

Tenant and Leaseholder Independent Scrutiny Panel - TALISMAN CODE OF CONDUCT

Introduction

The purpose of **TALISMAN** is to ensure the needs and views of Gateshead residents are at the heart of how services are developed and delivered by The Gateshead Housing Company and Gateshead Council.

The three primary aims of the group are to:

- Act as an independent driver for continuous improvement in performance and value for money.
- Ensure that customer views and aspirations are central to improving performance and service delivery.
- To contribute to local and national consultations on policy and strategy issues affecting Gateshead

This Code of Conduct incorporates the 7 principles of public life which have been adopted by The Gateshead Housing Company Board and Committees. As the **TALISMAN** will liaise directly with these Boards and Committees, making recommendations for decisions, it is necessary that Members of the group abide by a code based on the same principles.

- **Selflessness:** take decisions solely in terms of the aims of the group, not in order to gain financial or other material benefits for ourselves, our family or friends
- **Integrity:** not place ourselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might influence us in the proper performance of our duties
- **Objectivity:** ensure that in the operations of conducting scrutiny reviews and in making decisions and recommendations, we ensure impartiality and that choices are made on merit alone
- **Accountability:** accept accountability for our decisions and actions to other stakeholders and submit ourselves to appropriate scrutiny
- **Openness:** be as open as possible about all decisions and actions 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 and conflicts arising
- **Leadership:** promote and support these principles by leadership and example

General Conduct

- Arrive punctually to enable meetings to start on time
- Switch off mobile phones during the meeting, if someone needs to keep a phone on, make sure it is on silent
- The chair will make every effort to follow the agenda for the meeting and keep to the timescale agreed
- Come prepared by reading any information supplied beforehand and bring it with you to the meeting
- At the end of each item, the Chair will remind the meeting of the decision that has been agreed
- Listen to each other and allow each other the opportunity to speak and comment
- Respect the views of others and their right to speak
- Everybody will be treated with dignity and respect regardless of ethnicity, disability, gender, marital status, age, sexuality or religion or any other element.
- Do not use threatening behaviour, violence, obscene language or racist/sexist behaviour or threats or otherwise disrupt meetings of the group
- Abusive personal comments will not be tolerated
- Abuse of staff will not be tolerated
- Avoid jargon or explain what it means
- Remember that the purpose of the meeting is to benefit customers generally and not specific individuals.
- Follow the principles for requesting information to support the scrutiny activity and not approach individuals directly in relation to this activity
- Make every effort to attend each meeting, however if people are unable to attend a meeting or event, they will provide apologies in advance of the meeting

Disclosure of Interests

Members of **TALISMAN** must disclose any interests relating to the following points when they take up their post and annually thereafter. Any changes in the interim should be raised with the Chair immediately.

- An interest in any property owned by Gateshead Council or The Gateshead Housing Company
- A relationship with any person or firm earning fees from work placed by Gateshead Council or The Gateshead Housing Company
- A relationship with any person or firm entering into a contract to carry out work for Gateshead Council or The Gateshead Housing Company
- A relationship with any Board, Committee or staff member of Gateshead Council or The Gateshead Housing Company

In addition members should share with **TALISMAN** any conflicts of interest in relation to any particular scrutiny reviews as they arise. For example, the Chair of the Repairs Service Improvement Group may be considered to be heavily involved to participate in a scrutiny review of repairs and maintenance.

Confidentiality

- Members who are privy to confidential information on tenders of costs relating to either internal or external contractors should not disclose that information to any unauthorised party or organisation
- Confidential information or documents must not be communicated to others who do not have a legitimate right to know. Members must observe the provisions of the Data Protection Act in relation to processing of personal data
- Use of ICT systems, including internet and email, is regularly monitored. Members misusing ICT provided by Gateshead Council or The Gateshead Housing Company, either through non-business use or improper business use or improper use of the internet will be subject to disciplinary procedures
- When using ICT services all Members are legally obliged to comply with the:
 - Data Protection Act 1998
 - Computer Misuse Act 1990
 - Copyright Design and Patents Act 1988
 - Copyright Rights in Database Regulations 1997

Political Neutrality

- Members may well be involved, in their private lives, in political activity. However **TALISMAN** is non-political and the reputation or status of **TALISMAN** must not be damaged by personal political activities.
- Members must declare any affiliation with any political parties and must not allow their own personal or political opinions to interfere with their role.

Membership of Organisations

- A lodge, chapter, society or trust as defined below, should not be regarded as a secret society if it forms part of the activity of a generally recognised religion.
- Members must declare to the Company Secretary any membership of any organisation not open to the public with any formal membership and commitment of allegiance, and which has secrecy about rules, membership or conduct. This would include:
 - Where there is an obligation on the part of the member to make a commitment of allegiance to the lodge, chapter, society or gathering or meeting
 - A commitment to secrecy is required about the rules, membership, or conduct of the lodge, society, trust, gathering of meeting

Personal Accountability and Conduct

- Members carry special duties of accountability and, as a consequence, their conduct and personal integrity must always be beyond reproach.
- For this reason any member who becomes subject to criminal legal proceedings brought against them by Gateshead Council or The Gateshead Housing Company or, becomes subject to any criminal or civil proceeding shall immediately become suspended.
- Upon conclusion of any such proceedings consideration will be given whether to reinstate or seek removal.

Gifts

Giving and receiving gifts creates a relationship that can be seen to influence judgement. Therefore members should always avoid gifts except in the very limited circumstances below:

- The giving and receiving of other than normal gifts should be avoided and gifts of cash must never be accepted. Members must not put themselves in a position that may influence them or be perceived to influence them in the conduct of their duties
- Personal gifts must not be solicited under any circumstances. Anyone offering gifts should be asked to donate them or should be pooled for donation, raffled or gifted to an external charity.

Exceptions and how to deal with gifts:

- Only small personal gifts with a value of under £25 (e.g., diaries, calendars, stationery, flowers, and chocolates) may be accepted when refusal would offend
- Any other gifts received should be pooled and used for charitable benefit.
- Modest gifts to another individual or organisation may be made only in exceptional circumstances and with the prior approval of an executive director or chair
- Birthday cards or a small gift of modest value may be accepted.

All gifts received must be declared and recorded in a register held by the company secretary.

Entertainment and hospitality

Entertainment and hospitality should be avoided except in the limited circumstances set out below:

- Members may not solicit hospitality and may not give or receive repeated or lavish hospitality or entertainment. Occasional and modest hospitality is permitted with approval
- An exception must have prior approval from the company
- Hospitality must always be recorded in the register held by the company secretary
- Business lunches are permissible but must have the consent of the company and must be recorded in the hospitality book.

Contact with the Media

- Members of **TALISMAN** who are approached by the media must not respond directly and must contact the chief executive or another senior member of staff immediately.
- Any leaking, releasing or distribution of confidential information will be viewed as a serious breach of the code of conduct.

Equality and diversity

The Gateshead Housing Company and Gateshead Council are committed to attaining equalities and diversity in all of its work. Members of **TALISMAN** must through their actions seek to uphold the company's equality and diversity policy and ensure that discrimination does not occur.

Failure to Follow the Code of Conduct

TALISMAN members should recognise that failure to follow this Code of Conduct may damage the reputation of the Council or the Gateshead Housing Company and will normally be viewed as a disciplinary matter. Action will be considered in accordance with existing disciplinary procedures for TGHC Directors and employees. This could result in the member receiving a warning from the Chair or being dismissed from TALISMAN

I have read this Code of Conduct Document and agree to comply with all points within it.

Signed: _____

Print Name: _____

Date: _____

This Code of Conduct may be supplemented with additional day to day operational conduct requirements as developed by TALISMAN.