

# Human Resources

## INAPPROPRIATE PRINTED, AUDIO & VISUAL MATERIALS IN THE WORKPLACE

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South Yorkshire  
Fire & Rescue  
WORKING FOR A SAFER  
SOUTH YORKSHIRE

## INTRODUCTION

1. All South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue (SYFR) employees are required to be professional in their conduct at all times whilst on duty, or when on SYFR premises, or on other SYFR related, or sponsored activities.
2. As a member of the Dignity at Work Partnership<sup>1</sup>, SYFR is committed to promoting a positive working environment where the dignity and respect, to which all employees are entitled, is not undermined. No employee should be treated less favourably on the grounds of race, gender or gender reassignment, disability, sexual orientation, religion or spiritual belief, colour, nationality, national or ethnic origin, marital/parental status, family ties, trade union or political belief, hours worked, or any other reason, either directly or indirectly.
3. This policy should be read and used in conjunction with the following associated policies / procedures, where necessary:
  - a. Dignity at Work Policy
  - b. ICT Policies
  - c. Disciplinary Guidance
  - d. Grievance Guidance
  - e. Investigation Procedure
4. SYFR recognise that we all have widely diverse life-styles, tastes in entertainment, cultural attitudes and political views. Employees are obviously entitled to hold these views and opinions, to pursue their own interests and to indulge our own personal tastes and preferences. However, it is important that employees do not unfairly or unlawfully impose their preferences and values on others, cause hurt by their actions, or break the law. In the workplace, be it fire station, workshop, office or elsewhere, employees must be aware of, and be sensitive to, the life-styles, opinions and views of colleagues and also the image we project to visitors, service users, contractors and others.
5. Managers need to be proactive in taking direct action to eradicate the displaying, viewing, distributing or playing of inappropriate material/s in the workplace. If a manager witnesses such behaviour, or is told of actions which could constitute a breach of this policy, then SYFR expect the manager to take action to correct the behaviour. All staff should be mindful that it is not necessary for someone to be present that may be offended by such materials.

<sup>1</sup> The Dignity at Work Partnership is a partnership between the Government, Unite (the UK's largest union) and major public and private organisations. For further information on the Partnership, see [www.dignityatwork.org](http://www.dignityatwork.org)

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6. This policy is not intended to unfairly restrict what people do at work, but to reinforce the responsibility of all employees to conduct themselves in a way that does not infringe the right of other employees, and visitors to SYFR premises, to a safe, secure and professional environment.
7. It is hoped that employees will exercise appropriate restraint and self-regulation in terms of both the display of printed material and the use of televisions, DVD/video players, computer equipment and other electronic (or otherwise) media, (including mobile telephones), on SYFR premises, or during the course of their duties. Where it is apparent that such self-restraint is lacking, line managers must intervene and reinforce appropriate standards.
8. This policy should not be viewed as an unfair restriction on employees' personal preferences or tastes in visual or audio entertainment. Rather, it is about recognising that what is acceptable and enjoyable to some people, may be offensive or even intimidating to others. A healthy organisation is one in which there is a fair balance of rights and responsibilities. It should be remembered that exercising our right to view, read or play something which may cause offence or harm, may well cancel out someone else's more important right to work in a safe, secure and professional environment.

### SCOPE

9. All employees have a clear role to play in creating a positive and acceptable climate at work. In particular, employees should be aware of their own conduct, avoid colluding with any inappropriate behaviour and cooperate fully in any investigation when required. Managers have a responsibility to raise awareness of this policy and to act proactively to avoid any potential breaches of policy, i.e. Dignity at Work, Acceptable IT Usage policies etc, that may arise. Managers, together with all SYFR employees should be proactive in promoting a positive working environment and in challenging and erradicating unacceptable behaviour in the workplace.
10. All employees must be aware that the presence of inappropriate material on SYFR premises, or in SYFR vehicles, in any form (printed, audio, visual or electronic etc), that may intimidate or cause offence, is strictly prohibited. If in any doubt, employees should err on the side of caution and not display, view, distribute or play such material/s at work.
11. SYFR encourages employees who witness inappropriate behaviour or material/s to report it to their line manager or Transactional HR.

### PRINTED AND OTHER MATERIALS

12. There is a wide range of printed materials available (posters, artwork, magazines, books, newspapers etc) which cater for all tastes and SYFR recognises that some employees may wish to read, view, display or share such material/s with their colleagues whilst at work.

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13. All employees have a duty to ensure that any such materials brought into the workplace are not liable to cause offence or distress to colleagues or project an unprofessional, inappropriate or negative impression to visitors, service users, contractors or others.
14. Whilst materials of a pornographic, gratuitously violent, or racist nature are obviously inappropriate in the workplace, other materials may be less easy to distinguish. As a general rule, when displaying artwork, posters or information in SYFR premises, the following questions should be asked:
  - Is the material to be displayed instructional in a professional or work related sense?
  - Is it of legitimate general interest to others, providing information for social, community, welfare or trade union purposes?If the material to be displayed fulfils neither of these purposes, then its value must be seriously questioned.
15. If the display of material/s is for artistic or decorative purposes then extra caution should be given. What may be considered as artistic to some may be offensive to others, e.g. images of nudity. Even if such images are deemed acceptable to all employees in a particular watch/station/team, consideration must be given to the thoughts and opinions of others, i.e. visitors, service users, contractors.
16. For the purposes of this policy, 'display' includes material which may be fixed to the inside of a cupboard or locker door, or items (i.e. magazines, newspapers) left lying on tables etc.
17. Great care is taken by SYFR to ensure that any materials designed for display in SYFR premises is not offensive in any way. However, anyone who feels that any official document or poster contains material that they find offensive should raise the issue with their line manager.

## THE VIEWING, DISTRIBUTION OR PLAYING OF AUDIO, VISUAL OR ELECTRONIC MEDIA / MATERIAL

18. SYFR premises are equipped with a variety of audio-visual and computer equipment, which is available for use as a source of information during the course of work, and for entertainment during rest breaks (televisions, DVD/Video players, computer equipment etc)
19. The use of SYFR equipment for the purposes of viewing, distributing, displaying, playing or duplicating inappropriate material that may intimidate or cause offence, is strictly prohibited. If in any doubt, employees should err on the side of caution and not display, view, distribute/duplicate or play such material/s at work.
20. Similarly any personal items of equipment (i.e. personal audio/visual equipment/laptops/mobile phones etc), brought onto SYFR premises, must not be

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used to display, view, distribute/duplicate or play any material that could be considered inappropriate or offensive.

21. Whilst information contained in Appendix A can provide further guidance on what may be considered as appropriate in the workplace, SYFR expects employees to use common sense and tact when displaying, viewing, playing or distributing printed, audio, visual or multimedia materials at work.
22. Further guidance on the appropriate use of computer and IT equipment can be found in the IT Usage Policy, which is available on the intranet, or via the ICT section.
23. A breach of this policy may constitute gross misconduct and would render an employee liable to disciplinary action. Further information on the disciplinary process, is available in Disciplinary Policy, available on the intranet or from the Transactional HR team.

**If you require any further guidance on this document, please contact  
Transactional HR**

### GENERAL TEST OF SUITABILITY

It is not easy, or indeed appropriate, to prescribe what should be viewed, displayed, read, or played in the workplace. As a general test of suitability employees should ask themselves the following questions before bringing material into the workplace and or/viewing, displaying it etc.

- Would employees providing or viewing the material feel comfortable if their parents, partner or another member of their family, a visitor or senior manager were to join them in viewing the material?
- Can the employee providing or viewing the material be confident that there is nothing in it which is likely to be offensive to anyone in the workplace by virtue of its political, racial, sexual or violent content?

If the answer to both questions is **YES**, then the material is likely to be non-controversial. If the answer to any question is **NO**, then the material is probably not appropriate for the workplace.

It is hoped that employees will exercise appropriate restraint and self-regulation in terms of both the display of printed material and the use of televisions, DVD/video players, computer equipment and other electronic (or otherwise) media.