conduct, including on-line conduct, (both at work and outside) and their appearance during working hours, and whilst representing PSOW, do not cause embarrassment to PSOW in any way
- avoid behaviour whilst at work which may result in other colleagues feeling excluded.

### 3 Confidentiality

- 3.1 All staff must be aware of the statutory requirements to keep confidential the information which is in PSOW's possession. Staff must use their best endeavours at all times to prevent the publication or disclosure of any confidential information.
- 3.2 Staff must comply with all PSOW policies in relation to confidentiality, including the Information Security Policy.
- 3.3 Staff must continue to observe their duties of confidentiality after they have left PSOW.

### 4 Standards of Propriety

- 4.1 PSOW expects all staff members to adopt the highest standards of propriety and to act with integrity and impartiality at all times.
- 4.2 Staff must not misuse their position or use information acquired in the course of their work to further their private interests or those of others. Staff will be required to complete annually a Declarations of Interest Form, on the Hub. Should an interest arise in between the annual completion of the form, which is a conflict of interest for a member of staff, they must declare their interest to the Chief Operating Officer/Director of Improvement (COO/DOI), who will determine how best to proceed. In considering what amounts to a personal interest, staff should be guided by the terms of the Model Code of Conduct for Local Authority Members issued by the Welsh Parliament / Senedd Cymru. In particular Investigators should not undertake investigations into a complaint or allegation against an authority or a member of an authority of which the Investigator was an employee within the previous three years, and consideration needs to be given also whether there is a need to stand aside where a family member, close relative or close friend currently works or has worked for the authority in the last three years.
- 4.3 All staff must seek permission from the Ombudsman **before accepting** or continuing any paid outside appointment, or unpaid appointment of a public nature. Particular care should be taken where a member of staff is considering undertaking paid or unpaid work that could, or could be

perceived to, affect the independence and impartiality of the member of staff or the Ombudsman or could involve them in matters that could be referred to the Ombudsman. Advice may be sought from the Chief Legal Adviser and Director of Investigations on such issues.

- 4.4 Should a member of staff discover that the Ombudsman has entered, or proposes to enter, into a contract in which they are aware that they have a current or past financial and/or private interest, they must bring the matter to the attention of the Ombudsman as soon as practicable and in writing.

### 5 Civil or criminal court action

- 5.1 Staff must inform their Line Manager or higher as soon as possible of known civil or criminal court action being taken against them where that action is considered by any reasonable person to likely impact upon their ability to perform their role or has the potential to cause reputational or other damage to PSOW.
- 5.2 If a member of staff is unsure as to whether any action being taken against them would require them to officially notify the Ombudsman, it is recommended that they discuss their concerns with a Line Manager who will treat the matter in the strictest of confidence.

### 6 Personal and domestic relationships

- 6.1 Staff who have or develop a close personal / familial relationship (e.g. spouse, partner, sibling, child) with another member of staff must ensure that they:
- take steps to ensure that potential conflicts of interest in the workplace do not arise; in particular, staff members must not have line management responsibility for anyone with whom they have a close personal / familial relationship
  - behave in a businesslike manner and must not allow their personal relationship to affect their work performance, productivity or that of their colleagues

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- do not divulge confidential information inappropriately or improperly and will not do anything to bring PSOW into disrepute, or compromise its independence, integrity or professional relationships
- will not engage in any offensive or inappropriate workplace behaviour or behaviour that is embarrassing to colleagues e.g. personal arguments or over intimate behaviour.

6.2 Staff must report any potential conflicts of interest which may arise from a personal relationship to their Line Manager. Where necessary, reasonable alternative arrangements will be made (by agreement where possible) to ensure that potential conflicts do not arise.

6.3 Failure to comply with this policy or to comply with PSOW's reasonable arrangements could result in disciplinary action.

### 7 Political activities

7.1 It is of paramount importance that PSOW staff should be, and be seen to be, impartial and non-partisan. Accordingly, members of staff are not permitted to undertake party political activity of any kind, nor are they permitted to take part in non-party campaigning which is directed at a body in PSOW's jurisdiction e.g. a public campaign against the closure of a school or hospital.

7.2 Any member of staff who is in doubt as to whether an activity which they wish to undertake might be considered to be unacceptable under paragraph 6.1 should give prior notice to the Ombudsman and should not engage in that activity unless and until written agreement has been given by the Ombudsman.

### 8 Use of office premises and facilities

8.1 It is unlawful to smoke within PSOW's office premises or within the confines of the building.

8.2 Members of staff may make occasional and reasonable personal use of photocopiers/printers and faxes. However unless the cost of making

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personal use of the equipment is clearly negligible, staff should contact the Corporate Services Manager (CSM) to arrange payment before doing so.

- 8.3 Staff can use PSOW's telephones for occasional and reasonable personal use, provided that they are sensitive to any possible impact on colleagues. Staff can receive occasional and reasonable personal phone calls on the PSOW's telephone system.
- 8.4 Headphones or speakers connected to any media are only to be used within the PSOW premises during office hours if there is a valid business reason for such use. Even in the event of a valid business reason, speakers are only to be used where they do not cause disruption to other staff.

### 9 Mobile/smartphones

- 9.1 To avoid disruption, use (both incoming and outgoing) of mobile and smart phones (personal and PSOW issued) within the open office environment must be kept to a minimum.
- 9.2 Mobile and smart phones should be kept on silent whilst within the PSOW open office environment.
- 9.3 Mobile and smart phones should be kept on silent whilst in any meeting unless agreed otherwise by meeting chair prior to the meeting.
- 9.4 Use of personal mobile/smart phones for non voice transmissions (e.g. texting/ Twitter/Internet) should not normally be made during PSOW time. (Lunch breaks and time logged as not working as recorded on flexi sheets are not included within PSOW time).
- 9.5 PSOW issued smartphones may be utilised for reasonable personal use. PSOW may seek re-imburement for cost incurred which is deemed to be unreasonable.
- 9.6 PSOW supplied smartphones must be secured by the application of a PIN or a password and must lock after a short duration.

- 9.7 Only installation of official and accepted applications ('apps') on PSOW issued smartphones are allowed. If users are unsure if an application would be acceptable then they should seek the approval of the CSM before installing or using.

### 10 Internet, Electronic Mail and Communications Systems

- 10.1 Staff must not deliberately visit internet sites or send emails that contain indecent, obscene, hateful, pornographic, offensive or otherwise illegal material. Accidental access must be reported to the CSM as soon as possible. Breach of this rule may be regarded as gross misconduct leading to summary dismissal.
- 10.2 Staff must not at any time, whether using PSOW systems or not, publish defamatory and/or knowingly false material about PSOW, colleagues, complainants, public bodies or representatives of such organisations, online in any format including but not restricted to social networking sites, 'blogs' (online journals), 'wikis' etc.
- 10.3 Staff must not at any time, whether using PSOW systems or not, publish comments and/or other material that is deemed to bring the reputation of PSOW into disrepute online in any format, including but not restricted to social networking sites, 'blogs' (online journals), 'wikis' and any online publishing format. This includes comments that may not be directly related to PSOW but which can be associated via secondary link such as stating you are employed by PSOW.

### 11 Email

- 11.1 PSOW's **email** system is intended for business purposes only. Staff may however send occasional internal emails for non-business purposes but should be aware of the need to avoid sending messages that are critical of other members of staff or may be construed as bullying or cause colleagues to feel excluded.
- 11.2 Where staff need to send external emails that are not related to PSOW business, this should be done outside PSOW time and using the member of

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staff's personal email account (e.g. using webmail or mobile phones). If it is not possible to use a personal email account the member of staff may use his/her PSOW email account outside PSOW time, **except where there is any risk that the personal email may be wrongly interpreted as having been sent in an official capacity (for example emails to bodies in the Ombudsman's jurisdiction and the police)**. PSOW time is considered to be core hours and times in the flexible bands that staff are "clocked in".

11.3 Use of PSOW's email system for non work related purpose is permitted at any time for emergency/urgent situations e.g. urgent messages from schools, carers etc.

11.4 PSOW acknowledges that members of staff do not have total control of incoming emails and as such receipt of non work related emails are not considered a breach of this policy. However members of staff are expected to minimise such emails by 'de-registering' their work email address, where possible, with the sender. Email requests relating to such 'de-registering' is not a breach of this policy.

## 12 Internet

12.1 PSOW's **internet** provision is provided to staff for business purposes, although staff may make reasonable personal use of it, subject to the terms of this policy. Personal use should not normally be made during PSOW time. (Lunch breaks and time logged as not working on the staff time recording system are not included within PSOW time). Personal use of PSOW's internet systems is a privilege and not an entitlement, which may be withdrawn at anytime for either specific individuals or for all staff. Staff will be informed prior to such privileges being withdrawn.

12.2 Even if access to a particular internet site/web page is not blocked, staff should not consider such access allowed or acceptable if the access would violate this policy. Staff must seek advice from the Ombudsman or COO/DOI if it is considered there is a business need to access any site which may contravene this policy.

12.3 Use of PSOW's internet provision or network for personal use will be considered unacceptable if:

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- There is significant use of the internet for non business reasons during PSOW time;
- Use of the internet for non business reasons impacts upon the work of colleagues;
- Staff do not take common sense precautions to avoid introducing viruses or malicious code into PSOW systems, or do not follow any office instructions in that regard;
- Staff play 'on-line' games at any time using a PSOW desktop, laptop PC or other PSOW device.

This list is illustrative and not exhaustive.

### Access to PSOW Network

12.4 PSOW may allow staff to access the Guest Wifi network using their mobile devices. This should not be used to access indecent, obscene, hateful, pornographic, offensive or otherwise illegal material.

12.5 PSOW recognises and accepts that personal devices connected to the PSOW network may receive data during PSOW time. This is accepted but members of staff should seek to avoid being distracted by their personal mobile devices during PSOW time.

12.6 Personal use of PSOW's network is a privilege and not an entitlement, which may be withdrawn at anytime for either specific individuals or for all staff. Staff will be informed prior to such privileges being withdrawn.

## 13 Social Media

13.1 Staff should avoid using PSOW computers to access social networking, chat forum sites etc. for non business reasons. Staff may access such sites for non business reasons on their own devices using the PSOW Wifi network, provided that this is outside PSOW time. However care should be taken by staff **at all times** to avoid personal comments or personal posts that relate to, or may be interpreted as relating to, the workings of the office,

complainants, casework or work colleagues, or could adversely affect the reputation of PSOW.

13.2 All staff may access Facebook or Twitter sites for genuine business reasons but may not post to these on behalf of PSOW. However care must be taken not to access social media sites as part of an investigation about their use. Staff should seek **the advice of a manager in such cases, as there are restrictions on accessing such sites for investigation purposes.** As a guide, only pages that can be viewed without having the appropriate social media account and without logging on can be viewed for business purposes.

13.3 PSOW staff who are authorised to update PSOW's social media pages (e.g. Facebook and Twitter) may access and update these pages at any time.

## 14 Monitoring

14.1 PSOW reserves the right without notice to access records of websites visited, listen to or read any communication made or received by staff on computers, telephones or other office issued communications equipment for the following purposes:

- to establish the existence of facts
- to ascertain compliance with regulatory or self regulatory practices and procedures
- for quality control and staff training purposes
- to prevent or detect crime (including 'hacking')
- to investigate or detect unauthorised use of PSOW's systems
- to intercept for operational purposes, such as protecting against viruses and making routine interceptions such as forwarding emails to correct destinations.

14.2 PSOW also reserves the right to make and keep copies of emails and data documentation use of email, for the purposes set out above. PSOW may bypass any password you set.

### 15 Sanctions

15.1 Where it is evidenced that a member of staff has failed to comply with this policy, PSOW's Disciplinary Policy will be applied.

### 16 Review and publication

16.1 This policy will be reviewed every two years and will be published internally and externally.

Any inquiries about this policy can be directed to [policycontrol@ombudsman.wales](mailto:policycontrol@ombudsman.wales).