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Code of Conduct for Staff in the Government Offices of Iceland

4.5.2012

Introduction

With the purpose of promoting professional methods and of increasing confidence in public administration, the Prime Minister of Iceland hereby approves the following code of conduct for staff in the Government Offices of Iceland, cf. the first paragraph of Article 24 of Act No. 115/2011, on the Government Offices of Iceland. While preparing this Code, advice was obtained from ministry staff, the Institute of Ethics at the University of Iceland, and the Coordinating Committee for Public Administration Ethics.

Each member of staff shall ensure that they themselves comply with this Code. Senior ministry officials shall make certain that staff are aware of this Code and that its rules are integral to ministry activities.

In any doubtful cases which might arise, advice may be requested from the Coordinating Committee for Public Administration Ethics, cf. subparagraph b of the third paragraph of Article 25 of Act No. 115/2011. Furthermore, issues may be raised with the Althing Ombudsman, who shall in part assure that public administration functions in accordance with this Code, which is issued on the basis of the Act on the Government Offices of Iceland, cf. the first paragraph of Article 2 of the Act on the Althing Ombudsman, No. 85/1997. Should anyone feel that an infringement of this Code has meant that they were personally treated wrongly, a complaint may be lodged with the Althing Ombudsman, cf. the second paragraph of Article 4 of Act No. 85/1997.

This Code of Conduct must be considered in connection with the general code of conduct for state employees, cf. the second paragraph of Article 15 of Act No. 70/1996, on the Rights and Duties of Public Employees, and with any other code of conduct that might be relevant, cf. the authorisation in the third sentence of the first paragraph of Article 24 of Act No. 115/2011, to elaborate codes of conduct in each ministry. Furthermore, this Code of Conduct is meant to reflect certain core values of civil service, such as integrity, impartiality and efficiency.

1. Workplace relations and procedures

- a. The work environment in the Government Offices shall be characterised by cooperation, mutual respect and democratic governance.
- b. Government Office staff shall observe the boundaries between politics and public administration.
- c. Staff shall take pains in their methods of work and in all their treatment of documents and information, ensuring any necessary confidentiality.
- d. Staff shall base their advice and decisions on the best available information pertinent to the situation, obtaining the professional opinion of experts whenever appropriate.

- e. When appropriate, staff shall take an initiative in resolving issues.
- f. Staff shall not only show prudence in dealing with state funds, but shall encourage their colleagues to do likewise. No expenditure may be caused on behalf of any ministry unless the occasion befits ministry activities.

2. Behaviour and conduct

- a. Government Office staff shall distinguish clearly between their private lives and official job duties. This general principle also applies to using email.
- b. No member of staff may take personal advantage of their position or any information obtained through their work.
- c. Staff are not to detract from their ministry's credibility through reprehensible conduct, disregard for the law or disrespect for human rights and dignity, for instance by purchasing prostitution services.
- d. Staff shall never personally accept any valuable gifts on account of their work.
- e. In their relationships outside of work, including when using the social media, staff shall respect the confidentiality of their colleagues and workplace.

3. Conflicts of interest and shared interests

- a. Government Office staff shall take care that no involvement with family relations, friends or interests affects their work.
- b. Should there be a risk of any such involvement resulting in a conflict of interests, the staff member shall inform her/his immediate superior, with both of them ensuring that the provision of this information is entered in the Document Registry.
- c. When interacting with interest groups, staff shall bear in mind that the duties of public administration are primarily towards the public. Staff shall observe the principle of equality when responding to the requests of interest groups.

4. Communicating with the media, the public and surveillance bodies

- a. Government Office staff shall show courtesy towards those who call upon them and shall handle requests quickly, within reasonable time limits.
- b. Information shall be provided quickly and in a systematic fashion.
- c. Any mistakes or misunderstandings which concern decisions, the handling of cases or relations with the public shall be corrected as soon as possible.
- d. Staff shall be alert to matters that it would be proper to inform the media or public about and, as appropriate, point out such matters to their superiors.
- e. Staff shall strive to maintain open, unhindered communication with non-governmental organisations, professional associations and interest groups.
- f. Staff shall be efficient in cooperating with the Althing and its surveillance bodies.

5. Responsibility and monitoring

- a. All members of Government Office staff shall, in accordance with their roles and positions, be individually responsible for their deeds and actions, to the end that these will serve the public good and conform to national legislation and the constitution.
- b. A superior shall explain the rules applying to each job for her/his staff, stay on the alert for situations which increase the probability of rules being circumvented, respond whenever required and act as an appropriate model.
- c. Should a member of staff become aware of any morally reprehensible or illegal activity in the workplace, s/he shall give an indication of this to her/his next senior in line who has no personal interest at stake, or to other appropriate parties.
- d. No member of staff may suffer for having indicated an infringement of this Code, nor for seeking their rights if they feel they are being offended against.

