

# **East Boro Housing Trust**

## **Code of Conduct for Employees**

### **1. Introduction**

The reputation of the Trust as an open, fair, professional organisation with a high standard of integrity and commitment to customer service is dependent upon the conduct and behaviour of its staff.

This Code of Conduct sets out the standards of behaviour expected from employees of East Boro Housing Trust.

The Code of Conduct is based on three main points of reference:

- the Trust's publicly stated values and adopted seven principles of conduct;
- the principles set out by the Nolan Committee in its work on standards in public life;
- the National Housing Federation's Model Code of Conduct for employees of National Housing Federation members.

The Code of Conduct forms part of your contract of employment and you are required to abide by it at all times. Breaches of the Code of Conduct could lead to disciplinary action.

Managers are responsible for ensuring that staff reporting to them are aware of this Code of Conduct.

### **2. Customer Care**

All employees are expected to treat tenants and other customers with courtesy and respect at all times.

From time to time the Trust will have to deal with difficult customers. In such circumstances you should maintain high standards of professionalism and fairness. Rudeness to our customers is not acceptable in any circumstances.

You should be aware of and work to any service standards which apply to your department.

Your general actions, behaviour and demeanour while at work should be such as to present the Trust as a professional and effective organisation. You should avoid doing things which might imply a sloppy or uncaring attitude. For example, you should not chew gum whilst at work.

### **3. Confidentiality**

The Trust's values make a commitment to the open conduct of our business. However, there will be times when high levels of confidentiality should be maintained.

- You should abide by procedures designed to protect the confidentiality of information as defined in the Trust Confidentiality Policy and Confidentiality Information Policy.
- You should not disclose information about customers/tenants to third parties, including neighbours, unless authorised to do so, or with the customers/tenant's consent.
- Confidential business information should not be disclosed to external parties unless it is appropriate to do so. This would include matters relating to the Trust's finances, future development programmes, discussions with potential partners and contract proposals. Some information in these areas is already in the public domain but staff who have any doubts should seek clarification from the Chief Executive, before disclosing any information which might be commercially sensitive.
- You should exercise care in disclosing information which comes within the Data Protection Act.

### **4. Equal Opportunities**

You are required to comply with the spirit and letter of the Trust's Equal Opportunities Policy and related procedures at all times.

### **5. Harassment**

The harassment of other members of staff, tenants or other customers, for whatever reason is considered to be a serious breach of the Code of Conduct and may be regarded as gross misconduct (see Equal Opportunities, Diversity and Fair Housing Policy).

You should not display materials in the workplace which other people might find offensive, or use language which work colleagues or customers might find offensive.

### **6. Policies, Procedures and other Regulations**

You should ensure that current policies procedures, financial standing orders and other regulations are followed at all times. If you feel that procedures could be improved, you should discuss this with your line manager or the Chief Executive.

## **7. Health and Safety**

You should abide by the Trust's Health & Safety Policy and Procedures at all times.

You have a responsibility to ensure that your conduct does not endanger the health or safety of yourself or other employees, visitors, tenants and customers of the Trust.

You should bring to the attention of your line manager any circumstances which might have health and safety implications.

## **8. The Trust's Property and Assets**

You are expected to take reasonable measures to protect the Trust's property and assets from theft, damage or misuse.

## **9. Computer Systems and Software**

You should not do anything which would risk the integrity of the Trust's Information Technology systems. This would include the use of unauthorised or unlicensed software on the Trust's system.

All software or disks incorporated onto the Trust's system must be virus checked and approved by the Chief Executive.

You must not copy software products licensed to the Trust.

## **10. Procurement of Goods and Services**

Staff involved in buying goods or services on behalf of the Trust should ensure that:

- decisions provide the best value for money;
- decisions are taken objectively and without favour to one supplier or contractor;
- competition between contractors/suppliers is fair and open;
- appropriate procedures are followed, eg, using the approved suppliers' lists or following tendering procedures.

You should avoid using the Trust's contractors and suppliers for private purposes. Where this is unavoidable you should not get a favourable service as a result of their employment with the Trust. Consent should be sought from the Chief Executive before using the supplier or contractor.

## **11. Alcohol, Illegal Drugs and Substance Abuse at Work**

Alcohol, drugs or substance abuse impairs judgement and you can put yourself, your work colleagues and members of the public at risk if you undertake your duties whilst under the influence of drink, drugs and dangerous substances. Abuse of any such substance whilst you are at work, or affecting your work will be treated as a serious disciplinary offence.

## **12. No Smoking Policy**

There is a No Smoking Policy throughout the Trust. You are not permitted to smoke while at work or on the Trust's premises. Smoking while attending external meetings on behalf of the Association, including meetings with customers/tenants in their homes, customers/tenants' association meetings etc., is not permitted.

## **13. Corruption and Fraud**

You must be aware that it is a serious criminal and disciplinary offence to corruptly receive any gift, loan, fee, reward or other advantage in return for doing (or not doing) anything or showing favours to any person or organisation.

You should only use the Trust's monies and assets for their intended and lawful purpose.

If you are aware of potentially corrupt or fraudulent activities of other employees you have a duty to report this to the Chief Executive.

The Trust's policy is to report all cases of fraud to the police.

## **14. Dress Code**

You are expected to attend work dressed in a manner appropriate for your duties.

Whilst at work your dress and general appearance should be clean, tidy and consistent with the professional image which the Trust seeks to project.

You will be expected to wear the appropriate uniform if your post is a designated one for which a uniform is expected to be worn.

Trainers, shorts, jeans and similar casual dress are not considered appropriate attire for the workplace.

## **15. Relationships with the Press and Media**

You must not without permission, pass or distribute to the press or media any information or materials relating to the Trust.

Similarly you must not write letters to the press or write media articles about the Trust and its activities, or write letters or articles in your capacity as a Trust employee without prior permission from the Chief Executive.

You must not make comments or statements to the press. If approached by the media you should take details about the enquiry and pass it on to the Chief Executive.

## **16. Gifts and Hospitality**

Employees who receive gifts and/or hospitality should not place themselves under an obligation that might influence or be perceived to influence their future decisions or conduct. All employees must follow the procedures in the Trust Gifts and Hospitality Policy.

You should not accept cash or personal gifts with a significant monetary value under any circumstances. Gifts of nominal value, i.e, pens and similar items can be accepted.

Offers of hospitality should be recorded in the Trust's Hospitality Register. The Register should record whether the hospitality was accepted or declined and if accepted, why? Hospitality given on behalf of the Trust should also be recorded in the Register.

If you have any doubt about hospitality offered to you, either decline or seek advice from the Chief Executive.

When declining hospitality you should be courteous, but draw the attention of the person making the offer to the existence of this Code.

## **17. Interests and Conduct Outside Work**

The Trust has no desire to place restrictions on, or interfere with an employee's private life. However there may be circumstances when an employee's external interests affect their employment with the Trust.

You must obtain written consent from the Chief Executive before taking outside paid employment. Such employment must not interfere in any way with your existing job and should not conflict with the interests of your job or the Trust.

You should obtain written permission before undertaking voluntary activities if those activities or organisations are in some way related to the activities of the Trust, (eg, membership of the Committee of a local voluntary agency with whom the Trust has contact, or of the Committee/Board of another housing organisation). It is the policy of the Trust that you should not be involved with any organisation which might be in competition with the Trust.

This Code refers to your work related conduct. However, there may be circumstances in which your conduct outside work, while not directly related to your employment, might

adversely affect the reputation and perceived integrity of the Trust. There may be circumstances when conduct outside work, eg, conviction for a criminal offence, may result in disciplinary action being taken against you.

## **18. Political Activity**

It is important that the Trust is seen to be politically neutral and must not be linked, directly or indirectly to any political organisation. You are free to join political groups and work and campaign on their behalf. However, such political activity must be such so as not to compromise the Trust's neutrality.

You should discuss with the Chief Executive any intentions to stand for political office. There may be circumstances in which holding office on a Council may conflict with the Trust's interests.

## **19. Declaration of Interests**

You will be required to make a written disclosure to the Chief Executive indicating any connections which you have with external organisations, contractors/suppliers and outside employment. You are responsible for updating the Register of Interest when changes occur. In declaring such interest you must consider any connections of your family or close friends which might conflict with those of the Trust.

You should declare any conflict of interests as and when they arise during the course of the Trust's business or other activities. This would include connections or interests relating to the housing of customers/tenants/applicants, letting of contracts, employment of staff, the sale or acquisition of property etc.

You should declare to the Chief Executive if you are a member of any organisation not open to the public which has secrecy about its rules or membership or conduct. A full definition of such an organisation is included in Appendix 3 of the National Housing Federation Model Code of Conduct.

## **20. Schedule 1 Housing Act 1996**

You should be aware of the requirements of Schedule 1 of the Housing Act 1996 and the restrictions which this places on the Trust, its employees and Board Members.

Schedule 1 (formerly section 15 of Housing Associations Act 1985) prohibits the Trust from making payments or providing benefits to employees other than those to which they are contractually entitled.

The restrictions extend to Board Members and to the close relatives of employees and Board Members. Benefits include the granting of tenancies, leases and contracts of employment.

If you are in any doubt as to whether an action may contravene Schedule 1, eg, when dealing with the potential allocation of a property to an employee's relative, you should seek the advice of the Chief Executive.

## 21. Whistle blowing

All staff have a duty to report:

- any breaches of the Code of Conduct;
- any actions which might question the integrity of the Trust;
- any potential fraud or misuse of the Trust's assets.

If you have any suspicions about dishonest or unethical behaviour, you should first bring them to the attention of your line manager. If you feel that this is inappropriate you should discuss the matter with the Chief Executive or Chairman of the Trust. If you wish to discuss issues with an external organisation you are advised to contact the East Boro Housing Trust allocated "Director" at the Trust Solicitors at Steele Raymond Solicitors, Richmond Point, 43 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, BH2 6LR, Telephone 01202 294566.

All allegations made under this policy will be treated in confidence. All whistle blowers will be protected in accordance with the Public Interest Disclosures Act 1999.

No action will be taken against a person making allegations of dishonesty or fraud if they subsequently transpire to be unfounded, provided they were made in good faith. The Trust will however consider and reserve the right to take action in the case of allegations that are made without foundation or for/with malicious intent.

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