

SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Revenues & Benefit Services

Code of Conduct

Benefit Counter - Fraud Investigators

Aims

It is essential that our Fraud investigation officers conduct themselves on all official business within the guidelines of the Code of Conduct. It is essential that our customers the general public has complete faith in the integrity of investigation officers within Benefit Services.

This Code of Conduct aims to outline the minimum standards required of investigators of all grades and to promote the uniform adoption of such standards by investigators in their dealings with colleagues and the public. It is the duty of management at all level to observe the general principles and provisions of the code at all times and to ensure that staff under their command fully understand and comply with them.

General Principles

- 1) The code applies to investigators of all grades both during and outside working hours and will always be applied in a reasonable and objective manner.
- 2) Every investigator is under a duty to investigate suspected benefit fraud thoroughly and to pursue all reasonable lines of enquiry.
- 3) Investigators are required to maintain professional standards of conduct and appearance in all dealings with colleagues and the general public whether or not they are engaged on official duties.
- 4) Investigators must, at all times operate within the law and comply promptly with any legal obligations placed upon them by any current legislation or departmental instruction.
- 5) Investigators must not abuse their authority. They must not act, or imply that they could act in a way, which is beyond the actual limits of their powers.
- 6) Investigators must act openly and with complete impartiality in their dealings with colleagues and the public. They must treat members of the public and colleagues with courtesy, respect and consideration. They must never condone nor engage in, either directly or indirectly, any form of harassment, victimisation or discrimination.
- 7) Investigators should recognise the limits of their abilities and should not undertake activities for which they are not adequately prepared or for which they lack the appropriate training or expertise. They should seek to improve their performance continually and to assess their level of skill and knowledge.

8) Enthusiasm must not be allowed to override practical Health and Safety requirements, particularly with regard to instructions concerning visiting and interviewing in potentially violent situations.

9) At all times whilst conducting investigations the investigator will have to regard to the needs of our customers in accordance with:

- The Race Relations (amendment) Act 2000
- Disability Discrimination (amendment) Act 2006
- Sex Discrimination Act 1975; and
- Treat all customers fairly and equally regardless of their sexual orientation, religious beliefs and age.

Provisions

1.) Unless engaged on duties which dictate otherwise, investigators should at all times remember that they are the public face of Benefit Services and should dress and act accordingly.

2.) Investigators must exercise reasonable care to prevent loss of or damage to public and private property.

3.) All evidence gathered during the course of an investigation must be recorded in accordance with the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996. (code of Practice)

4.) Evidence must never be concealed nor altered in any way from its original form.

5.) The interviewing of a suspect must always be carried out in accordance with the provisions of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. Investigation officers of the Council Benefit Services Section are under section 67(9) of PACE persons other than police officers charged with the duty of investigation of offences and therefore are subject to the same restraints within the code of practice as the police. Interviews must be conducted under caution where appropriate.

6.) Any personal connection with a fraud investigation or subsequent prosecution must be declared at the earliest opportunity.

7.) All investigators must report any criminal proceedings taken against them or any matters for which they are convicted in a criminal court.

8.) The provisions of the Human Rights Act & Data protection legislation and RIPA must be observed at all times and all information gathered in the course of an investigator's duties treated as confidential.

All reasonable steps should be taken to prevent disclosure to third parties except in accordance with statutory authority or departmental procedures.

All information obtained must not be used for personal gain or coercion.

9.)All expenses relating to official business must be claimed in accordance with departmental procedures and with due regard for value for money.

10.)Mobile phones supplied by Benefit Services must only be used for official business except in emergencies.

Full records of personal calls made must be declared within the visiting book on return to the local office.