

# Integrity Spotlight

V1.0 – March 2022

## Advisory

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## Flexible and Remote Work

The **COVID-19 pandemic** continues to have a significant impact on the way we live and work. During times of change and disruption, **corruption** and **inappropriate conduct** can become more common.

While many restrictions have now been eased, the pandemic has presented both the necessity and the opportunity for workplaces to embrace ongoing flexible and remote working arrangements.

This **hybrid working environment** can create **challenges and risks**, which might affect business processes, staff morale and management's ability to provide proper support and supervision. If unmanaged, that environment can foster inappropriate or corrupt conduct.

### Pressures and risks of working from home

Many public officers have welcomed the benefits of remote and hybrid working arrangements. However, working from home can be stressful for those who find themselves juggling work with caring responsibilities, dealing with the isolation of living alone, or living in unsafe relationships or environments.

Ordinary workplace stresses such as workload issues and managing difficult collegial relationships can be exacerbated by working remotely. These pressures can cause individuals to act in ways that would not ordinarily be expected of them, including engaging in improper conduct.

Managers need to be aware of the different vulnerabilities their staff might be facing. Employee wellbeing should be a priority, both to support staff in difficult circumstances, and to minimise any risk of improper conduct.

It is crucial that clear and regular **communication** channels are maintained. Managers should have regular and realistic conversations with their staff about **work expectations** in the context of their personal circumstances. Staff should know what leave is available to them and the potential for utilising flexible working arrangements. All staff should be reminded that support is available including access to **Employee Assistance Programs**.

## Supervision

Working from home can mean that usual levels of staff **supervision** are reduced. Business reporting lines, informal relationships and organisational structures can be compromised or even severed when staff are isolated from each other. It is important that managers ensure they remain **connected** to their staff, and that staff remain connected to **each other** and the organisation.

A workforce that becomes disconnected can result in:

- A reduction in productivity
- Inconsistent approaches to work
- Poor judgement in the absence of the usually available sources of support, guidance and advice
- Loss of collaboration leading to siloed work groups
- Loss of effective supervision in relation to important decisions.

**Flexibility** and understanding are essential to help people work effectively from home. However, the integrity of that work, including the maintenance of **accurate records** (such as timesheets), must be maintained.

Agencies should strive to deliver services in line with usual standards, including standards of accountability.

## Information and Cyber Security

Working from home may necessitate innovative approaches to the access, movement and sharing of information. It is important to appreciate that unorthodox solutions to information access generally comes with a reduced level of information security.

Public officers who use **personal devices** for work related purposes should understand and adhere to organisational pre-requisites and limitations on their use, including:

- The need to ensure devices are password protected
- The correct installation of anti-virus and anti-malware software
- Organisation mandated limitations on downloading and storing of work related information.

Agencies should consider how staff will be assisted to **remove** work information from personal devices once those devices are no longer needed for work. Care must be taken to ensure that **sensitive** public administration information is not held on an employee's personal device for any longer than necessary, and that information is permanently removed from devices before they are disposed of.

Good **records management** is essential to the maintenance of public integrity. **Version control** of documents and files should be maintained, and all work products should make their way securely back into the agency's record management system.

Opportunistic and sophisticated **phishing attacks** have been launched upon public administration and the community. Agencies should provide regular updates to staff, and where appropriate the community, about how to identify and protect themselves from phishing attacks.

Codes of conduct for public administration were created to assist public officers in their ethical and professional obligations.

## Guidance for maintaining integrity

While the risks of corruption and improper conduct are elevated during times of change and disruption, it is important to remember that arrangements to **guide** the conduct and integrity of public officers are available.

**Codes of conduct** for public administration were created to assist public officers in their ethical and professional obligations. Senior leaders and managers in public administration can play a part in reminding their staff and colleagues of the guiding principles of public administration and by setting an **ethical** example to follow.

Maintaining an environment with appropriate controls against corruption and inappropriate conduct during the pandemic is challenging, but the first line of defence will be staff directed by **principled leadership** and clear ethical expectations.

## Further information and resources

Integrity risks arising from the COVID-19 pandemic are detailed in the ICAC's 2020 report, 'Public Administration in a Pandemic': <https://www.icac.sa.gov.au/media-release/public-admin-in-pandemic>

The Office for the Commissioner for Public Sector Employment has also published information about COVID-19 workforce considerations: <https://www.publicsector.sa.gov.au/hr-and-policy-support/covid-19-workforce-arrangements>

The Code of Ethics for the South Australian Public Sector is available at: <https://www.publicsector.sa.gov.au/hr-and-policy-support/ethical-codes>

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