



Code of Conduct and Professionalism Policy

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Code of Conduct and Professionalism Policy

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Section 1 – Code of Conduct & Professionalism Policy – General

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Code of Conduct sets out the standards of conduct and professionalism that we expect of all colleagues of First Choice Homes Oldham (FCHO), to ensure that they uphold the highest standards of behaviour in line with FCHO's values, policies and procedures.
- 1.2 The Code applies to all colleagues of First Choice Homes Oldham.
- 1.3 Board and committee members are not within the scope of this Code and are subject to FCHO's separate Board Member Code of Conduct.
- 1.4 FCHO will use appropriate procurement, contractual, contract-management and assurance arrangements to ensure that relevant contractor and service-provider staff understand and demonstrate standards of conduct equivalent to this Code, and have the skills, knowledge, experience and behaviours needed to deliver good-quality services.

2 Compliance with the Code

- 2.1 It is the responsibility of individual colleagues to comply with the Code.
- 2.2 FCHO will embed this Code through induction, accessible guidance, learning, appraisal and performance management. All colleagues must know how to obtain advice and how to raise concerns about conduct.
- 2.3 Customers will be given meaningful opportunities to influence and scrutinise the development, adoption and review of this Code. The Code will be made accessible to customers, formally approved through FCHO's governance arrangements, and kept up to date and fit for purpose through an annual suitability check and review following relevant legal, regulatory or organisational change.
- 2.4 If someone has reason to believe that a fellow colleague is in breach of the Code of Conduct & Professionalism Policy, they should raise this issue either with their line manager, with another appropriate manager, or through the procedure described in the Whistleblowing and Confidential Disclosure Policy.
- 2.5 No person who raises a concern, makes a complaint or uses a reporting or whistleblowing procedure in good faith must be victimised, disadvantaged or treated unfairly for doing so.
- 2.6 FCHO takes any allegations relating to fraud and corruption very seriously. If allegations are substantiated after an investigation, FCHO's disciplinary procedure will be invoked and the appropriate sanction applied. Where appropriate, the matter may also be referred to the Police for prosecution. Colleagues should refer to the Probity/Counter Fraud and Anti Bribery Policy.
- 2.7 Raising unfounded or malicious allegations will be treated as a disciplinary matter where a formal investigation will be invoked.

- 2.8 This document also applies to temporary workers, including those employed through an agency or working as self-employed contractors. If a temporary worker breaches the Code of Conduct and Professionalism Policy, FCHO will usually consider ending their assignment rather than applying the employment policies used for colleagues.

3 Standards

- 3.1 Colleagues are expected to give the highest possible standard of service to our customers and any other members of the public they deal with. Where it is part of an individual's duties, colleagues should provide appropriate advice to Board Members, the public and fellow employees with impartiality.
- 3.2 Colleagues must also be mindful that in some cases their actions in their personal lives, can have an impact on their work life. This could be where their personal actions are at odds with the requirements of their role or where they are known to be an employee of FCHO, and their actions are (or may be) perceived to bring the organisation into disrepute.
- 3.3 Colleagues are particularly advised that membership of certain groups or organisations, any comments or participation in social networking sites or other internet and public forums that involve negative comments about FCHO or its customers, that bring FCHO into disrepute, may be considered by FCHO to be damaging or derogatory could result in a formal investigation that may lead to disciplinary action. Colleagues are advised that expectations of privacy in making such comments, are not accepted by FCHO as a valid defence for such comments.
- 3.4 All colleagues are required to adhere to and demonstrate FCHO's Values & Behaviours full details of which can be found in our Behavioural Framework.

We Listen

We encourage others and challenge ourselves. We are curious and ask questions.

We Own

We make a difference in a positive way. We work together to get things done.

We Care

We are appreciative and respectful of others. We are passionate and professional.

We Act

We deliver on our promises. We enjoy what we do and always give our best.

We Learn

We always learn and adapt. We are open to change and new ideas.

We Keep it Simple

We make the right decisions. We identify and remove unnecessary barriers.

Our behaviours are mapped to the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) professional standards which are:

- Integrity
- Inclusive
- Ethical
- Knowledgeable
- Skilled
- Advocate
- Leadership

These standards define the housing profession now and in the future. Mapping the standards to our Behavioural Framework ensures that the behaviours that link to our values, are also the ones that set the benchmark for housing professionals across the sector.

Disclosure of information

- 3.5 The law requires that most of the work undertaken by FCHO is open to inspection and that certain types of information are available to Board Members, Elected Members, Auditors, Government Departments, customers and the public. There are exceptions to this including:
- Confidential or “exempt from publication” information discussed at FCHO’s Board Meetings, and other meetings when the press and public have been excluded;
 - Commercially sensitive information in relation to contracts for the supply of goods and/or services;
 - Personal information relating to customers, employees, Board and Elected Members.
- 3.6 Colleagues should not use any information obtained through their employment with FCHO for their own personal gain or benefit, nor disclose it to anyone else.
- 3.7 Colleagues must disclose to FCHO any criminal convictions or civil action against them that may impact upon their job role. The following list details what must be disclosed; this list is not exhaustive and if you are in doubt you must seek advice from the Head of People .

If your job includes	You must disclose
Driving (including driving your own vehicle)	Any motoring convictions or offences including accepted/proven, cautions, fines/points on your licence or mandatory training undertaken in place of fine and / or points on your licence.
Working with customers with additional support needs	Any convictions or cautions for offences against the person Grievous or Actual Bodily Harm (GBH, ABH) or offences

	involving violence or financial abuse or abuse of trust.
Working with money (finance team, financial inclusion or management of finance function)	Any convictions or cautions for fraud, theft or offences involving dishonesty or deception. Any civil actions relating to debt. In addition – should it be applicable – you must disclose an Individual Voluntary Agreement (IVA) or bankruptcy.
A Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Check as a requirement of appointment	Any criminal convictions and cautions

4 Political Neutrality

- 4.1 Colleagues must serve our customers and Board members without preference or prejudice to the individual political opinions of customers or Board members.

Some colleagues are in politically restricted posts. Their employment conditions are known to them and restrict their personal political activities.

5 Principles & Professionalism

- 5.1 All colleagues must perform their duties with honesty, responsibility, integrity and objectivity and must be accountable to the organisation for their actions whilst representing FCHO. Colleagues should have the FCHO Values in mind at all times, and ensure that their behaviour aligns with these.
- 5.2 A colleague will be accountable for their behaviours and actions at all times, whilst acting as a representative of FCHO.
- 5.3 All colleagues must:
- treat customers and members of public with respect, empathy and fairness.
 - listen to residents and take account of how their conduct, actions and decisions may affect customers, including safety, wellbeing and trust;
 - provide clear, honest explanations for actions or decisions that directly affect customers and respond constructively to feedback;
 - challenge language, assumptions or behaviour that reinforce stigma about residents or social housing, and recognise and use responsibly any power or authority associated with their role;
 - not discriminate unlawfully against any person.
 - treat fellow colleagues customers/members of the public, and Board members of FCHO professionally, with dignity, respectfully and fairly.
 - not conduct themselves in a way which may bring FCHO into disrepute (such as damage to or loss of reputation).

5.4 All colleagues must:

- a) use any public funds entrusted to or handled by them in a responsible and lawful manner in accordance with FCHO Standing Orders and Financial Regulations.
- b) ensure value for money.
- c) not make personal use of property or facilities of FCHO unless properly authorised to do so
- d) ensure any expenditure is authorised appropriately and obtain proof of spending in accordance with Financial Regulations.

5.5 Colleagues must not in their official or personal capacity:

- a) allow their personal interests to conflict with the organisation's requirements
- b) use their position improperly to confer an advantage or disadvantage on any person.

5.6 Colleagues must comply with any requirements of FCHO:

- a) to register or declare interests; and
- b) to declare hospitality, benefits or gifts offered and / or received as a consequence of their employment.

5.7 Colleagues must not:

- a) disclose information given to them in confidence by anyone, or information acquired that could reasonably be deemed to be of a confidential nature, without the consent of a person authorised to give it, unless they are required by law to do so.
- b) prevent another person from gaining access to information to which that person is entitled by law (refer to Data Protection Act and Freedom of Information Act) subject to that person complying with any requirements for access including the paying of any fee or charge that FCHO may lawfully levy.

5.8 Colleagues must not be involved in the appointment or any other decision relating to the discipline, promotion, pay or conditions of another colleague or prospective colleague who is a relative, spouse or partner (partner includes cohabiting partners not in any formal legal relationships).

5.9 Colleagues must at all times demonstrate ethical behaviour and act in accordance with the trust that the public is entitled to place in them.

6 Relationships

6.1 Board members

Mutual respect between colleagues and Board members is essential for good governance. However, colleagues need to be mindful that close personal familiarity between themselves and Board members can damage the

relationship and affect perceptions of their neutrality. Colleagues must disclose any intimate personal relationships with members of the Board or with relatives of Board Members in writing to the Head of People . The form In Appendix 1 can be used for this purpose.

6.2 The local community and customers

Colleagues must always remember their responsibilities to the community they serve and ensure courteous, respectful, fair, efficient and impartial service delivery to all colleagues, groups and individuals within that community, as required by the policies of FCHO. Colleagues must declare to the organisation if they enter into a personal relationship with a customer.

6.3 Contractors

In general, an individual's employment with FCHO must take precedence over any business interests they may have or wish to have. Any relationships of a business or personal nature with current or potential contractors must be declared. Colleagues must award orders or contracts on merit and by fair competition against other tenders. The FCHO procedures for such competition must be followed.

6.4 Colleagues

Colleagues must declare to the organisation if they enter into a personal relationship with a colleague with whom they have a close working relationship and/or where there is the potential for a conflict of interest or abuse of position. Similarly, any previous relationships with a colleague must also be declared in these circumstances. In addition, colleagues must declare their familial relationships (by birth or marriage) in similar situations and must also declare where they have a close working relationship with a person who shares their accommodation. The form in Appendix 1 can be used for this purpose.

7 Outside Commitments

- 7.1 Colleagues who wish to undertake outside employment must make a declaration of this employment in line with the requirements of FCHO.
- 7.2 Colleagues will not normally be prevented from undertaking outside employment unless in the view of FCHO there is a conflict of interest.
- 7.3 If, in FCHO's view there is a conflict of interest the colleague will be required to relinquish either the external employment or their employment with FCHO. Failure to meet this requirement may result in summary dismissal. Where a colleague fails to declare an outside interest, this may also result in a formal investigation which could lead to disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.
- 7.4 The term employment in this context is also taken to include the holding of any voluntary office, for example being a charitable trustee.
- 7.5 The term employment in this context also applies to self-employment, running a business or holding office as a company director.
- 7.6 FCHO equipment must not be used for any outside employment (excepting where personal use of FCHO equipment is allowed either outside of work's time or outside of work's time . FCHO vehicles must not be used for personal use under any circumstances at any time.
- 7.7 Colleagues who undertake outside employment are responsible for ensuring they adhere to the requirements for rest and rest breaks as defined by the Working Time Directive. If the combination of external and FCHO employment brings the colleague in breach of the Working Time Directive, they may be required to surrender or rearrange their external work to prevent such breach occurring or reoccurring.
- 7.8 Colleagues must not undertake outside work or activity for personal gain in the office or workplace during working hours (the time recorded as working for FCHO).

8 Intellectual Property

- 8.1 Intellectual property is the term that includes inventions, creative writing, (such as computer software) and drawings. Many colleagues' work habitually involves them in creating intellectual property for FCHO. When intellectual property is created by colleagues during their employment with FCHO, then the work and intellectual property rights belong to FCHO.

9 Personal Interests

- 9.1 Colleagues must declare if they have any personal interests or involvement that might conflict with their employment or with the interests of FCHO, by completing the declaration of interest form.
- 9.2 Interests or involvement that might conflict with the interests of FCHO could be either financial and/or non-financial for example:

- Partnership in a business
- Self-employment in a trade in addition to employment with FCHO
- Work done for any person or organisation other than as an colleague of FCHO
- Serving as a member of a group, committee or board that may work in conflict or competition with FCHO
- Applications submitted by relatives or friends for consideration by FCHO, i.e. tendering for work, job applications, applications for housing.

9.3 The Head of People maintains a register of declared interests by colleagues . A declarations exercise is undertaken every year and failure to return a completed and signed declaration within the specified deadline is a gross misconduct offence which could result in dismissal. Managers are supplied with a list of interests of colleagues in their teams. In areas of the business where colleagues may move between managers, this information may be supplied to a higher management level and cascaded down to ensure that senior management have an overview. Directors and employees engaged on the Leadership Contract will be supplied with a list of the declarations for all colleagues in their area of the business. The People Team and other relevant individuals have access to colleague declarations.

9.4 All colleagues are under an obligation to notify the organisation of any change in their circumstances with regards to declarations of interest. Failure to keep declarations of interests current and accurate could lead to a formal investigation resulting in disciplinary action. There is no obligation for FCHO to remind colleagues of this duty and the absence of a reminder will not be accepted as a valid defence in any disciplinary proceedings.

9.5 If any colleague has a personal interest in any matter which arises at a meeting where the colleague is reporting or advising (or might be called upon to advise, or otherwise be able to influence) any member(s) of FCHO or any third party, the colleague must declare the interest, and take no part in the consideration or determination of the matter. Any such declaration made at an official meeting is recorded in the minutes. If appropriate, another colleague will attend and report and/or advise on the matter.

10 Equality Issues

10.1 Colleagues must take personal responsibility for observing, upholding and complying with FCHO's policies and requirements in relation to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) as outlined in its EDI Strategy and Dignity at Work policy. Any colleague who is found to have committed, authorised or condoned an act of discrimination, bullying or harassment will be invited to a formal investigation, which could lead to disciplinary action being taken against them, up to and including dismissal.

Colleagues are advised that the law prohibits unlawful discrimination on the grounds of a protected characteristic and these currently include on grounds of

- Race
- Age
- Sexual Orientation

- Sex
- Marriage and Civil Partnership
- Religion & Belief
- Gender Reassignment
- Disability
- Pregnancy or maternity

11 Behaviour during the tendering process

- 11.1 Colleagues involved in the tendering process and dealing with contractors must be clear on the separation of both client and contractor roles within FCHO.
- 11.2 Information on tenders or costs of internal or external contractors is confidential and must not be disclosed.
- 11.3 If a colleague's duties require both client and contractor roles, they must agree with their manager (and record the agreement) how the roles are separated and how accountability and openness in each role will be demonstrated.
- 11.4 If, during tendering or contracting a colleague learns that current or recent former (last three years) colleagues or their partners, close relatives or associates are seeking work from FCHO, either as owners or managers, they should notify the Procurement & Value for Money Manager.
- 11.5 Colleagues must not employ former colleagues on a consultancy basis, without the express prior written consent of the relevant Director, or in the case of a Director, the Chief Executive or in the case of the Chief Executive, the Chair of the Board. All appointments will be in line with the Recruitment and Selection Policy and Procedure.

12 Corruption

- 12.1 It can be a serious criminal offence for a colleague to receive or give any gift, loan, fee, reward or advantage for doing or not doing anything or for showing favour / disfavour to any person in their official capacity, or to indicate a willingness to take such a course of action or inaction in return for a gift, loan, fee, reward or advantage. The Bribery Act makes it a criminal offence to offer or accept a bribe or to indicate a willingness to offer or accept a bribe.

13 Use of Facilities

- 13.1 In general, colleagues must not use FCHO owned facilities, property or equipment for their own personal use (including for personal employment or for any charity or voluntary groups) unless permission is given for such use. All Information and Communication Technology (ICT) issued ICT equipment and facilities, (hardware, software, systems, data and information) is the property of FCHO.
- 13.2 ICT equipment located in FCHO offices must be kept in good working order and computer screens must be locked when away from desks to ensure confidentiality of data and information.

- 13.3 ICT equipment or electronic devices not owned or issued by FCHO must not be introduced to the corporate network or plugged into any FCHO owned ICT equipment.
- 13.4 Lost or stolen ICT equipment (laptops, tablets, SMART phones, mobile phones, cameras and removable media) must be reported to ICT at the earliest opportunity and if appropriate also reported to the police.
- 13.5 Colleagues are responsible for the content (data and information) they use and that is stored on the ICT equipment and facilities that they make use of and are reminded that discriminatory or pornographic material is not permitted and will always be dealt with formally, the matter will be investigated and may lead to disciplinary action. It is possible to access FCHO ICT systems remotely. Access is controlled and when accessing systems remotely the guidance detailed in the FCHO ICT Acceptable Use Policy applies.
- 13.6 Colleagues may send and receive a reasonable amount of personal emails and should be dealt with during lunch break or at the end of the working day. Personal use of email may be suspended or removed where in the opinion of the manager it is being abused in some way or is beyond reasonable
- 13.7 The sending of discriminatory emails or emails that could cause damage to the reputation of FCHO must not in any circumstances be sent using FCHO ICT equipment and facilities or FCHO email addresses. Chain emails must not be signed up to, forwarded using FCHO email addresses or circulated around the FCHO email system. FCHO email addresses must not be used to sign up for websites or memberships that are not work related.
- 13.8 Colleagues may use their work mobile phone for occasional personal use in extreme or emergency circumstances i.e. to call home to advise a meeting has overrun (where their personal mobile is unavailable), or to call emergency services or make other relevant calls in the case of a vehicle breakdown
- 13.9 Mobile devices (mobile phones, SMART phones and tablets) must be protected with a PIN code for security and data protection reasons.
- 13.10 All holders of FCHO mobile equipment must take reasonable care of the equipment in their care and will be liable for costs incurred as a result of gross negligence. Infrequent accidental damage will not normally constitute gross negligence, however repeatedly dropping and damaging the mobile phone would. Mobile equipment must not be left on display in an unattended vehicle.
- 13.11 It is illegal to use a hand-held phone while driving. FCHO does not issue hands free kits and instructs all holder of FCHO mobiles that they must not be used while driving using a hands-free kit for work or for personal calls. Colleagues on FCHO business must not use their own hand-held phones, unless used with a hands-free kit, while on company business. Failure to observe this rule would lead to a formal investigation, that could lead to disciplinary action, an act of this kind would be deemed a gross misconduct offence under the disciplinary policy.

- 13.12 FCHO mobile users must not have their FCHO e-mails pushed directly to their personal smart phones as this is a breach of ICT security. Failure to observe this rule is a gross misconduct offence under the disciplinary policy.
- 13.13 The ICT FCHO Information, Communications and Technology Security and Acceptable Use Policy provides further details regarding the use of ICT equipment and facilities, (hardware, software, systems, data and information). The policy should be used in-line with the guidance set out within the code of conduct.

Responsible use of digital systems, data and artificial intelligence

- 13.14 Colleagues must use digital systems, data and emerging technologies only as authorised, promptly report suspected data or cyber-security breaches, and avoid uses that are misleading, discriminatory or inconsistent with FCHO's values. Any permitted use of artificial intelligence must be transparent and proportionate, protect confidential and personal information, and retain appropriate human judgement and accountability.

Environment and sustainability

- 13.15 In carrying out their roles, colleagues must consider environmental impacts and take reasonable steps to reduce avoidable waste and unnecessary use of resources, in line with FCHO's environmental and sustainability commitments.

14 Working with Customers with additional support needs

- 14.1 Customers with additional support needs refers to both children and adults. All adults are potential victims of crime or abuse, but not all adults have additional support needs.
- 14.2 Some colleagues are required to work in areas where personal relationships with customers are either a requirement of the post or a usual consequence of the work, for example Community Services.
- 14.3 In such services, steps need to be taken to protect both customers and colleagues from allegations of either breach of trust or inappropriate relationships.
- 14.4 Colleagues must ensure when working with such customers that the relationship remains professional and focused on the customer's needs.
- 14.5 Colleagues must never enter into a close personal or sexual relationship with existing customers or take advantage of their personal relationships with customers.
- 14.6 Colleagues must not agree to be an executor or beneficiary under an existing customers will or carry out paid work for them outside of contractual duties. In some circumstances carrying out paid work for customers can be agreed with the colleague's line manager; permission must be sought first.

- 14.7 Colleagues must not give customers any personal information about themselves or other colleagues such as home address or private phone number.
- 14.8 Colleagues must declare any pre-existing relationship with a customer to their manager when the customer first accesses a relevant service.
- 14.9 Colleagues may occasionally form relationships with former customers of FCHO. Colleagues involved in any such relationship should notify their line manager of this and should ensure that they maintain confidentiality of their colleagues' personal information and that their professionalism is not compromised.
- 14.10 All colleagues must comply with FCHO's Safeguarding Policies .

Learning, development and professional standards

- 14.11 Colleagues must take an active part in appraisal and regular performance review; identify relevant learning needs; complete mandatory training; apply learning in practice; and maintain any continuing professional development or qualification records required for their role. They must raise promptly any circumstance that limits their ability to fulfil their responsibilities safely and competently.
- 14.12 All colleagues are required to report any suspected abuse of children and/or customers with additional support needs immediately their suspicions are raised to their line manager in the first instance.
- 14.13 More generally, colleagues must promptly report through the appropriate channel any concern that their own or another person's conduct, action or decision may place the health, safety, security or wellbeing of customers, colleagues or others at risk.
- 14.14 Colleagues must not hold monies or prescription medicines for customers for supply/dispensation on request.

Section 2 – Code of Conduct – Interpretation and Status

15 Interpretation

- 15.1 The Leadership Team are responsible for interpreting this policy where the provisions are unclear or there is ambiguity. Any interpretation will automatically become incorporated into the policy.
- 15.2 The Officer or Officers operating the policy in practice are responsible for implementing the policy and interpreting the policy giving the words of the policy their common everyday meaning.

16 Status of Policy and Procedure

- 16.1 This Code is non-contractual, though in parts it refers to contractual matters contained in other documents and may be varied by FCHO. This Code will be regularly updated to reflect changes to job titles, responsibilities or areas of work or responsibility.
- 16.2 Failure to adhere to the requirements of the Code of Conduct may result in a formal investigation, whereby disciplinary action may be taken. Failure to observe any requirements of the Code which are also a breach of a contractual or legal obligation (or are otherwise identified as gross misconduct issues) will be regarded as gross misconduct.