

**Ongo Homes
Customer Engagement
Code of Conduct
May 2019**

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1. Our policy is...

- 1.1 To provide opportunities and structures which seek to engage residents in the design, planning and delivery of our services.
- 1.2 To remain committed to the ongoing development and support of various forms of active customer engagement that supports our vision of creating and sustaining truly vibrant communities.
- 1.3 To ensure that customer engagement volunteers have a key role in the successful achievement of our vision, in advocating for the interests of residents and in working in partnership with Ongo Homes staff in the local decision-making process.

2. It applies to...

2.1 This Code of Conduct is mandatory for all Ongo Homes affiliated and supported resident groups and applies to all individual customer engagement volunteers (referred to hereafter as volunteers throughout) who participate or who are engaged in one or more customer engagement activity.

2.2 This code of conduct **does not** apply to any Ongo Homes resident who is engaged as a regular volunteer with any Community Development Projects e.g. Choose to Reuse project, Handy van project. A separate code of conduct exists for this purpose.

3. Because we want to...

- ✓ Provide a similar framework for the conduct of volunteers engaged in any form of customer engagement activity;
- ✓ Assist Ongo Homes staff or customer engagement members of a recognised resident group to take pro-active steps to deal with individuals who display inappropriate behaviour as part of any customer engagement activity. This can result in people being asked to leave meetings or where a persistent breach occurs, the exclusion or suspension of an individual from customer engagement activity for a defined period of time;
- ✓ Have a reference guide to assist involved Ongo Homes residents to fulfil their defined role and responsibility.

4. We will...

4.1 Respect the different roles of customer engagement volunteers and Ongo Homes staff

- Customer Engagement volunteers and Ongo Homes staff will respect their mutual roles and responsibilities;

- Ongo Homes will not grant volunteers any special benefit or consideration because of their position;
- Volunteers recognise that they do not have authority over Ongo Homes staff or Contractors working on their behalf;
- Ongo Homes staff recognise that they are accountable for meeting their commitments to volunteers in the context of joint activities;
- All interactions between volunteers and Ongo Homes staff will be governed by principles of respect and of the understanding that they both have varied and different roles to each other.

4.2 Maintain confidentiality

- Volunteers have access to a lot of information about Ongo Homes and its customers and suppliers, so extreme care needs to be taken regarding disclosure especially as some of this information could be personally or commercially sensitive;
- At all times volunteers should respect confidential issues relating to other residents/Ongo Homes staff and refrain from mentioning or passing on information relating to specific individual cases which are of a defamatory, slanderous, or libellous nature to Ongo Homes, its staff, residents and other stakeholders;
- Any information or items shared with Ongo Homes that are of a confidential nature must not be disclosed to anyone else apart from members of the group in order to allow the business of a meeting to take place or to allow a person to carry out their role as a volunteer;
- If volunteers have any doubt about whether information is confidential or not, then they should contact the Ongo Homes Customer Engagement Team.

4.3 Conflict of interest

- A conflict of interest occurs when personal or business interests affect a volunteer's ability to fairly and objectively represent the best interests of residents or their community. The interest may benefit family, friends or a business enterprise with which the volunteer is associated with.
- Volunteers must:-
 - Declare any criminal convictions, new or historical, in confidence to a member of the Customer Engagement Team, prior to carrying out any involvement activities (see section 4.4);
 - Not use their position for personal gain;

- Not pass on confidential information that they have access to because of their position (in certain circumstances, volunteers will be expected to sign a separate confidentiality agreement should their role require it. E.g. resident scrutiny panel members);
- Declare any relationships with staff/Board members, ensuring that appropriate professional boundaries are maintained;
- Use appropriate Ongo Homes channels and procedures to access services for either themselves, family and /or friends, e.g. reporting repairs, complaints etc.;
- Declare to Ongo Homes and/or their peers when they are in a possible conflict of interest position and they have a personal, financial or material interest in any matter being considered. They must also absent themselves from any discussion or decision on matters in which they have or may have a conflict of interest in.
- Notify the Customer Engagement Manager if they are a volunteer on any of the Customer Engagement groups if you secure a job with Ongo. A decision will be made if there will be a conflict of interest in you undertaking the job alongside your volunteering capacity.

4.4 Carry out responsibilities with diligence

- Volunteers act on behalf of other residents and their respective communities and are in a position of trust, therefore they must:
 - Take responsibility for transparency and honesty by declaring any criminal convictions (new or historical) in confidence, regardless of whether they are 'spent' or 'unspent', to the Customer Engagement Manager. A risk assessment will then be carried out on the individual to:
 - a) Ensure there is no risk to staff or customers
 - b) Ensure there are no issues that could potentially damage the reputation of Ongo Homes or the engagement activity role
 - c) Identify any fraud/theft convictions which may have an impact on monetary activities
 - Ongo Homes will also make reasonable checks they feel are deemed to be necessary by working in accordance with the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974.
 - Notify Customer Engagement if they have a medical condition, e.g. mental health or disability. A risk assessment would be undertaken to ensure we can provide the necessary support or adjustments that will assist individuals in being involved.

- Must use any equipment that has been made available for their personal use, for the purpose that it was originally intended for (e.g. use of laptop to record /promote activities relating to their respective group, in line with the ICT Acceptable Use Policy – copies available from Customer Engagement)
- Take reasonable care of any ICT equipment provided, as detailed in the ICT Acceptable Use Policy, and ensure that it is not used for any inappropriate purpose, e.g. making defamatory, libellous comments that have a negative impact on Ongo Homes, its residents and its wider community partners (see the Acceptable Use of Internet, E-Mail and Social Networking Policy – copies available from Customer Engagement)
- Report any theft of equipment supplied by Ongo Homes or which has been funded from other sources for use in respect of storing documents relating to Ongo Homes and the volunteer role
- May seek remuneration only for legitimate, agreed-upon expenses incurred as part of their role
- That where finances are concerned they:-
 - a) Ensure that they follow the proper Ongo Homes guidelines (e.g. setting up bank accounts, signatories etc.)
 - b) Respond positively and in a timely manner to any information required or requests made by Ongo Homes
 - c) Take reasonable care in the management and accounting of funds
 - d) Ensure that accounts are accessible and available for audit checks
 - e) Ensure effective consultation takes place with any respective group members on income and expenditure items
 - f) Ensure that they attend relevant training sessions to keep their knowledge and awareness up-to-date
 - g) Control the use of funds for their proper use
 - h) Not obtain a personal gain or achieve ulterior objectives

4.5 Harassment

- Harassment means improper comment or conduct that a person knows or ought to know would be unwelcome, offensive, embarrassing or hurtful.

Volunteers:-

- Must not exert or attempt to exert undue or inappropriate influence on residents or Ongo Homes staff or behave in a manner that may be perceived as intimidating or threatening
- Must not try to influence outcomes with threats, bribes or inducements
- Must not behave in an abusive way towards other residents, Ongo Homes staff and partners.

For example:-

- a) Initiating or spreading hurtful rumours
- b) Swearing at someone (includes using obscene language, name calling)
- c) Using insulting behaviour (includes making threatening gestures or remarks)
- d) Making physical threats
- e) Assaulting someone physically or sexually
- f) Creating unwanted sexual attention

4.6 Equal opportunities

- Volunteers must ensure that the role they undertake on behalf of, and for the benefit of, the wider resident base and Ongo Homes communities promotes inclusion and is available to all, irrespective of race, religion or belief, age, sex, disability, sexual orientation, marriage/civil partnership status, pregnancy or maternity status, or transgender status¹.
- Volunteers shall not discriminate on any of the above grounds against any other residents, Ongo Homes staff or its partners
- Volunteers must be seen to lead by example and conduct their role in such a way that is inclusive of all residents. As such they must operate within the spirit of inclusion and actively promote equality of opportunity thereby ensuring that they eliminate all negative forms of discrimination in the way they work.
- All Volunteers must work co-operatively with their peers and with Ongo Homes staff to broaden participation on all customer engagement structures.

4.7 Have fairness and respect for others

- Volunteers should acknowledge and respect the fact that no two individuals are the same and that their peers have differing levels of time available and commitment that they can dedicate to involvement activities. Everyone has the right to be involved at a pace and level of their choosing, with all contributions being valued
- Regardless of the involvement structure, all volunteers should respect the difference of opinions from their peer group, especially as differences of opinions are bound to happen from time-to-time. Whilst freedom of speech and expression of views is encouraged and welcomed, volunteers need to be mindful of what they say, where they say it, who they say it to and the impact it might have on others. Even though individuals may not personally agree with the views and opinions of others they must be prepared to talk their differences through and accept any majority decisions made after the discussion
- Volunteers working as part of a Ongo Homes recognised group should display effective levels of team work and take joint responsibility for ensuring that the group strives to

¹ Recognised nine protected characteristics of the Equality Act 2010

meet its main purpose and key objectives, outlined within its terms of reference. Mutual respect, trust and understanding between group members and Ongo Homes staff is a key factor to developing and sustaining effective partnership work

- All volunteers should regularly familiarise themselves with the respective terms of reference or constitution of the structure that they are involved with. In doing so they will ensure that their individual input contributes to the successful achievement of aims and objectives.

4.8 Public Relations

- For the purposes of this policy, 'press' and 'media' relates to all printed, broadcast and online news reporting facilities, including local paid-for and free newspapers, village newsletters and magazines, radio and television news, online news sites. Seek advice from the ongo PR Team.
- Articles/information may only be submitted to the press and wider media on behalf of a particular customer engagement structure if discussed, agreed and recorded at an official group meeting
- Volunteers submitting personal articles to the press must only refer to that which is of personal interest and must, in no way, claim to represent Ongo Homes, any part of the ongo Partnership or associated group or committee.
- If a volunteer is approached by any media organisation, or representative of a media organisation, and asked to comment in an official capacity on a matter relating to Ongo Homes, the Ongo Partnership, or any activity associated with the Partnership, they are advised to inform the PR Team by telephone or email or seek advice from a member of staff prior to making official comment.
- Volunteers who communicate information via social media which includes facebook and twitter must refer to their comments as being of personal interest and in no way claim to represent Ongo Homes, any part of the Ongo Partnership or associated group or committee
- If a volunteer is asked to comment, as a tenant, on activities relating to Ongo Homes or the Partnership, they have the right to do so. Professional advice on dealing with media interviews is available from the PR Team to help and support individuals in such situations.

Volunteers must not intend to damage or bring into disrepute the reputation of any Ongo Homes project or customer engagement group structure.

4.9 Political affiliation

- Residents may be affiliated to or be members of a political party but they cannot represent a political party in their role as a volunteer or member of any of the other customer engagement group structure.
- Volunteers must not be involved with extremist beliefs, organisations and/or terrorist activities. The Government has defined extremism as ‘vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs’.

4.10 Conduct at meetings

- All volunteers, wherever possible, will have equal status at meetings.
- General behaviour at meetings should consist of the following:-
- Volunteers should at all times observe accepted codes of practice and procedures whilst taking part in meetings:
 - To be courteous to each other and support and assist others in seeking the best possible solution to issues being discussed
 - To respect the role of, and follow the guidance of the Chair person during the meeting
 - To follow the agenda, stay on topic and to help each other to reach effective decisions
 - To remember that the purpose of the meeting is to benefit residents generally and not specific individuals
 - To bear in mind the rights of individual residents and the duties of staff when proposing solutions to problems
 - To operate within the guidance set out in either the relevant constitution or terms of reference
 - The Chair should welcome members and invited guests to the meeting
- The Chair should ensure that no one individual dominates the meeting (including themselves) and those issues relevant to the current agenda item are only discussed. All members during the meeting have a responsibility to ensure that this is adhered to
- All speakers should go through the Chair and keep to the subject being discussed.
- Only one member should speak at a time and there should only be one conversation at any one time
- When a member raises a topic that creates a personal and/or prejudicial conflict of interest, the Chair must bring that person to order
- If volunteers are involved in more than one group they must avoid raising issues which have already been discussed in other groups. This will help to avoid any confusion.

- Meetings must start at the stated time and abide by the agenda. Late arrivals should enter quietly and not disrupt the meeting with apologies
- Jargon must be avoided wherever possible. If it is used then a full explanation should be given
- ***It is the responsibility of each member to ensure they are prepared for the meeting by reading all the relevant papers, preparing questions in advance and bringing them to the meeting.***

The guidance above helps Ongo Homes staff, or officers of a residents' group to ask individuals that do not keep to the code to leave the meeting, or if the breach is persistent, to exclude the individual from attending further customer engagement meetings.

4.11 Breaches of the Customer Engagement Volunteer Code of Conduct

4.11.1 Not declaring criminal convictions, new or historical, may lead to an immediate suspension of volunteer status whilst a risk assessment is undertaken

4.11.2 Following the conclusion of a risk assessment of a criminal conviction, action may be taken. Examples are - fraud/theft convictions may have an impact on volunteers not being allowed to take on a treasurer's position for a local group or carry out any monetary activities for any involvement structure, convictions relating to threats or actual abuse or harm to others may result in volunteer status being withdrawn

4.11.3 At Meetings

- At a meeting, a Ongo Homes officer, together with the Chair, will be responsible for taking decisions on any breach of the code of conduct that has been identified/brought to their attention
- If a resident does not abide by the code of conduct, the Ongo Homes officer, Chair (vice chair or nominated person where relevant) will warn that if the individual breaches the code again then they may be asked to leave the meeting
- The Ongo Homes officer or Chair (vice chair or nominated person where relevant) can use their discretion and may issue the resident one further warning during the meeting. There should be no more than a maximum of 2 warnings during any one meeting
- If the member of the group or member of the public persists and continues to ignore the code then the Ongo Homes officer, Chair (vice chair or nominated person where relevant) will ask the resident to leave the meeting with immediate effect
- If the involved resident continues to break the code at subsequent meetings of the same group then consideration will be given to barring that individual from that particular

customer engagement activity for a defined longer-term period, in line with timescales indicated in 4.11.6.

4.11.4 All Breaches to the Customer Engagement Volunteer Code of Conduct

Ongo Homes shall investigate all breaches of the code that are brought to their attention. If any volunteer or member of staff experience a breach of the code and want to report this, they must do so in writing within 14 days of the incident taking place to the Customer Engagement Manager. In the first instance the Customer Engagement Manager will:-

- Write to the individual detailing the nature of the allegation and complaint received
- Arrange a meeting with the individual to discuss the issues further and to advise on the expected future conduct of the individual, monitoring period, and any actions required of the individual (e.g. to undertake training)
- Outline the consequences for the individual should unacceptable behaviour or actions continue which constitute a breach of the code of conduct
- Confirm discussions of the meeting in writing to the individual concerned
- Provide feedback to the relevant customer engagement group structure detailing any advice given to the individual concerned and any course of action agreed at the meeting with the individual

In certain circumstances, any violation of the Code of conduct may also result in a violation of legislation which could result in legal implications (e.g., data protection).

Note

- The only instance where Ongo Homes will not investigate any alleged breach is where resident associations or community groups themselves, as part of their constitution (section 5), are able to deal with code of conduct of issues within their specific group. Ongo Homes will provide optimum levels of support to Chairs and Vice Chairs should such situations occur.

4.11.5 Outcomes

The emphasis shall be on providing training, advice, support to ensure that the individual does not commit any further breach.

4.11.6 Dependent on the severity of the situation, Ongo Homes may also consider carrying out the following:-

- A warning letter from the Customer Engagement Manager stating that any repeats over a defined time period could result in the individual being excluded from participating in all Ongo Homes recognised customer engagement activity, temporary suspension from attending meetings (Community Voice or any other customer engagement group structure) for either a 3 month or 6 month period. Where a letter is not the most appropriate form of communication, every effort will be made to ensure the warning is communicated to the resident in a way that they understand.

- In extreme or repeat cases, customer engagement volunteer status could be revoked and the individual suspended from all Ongo Homes customer engagement activities for a period of 12 months. If the person were representing a residents association or community group at the time of his/her status being revoked, Ongo Homes would contact the relevant group stating that should the committee wish the individual to continue to represent their group, then Ongo Homes support and recognition of the group may be withdrawn. At the end of the 12-month suspension period if the person wishes to participate once again in any resident involvement activity structures, the person must re-apply in writing to Ongo Homes for permission to re-join. The Customer Engagement Manager will then write to the person explaining that permission is granted but that the volunteer will be on a probationary period for the first six months
- If the volunteer re-offends during the six month probationary period, then he/she will be subject to immediate suspension pending investigation, which may result in a further suspension or a permanent exclusion from voluntary work at Ongo Homes and any recognised customer engagement activities.

4.11.7 In addition, if Ongo Homes has issued notice of legal action against a volunteer for any reason in relation to their tenancy then Ongo Homes may advise the volunteer that they will be suspended from all voluntary work and customer engagement activities until the outcome of the legal action is known.

- Volunteers should notify customer engagement if they are issued with a notice of legal action by Ongo Homes in relation to their tenancy

4.12 Right of Appeal

4.12.1 Volunteers have a right of appeal and should do so verbally or in writing to the Customer Engagement Manager within 14 days of notification of action to be taken. An investigating officer will then be appointed by Ongo Homes to re-investigate the case. Following the investigation, the relevant Head of Service will determine the nature of the appeal.

5. Making sure we do what we say...

5.1 The Customer Engagement Manager has overall responsibility for the policy and for monitoring its effectiveness.

5.2. Members of the Customer Engagement team and all volunteers are responsible for ensuring that they understand and comply with the code and that it is implemented on a day-to-day basis.

5.3. It is the responsibility of all volunteers to ensure that the code of conduct is maintained and adhered to.

6. Other things to bear in mind...

- ✓ Ongo's Acceptable Use of E-mail and Internet Policy
- ✓ Ongo's Professional Boundaries Policy
- ✓ Ongo's Staff Code of Conduct
- ✓ Data Protection Act 1998
- ✓ Equality Act 2010

7. We'll look at this again...

- 7.1 Annual health checks will be carried out and a full review of the document in three years time, or sooner if anything changes.
- 7.2 Changes to the code shall be notified in writing to all volunteers.