

North Lincolnshire Homes Tenant Scrutiny Panel

DRAFT Volunteers Code of Conduct

North Lincolnshire Homes Volunteers "Valuing you as you are"

1. WHAT IS A CODE OF CONDUCT?

The code describes the way that volunteers are expected to carry out their duties either as members of Community Voice, or as independent volunteer members of any North Lincolnshire Homes sponsored or affiliated working group (i.e. Tenant Inspectors, Work for Homes, Reading Panel, Resident Associations etc).

2. WHY HAVE A CODE OF CONDUCT?

This code explains how volunteers are expected to behave, not only in meetings but also in other situations where they may be representing their group or community, e.g. written communications and telephone conversations. The code is also a useful tool when holding open or general meetings to which all tenants, residents, North Lincolnshire Homes' employees or the general public are invited to attend (providing that those attending have formally agreed to accept the code at the beginning of the meeting).

The code enables employees of North Lincolnshire Homes, 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 resident involvement meetings.

3. GENERAL

This code of conduct is mandatory for North Lincolnshire Homes affiliated and supported groups and applies to all volunteers when participating in North Lincolnshire Homes sponsored resident involvement activities.

4. CONFIDENTIALITY

Members should respect all tenants'/residents'/North Lincolnshire Homes employees' confidentiality, whether present or not, and refrain from mentioning specific individual cases which may be considered slanderous, or cause embarrassment to another individual.

Any information or items shared with North Lincolnshire 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 the meeting to take place.

5. CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

Volunteers will not under any circumstances use their position in any resident involvement structure to bypass North Lincolnshire Homes' procedures for personal gain. Members must declare if they have personal and/or prejudicial interests. Members must accept that they may not be able to speak or may be asked to leave the meeting while such discussions take place.

Individual members:

- a) Must not expect to receive more or less favourable treatment by staff because of their status as a volunteer in any of the resident involvement structures
- b) Must use the normal procedures for reporting repairs, complaints etc.

6. EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITIES

Volunteers should accept that they work for the benefit of all individual tenants and for affiliated or North Lincolnshire Homes sponsored residents groups, irrespective of size, location, race, age, sexual orientation, class, disability, gender, religious beliefs, trans status, nationality or ethnic origin. Volunteers must eliminate all types of negative discrimination in the way they work, and actively promote equality of opportunity.

Volunteers shall not discriminate on any of the above grounds against any other volunteer, North Lincolnshire Homes' officer or member of the public. Discriminatory language will not be used in discussions.

7. RESPECT FOR OTHERS

Volunteers should recognise and respect that some individuals may have more time to participate than others, with some members wanting to be heavily involved in the participation structures and others only wanting to dip in and out of the process. Volunteers should appreciate that everyone has the right to be as involved as they wish to be, with all volunteer contributions being valued.

Volunteers should treat everyone (North Lincolnshire Homes' employees, invited guests and residents alike) with consideration, and respect their contributions to the resident involvement process. Any difficulties experienced in performing allocated tasks should be discussed and resolved. Volunteers should respect their relevant resident involvement structure and support all decisions taken by it. Volunteers invited to speak on behalf of their particular participation structure must give their relevant groups opinion and not their own.

8. DIFFERENCES OF OPINION AND CONFLICT

Freedom of speech and expression should be encouraged and welcomed. However, differences of opinion are bound to occur from time to time. Volunteers should recognise this and respect the differing views. They should be prepared to talk the differences through and accept majority

decisions made after discussion. In extreme cases of conflict an external mediator may be employed. Differences must not be allowed to become personal (except for disciplinary matters).

Volunteers participating in Community Voice or on any other resident involvement structure should be of a like mind and share the same overall values and objectives. Volunteers must not deviate from the general direction of the group and must share the same corporate values and allegiance.

9. TEAM WORK

Volunteers participating in a specific resident involvement meeting group structure should take responsibility for the progress of their working group. Contributions should be welcomed from all members, old and new, or where circumstances make them less active in the group, so that the group is not exclusively dictated to by the few.

Partnership working with North Lincolnshire Homes' employees or other invited guests is essential along with mutual respect being maintained at all times.

Volunteers must not damage the reputation of other individuals (volunteers or North Lincolnshire Homes staff) by giving personal opinions as to capabilities.

10. RELIABILITY

Volunteers should always try to deliver on their promises, and not let fellow members and the group down. If this proves impossible they should let their working group know as soon as possible.

11. PUBLIC RELATIONS

Articles may only be submitted to the press on behalf of a particular resident involvement group structure if discussed, agreed and recorded at an official group meeting.

Volunteers submitting personal/private articles to the press must state clearly that the article is 'their own opinion'. The article must not intend to damage or bring into disrepute the reputation of any resident involvement group structure.

12. POLITICAL AFFILIATION

Individual members may be affiliated to or be members of a political party but they cannot represent a political party in their role as a member of any of the resident involvement group structures.

13. MONEY

Any North Lincolnshire Homes supported resident involvement group structure that has responsibility for financial resources will have clear basic guidelines for handling money. These will include keeping a bank account, numbers of signatures needed for cheques, spending criteria and providing regular financial reports to their group and North Lincolnshire Homes at, but not

restricted to, AGM's. No money should be spent without a decision and authorisation at a formal meeting to do so.

Volunteers empowered to manage financial resources on behalf of any resident involvement group structure must adhere to the guidelines detailed in the group's constitution or terms of reference.

14. CONDUCT AT MEETINGS

All volunteers will have equal status at meetings.

Volunteers should at all times observe accepted codes of practice and procedures whilst taking part in meetings:

- a) To be courteous to each other and support and assist others in seeking the best possible solution to problems being discussed
- b) To follow the guidance of the Chair in the conduct of the meeting
- c) To follow the agenda, and to help each other to reach effective decisions
- d) To remember that the purpose of the meeting is to benefit residents generally and not specific individuals
- e) To bear in mind the rights of individual residents and the duties of staff when proposing solutions to problems
- f) To operate within the rules laid down in the relevant constitution or terms of reference

The Chair should welcome members and invited guests to the meeting.

The Chair should facilitate the meeting and not act as dominant spokesperson.

Speakers should go through the Chair and keep to the subject being discussed.

The Chair should ensure that no one individual dominates the meeting and that issues relevant to the current agenda item only are discussed. Members should assist the Chair by pointing out any breach of practice to this clause.

Only one member should speak at a time and there should be no cross talking.

When a member raises a topic that creates a personal and/or prejudicial conflict of interest, the Chair must bring that person to order.

Meetings must start at the stated time and abide by the agenda.

Late arrivals should enter quietly and not disrupt the meeting with apologies.

Mobile phones must be switched off before meetings start (exceptions can be arranged through the Chair).

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 and bringing them to the meeting.

15. NO SMOKING

All meetings will abide by the no smoking policy.

16. TERMS OF REFERENCE / CONSTITUTION

All volunteers should familiarise themselves with the terms of reference or constitution of their group to ensure that they continue to meet its aims and objectives.

17. BREAKING THE CODE OF CONDUCT

At Meetings

At a meeting of any of the resident involvement structures, a North Lincolnshire Homes officer, together with the Chair of the group will be responsible for taking decisions on any breach of the code of conduct (with the support of the majority of members in attendance).

If a member of the group does not abide by the code of conduct, the North Lincolnshire Homes officer, Chair (vice chair or nominated person where relevant) will warn that if the individual breaks the code again they may be asked to leave the meeting.

The North Lincolnshire Homes officer, Chair (vice chair or nominated person where relevant) may give the member of the group or member of the public two further warnings, a maximum of three warnings in any one meeting, and or three consecutive meetings.

If the member of the group or member of the public continues to ignore the code then the North Lincolnshire Homes officer, Chair (vice chair or nominated person where relevant) will ask the individual to leave the meeting.

All Breaches to the Code of Conduct

The steps that North Lincolnshire Homes will take

The Resident Involvement Section of North Lincolnshire Homes shall investigate all breaches of the code that are subject to the complaint. The resident involvement section will:

- a) Write to the individual detailing the nature of the concerns and any complaints it has received
- b) Arrange a meeting with the individual to discuss the issues raised in the letter and to advise on the expected future conduct of the individual and any actions required of the individual (e.g. to undertake training)
- c) Outline the consequences for the individual should unacceptable behaviour or actions continue
- d) Provide a report to the relevant resident involvement group structure detailing any advice given to the individual concerned and any course of action agreed at the meeting with the individual

Outcomes

The emphasis shall be on training to ensure that breach does not re-occur, however other action available by North Lincolnshire Homes is:

- a) A warning letter from the Resident Involvement & Community Development Manager stating that a repeat could result in the individual being excluded from participating in Community Voice or/and other affiliated or sponsored resident involvement structures
- b) Suspension from attending meetings (Community Voice or any other resident involvement group structure) for a period of three months
- c) Suspension from attending meetings (Community Voice or any other resident involvement group structure) for a period of six months
- d) In extreme or repeat cases, volunteer status could be revoked and the volunteer suspended from all resident involvement structures for a period of 12 months. If the person were representing a residents association at the time of his/her status being revoked, North Lincolnshire Homes would contact the relevant residents association stating that if the committee wishes the person to continue to represent their group, that North Lincolnshire Homes 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 of the resident involvement group structures, the person must re-apply in writing to North Lincolnshire Homes for permission. The Resident Involvement 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
- e) 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 North Lincolnshire Home affiliated and supported resident involvement activities

If North Lincolnshire Homes has commenced legal action against a volunteer, North Lincolnshire Homes may advise the volunteer that they will be suspended from all resident involvement activities until the outcome of the legal action is known.

Right of Appeal

Volunteers have a right of appeal and should do so verbally or in writing to the Resident Involvement Manager of North Lincolnshire Homes immediately or within 14 days of notification of action to be taken. An investigating officer will then be appointed by North Lincolnshire Homes to re-investigate the case. Following the investigation, a Director of North Lincolnshire Homes will decide if the appeal is upheld.

18. FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CODE OF PRACTICE

It is expected that this code of practice will continue to develop to reflect best practice. The code will be reviewed periodically by the Board of North Lincolnshire Homes.

Changes to the code shall be notified in writing to all North Lincolnshire Homes funded and affiliated resident involvement group structures who shall be required to accept such changes in writing on penalty of losing sponsorship/affiliation.