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# HALDIMAND COUNTY

## Report HRD-07-2024 Employee Code of Conduct

For Consideration by Council in Committee on November 19, 2024

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### OBJECTIVE:

To modernize the Employee Conduct Policy for Haldimand County, as well as to adopt a protocol for the public to raise concern(s)/complaint(s) regarding the conduct and/or level of service provided by Haldimand County representatives, ensuring accountability and transparency.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. THAT Report HRD-07-2024 Employee Code of Conduct be received;
2. AND THAT Council rescind the Code of Conduct Policy No. 2001-06, the Dress Code Policy No. 2001-17 and the Employee Code of Conduct Policy No. 2001-19;
3. AND THAT the updated Employee Code of Conduct as outlined in Attachment 1 to Report HRD-07-2024 be approved.

**Prepared by:** Katie Meyer, Manager, Human Resources

**Respectfully submitted:** Megan Jamieson, CHRL, General Manager, Corporate & Social Services

**Approved:** Cathy Case, Chief Administrative Officer

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The Employee Code of Conduct is a critical document that guides how Haldimand County representatives (employees, volunteer firefighters, and volunteers) are expected to conduct themselves.

The current Employee Code of Conduct was inherited from the Region of Haldimand-Norfolk in 2001 and has not undergone a comprehensive review since that time. Recognizing how the workforce has evolved, it is important to review and update the policy such that it is consistent with provincial/federal legislation, reflects the current working environment, and is compatible with other corporate policies and standards which address similar or related topics.

The proposed revisions to the Employee Code of Conduct are designed to provide a guideline of “Our Code” for Haldimand County representatives to foster a culture of integrity, ethical behaviour and professionalism, ensuring that all representatives are equipped to navigate ethical challenges effectively.

### BACKGROUND:

The current Employee Code of Conduct, inherited from the Region of Haldimand-Norfolk in 2001, has not been reviewed in 23 years. The dated policy has led to challenges that hinder staff engagement and buy-in to the code, as well as enforcement.

The primary challenges identified by employees are as follows:

- **Outdated Language:** the language used in the code is no longer relevant to today's workforce, making it difficult for staff to relate to or uphold its principles.
- **Too Prescribed:** the existing policies emphasizes specific behaviors and rules rather than not allowing for and promoting ethical behavior and professionalism. This has posed challenges in enforcing the policy.
- **Relevance and Missing Information:** as the organization has evolved, the policy itself has not captured new technologies, policies/procedures and no longer applicable to the current work environment, including alignment with corporate values, ways of work and core competencies.
- **No Feedback Mechanisms:** The current Policy does not provide a formal method of being accountable to the public. This was identified through a process review by the Ontario Ombudsman, who recommended that the County document a protocol for handling complaints for the purposes of transparency to the public.

In light of these challenges, a comprehensive overhaul of the Employee Code of Conduct was completed to address the challenges identified above to ultimately modernize the approach.

## **ANALYSIS:**

Staff have completed a review and have effectively re-written the Employee Code of Conduct Policy. Staff investigated and explored codes of conduct from other municipalities across the province, to identify best practices.

Additionally, staff considered how the Code guides actions. The role of Haldimand County representatives, as illustrated in the proposed revisions to the Code of Conduct, is recognized as being responsible and accountable to the public and one another, as ambassadors in local government. The principles set out in the Code of Conduct are written to foster a culture of professionalism, respect, ethical decision-making, and accountability. It is intended to guide behaviour to provide standards of excellence in public service, which in turn, promotes public confidence and trust.

To achieve this, it was determined that best practice is to adopt a guideline approach which staff have mirrored after the City of Ottawa. That said, the concepts and expectations included within the policy are maintained from the original code. The proposed revisions are framed into a modernized guideline by reducing rigid black-and-white behaviors and adopting a more balanced approach that outlines both appropriate and inappropriate actions and considerations. This recognizes that a policy cannot cover every situation and must rely on an individual's ethical and professional judgment. These are not new expectations of Haldimand County representatives, rather they are now formalized as part of Our Code.

The proposed revisions to the Employee Code of Conduct Policy includes:

- **Imbedding our Ways of Work/Values/Core Competencies:** The revised policy utilizes the core competencies identified for Haldimand County staff, ensuring that all employees understand the expectations and responsibilities associated with their roles.
- **Developing a Guideline as the Framework:** "Our Code" emphasizes the importance of ethical and professional judgment, encouraging staff to assess situations thoughtfully and act with integrity.
- **Modernization:** The new approach reflects the present-day workplace dynamics and aligns with best practices in public service conduct.

It is important to note that the draft policy includes a commitment for employees to present themselves professionally and dress appropriate for the work being performed. The guidelines set within are a modern approach and meant to replace the outdated practice of a "dress code". Accordingly, should

Council support the new policy, as presented, staff recommend that the current Dress Code (Policy 2001-17), inherited from the former Region of Haldimand Norfolk be rescinded.

Staff also have developed procedures to support the guidelines outlined in the Policy that include:

- Conflict of interest procedure; and
- Procedure for residents to file a complaint, including the process in which staff will respond.

The expectations outlined in the draft policy, (Attachment 1), complement the expectations set out for Council, the public, and specific user groups, regarding appropriate and respectful conduct as outlined under separate policies.

The original Code of Conduct Policy No. 2001-06 was replaced by Policy No. 2001-19 in 2001, however was never officially rescinded. This report recommends also rescinding Policy No. 2001-06 as a matter of housekeeping.

## **FINANCIAL/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS:**

The draft policy, included at Attachment 1, has been reviewed by the County's legal representative, with relevant comments included within.

## **STAKEHOLDER IMPACTS:**

The Employee Code of Conduct applies to every employee of Haldimand County, as well as Volunteer Firefighters, and certain County volunteers. It does not apply to Haldimand County Library Board Employees, Members of Council or Board Appointees, as they are covered respectively by the Library's own conduct policy and by the County's Council Code of Conduct.

As representatives of Haldimand County, the Code is designed to establish expectations and guide ethical and professional judgement. Ultimately, the code is intended to promote respectful conduct to the public and internally within the organization.

The policy is currently under review by the unions, and at this stage, we have not yet received their feedback. We understand the importance of their input and will continue to engage with the unions as their feedback is received.

## **REPORT IMPACTS:**

Agreement: No

By-law: No

Budget Amendment: No

Policy: Yes

## **REFERENCES:**

None.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Draft Revised Employee Code of Conduct Policy
2. Code of Conduct Policy No. 2001-06
3. Dress Code Policy No. 2001-17
4. Code of Conduct Policy No. 2001-19