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**Customer Boards and Customer Scrutiny Panel Code of Conduct**

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| **January 2013** |

**Why do we need a Code of Conduct?**

The Code of Conduct ensures all Customer Board and Customer Scrutiny Panel members (in this document referred to as CB/CSP members) understand the standards of behaviour expected of them.

 The conduct of CB/CSP members will give confidence to Aster Communities and Synergy tenants, other customers, stakeholders and funders that CB/CSP members will show professionalism and integrity, and their actions will be accountable and transparent. The primary duty of CB/CSP members is to act in interests of Aster Communities, Synergy Housing and the Aster Group, and their customers.

This Code of Conduct has been developed in line with the National Housing Federation Code of Conduct and the findings of the Nolan Committee on “Standards in Public Life”, but goes beyond these. It may be reviewed from time to time by the Aster Communities and Synergy Housing Boards, in consultation with the Customer Boards and Customer Scrutiny Panel.

 **Findings of the Nolan Committee**

The seven principles of public life identified by the Nolan Committee in its first report guide the content of this Code of Conduct.

* **Selflessness**: take decisions solely in terms of the Group’s values and mission. We should not do so in order to gain financial or other material benefits for ourselves, our family and friends
* **Integrity**: not place ourselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might influence us in the performance of our duties
* **Objectivity**: ensure that in the delivery of services, we ensure impartiality and that choices are made on merit alone
* **Accountability**: accept accountability for our decisions and actions to our residents, the providers of public funds and other stakeholders, and submit ourselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate
* **Openness**: be as open as possible about all decisions and actions that we take. We should give reasons for our decisions and restrict information only when individual or commercial confidentiality clearly so demand
* **Honesty**: declare any private interests relating to our duties and take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that is lawful, and protects the Group’s reputation, values and mission
* **Leadership**: promote and support these principles by leadership and example

**Personal Conduct**

CB/CSP members should demonstrate the following behaviours and attitudes at all times:

* exemplary courtesy to other members and to staff
* be welcoming and friendly
* act with integrity, honesty and openness
* remember that their involvement is to benefit the community, not to pursue personal aims
* not speaking or writing to the press relating to the Group without prior agreement
* behave appropriately and not be under the influence of drugs or alcohol
* treat all paperwork, discussions and personal information about customers as confidential unless stated otherwise
* not make comments that could be seen as racist, sexist, homophobic or of a derogatory nature
* not discriminate against any person on the grounds of age, sex, race, nationality, sexuality, political views, religious beliefs, marital status, disability or health
* not use offensive, intimidating, threatening, abusive, patronising or demeaning language or behaviour
* understand and respect that people will have different tolerances of such language or behaviours
* not be in arrears with rent, service charges or any other financial commitment or have legal proceedings being taken against them by the Group
* be especially careful of relationships with customers, staff and contractors and never allow any personal relationship with a customer, employee or contractor to conflict with the Group’s best interests
* avoid gifts except in the very limited circumstances as the giving and receiving of gifts can create a relationship that can be seen to influence our judgement. Small personal gifts of nominal value, such as diaries, calendars, stationery may be accepted by an individual. Modest hospitality will be allowed, but only with the approval of the Chair and in line with the Group Gifts, Hospitality and Anti-Bribery Policy.
* avoid jargon

**Conduct at meetings**

* arrive on time for meetings
* if unable to attend give apologies in advance of the meeting
* switch off mobile phones, or refrain from using unless prior agreement has been given by the Chair
* members should follow the guidance of their Chair in the conduct of the meeting
* members should follow the agenda and help each other reach informed and effective decisions
* members should prepare properly for each meeting by reading all the relevant papers and bring these to the meeting
* speakers at meetings should go through the chair and keep to the subject being discussed
* only one member should speak at a time
* any other business will only be used for urgent items and will be agreed at the beginning of the meeting

**Confidentiality**

CB/CSP members may deal with sensitive and controversial issues. They must exercise discretion and care in performing their duties and responsibilities. If confidential information is discussed it must not be passed on to anyone who is not a member unless otherwise agreed at the meeting.

**Conflict of Interest**

CB/CSP members are expected to:

* ensure their private or personal interests do not influence their decisions and they do not use their position to obtain personal benefit
* disclose any interest, whether personal or on behalf of any group they represent that they consider may affect any matter under discussion
* declare any interest in an item and leave the meeting if requested to do so by the Chair
* use the normal procedures for reporting or dealing with any aspects of their tenancy, for example reporting of repairs

**Breaches of the Code of Conduct**

If any member of the Customer Board or Customer Scrutiny Panel does not abide by this Code of Conduct during a meeting the following action may be taken:

* they will be made aware of the breach by the Chair who may warn the member that they may be asked to leave the meeting if they breach the Code again
* the Chair may give up to two further warnings, either in that meeting or in further meetings
* if the member continues to ignore the Code of Conduct the Chair will ask the members present at the meeting to vote on whether that member should leave the meeting

The Chair will make a member aware if they breach the Code of Conduct and bring the Group into disrepute. The member will be warned that they may be asked to leave the Customer Board or Customer Scrutiny Panel.