

# **Harrow Voluntary & Community Sector Forum**

## **Members' Code of Conduct**

This Code of Conduct sets out the behaviour expected of members of Harrow Voluntary & Community Sector Forum (the Forum) when carrying out activities as a representative of the Forum or of a member organisation, for example in meetings, written communications and telephone conversations. It enables the Forum to ask any individual or group to leave a meeting or activity, or to have their membership suspended or withdrawn if the Code is breached.

### **1. GENERAL CONDUCT**

All members will be expected to:

- a. adhere to the Forum's Constitution and Membership Guidelines (see Appendix I);
- b. treat others with courtesy, respect and fairness;
- c. work constructively and support other members in pursuit of the Forum's constitutional object and aims;
- d. remember that the Forum's purpose is for the good of all people in Harrow and their communities generally, not of specific groups or individuals;
- e. recognise and respect the rights of individuals and not discriminate against Forum members or any other persons on the grounds of ethnicity, national origin, gender, marital status, age, sexual orientation, religion or disability;
- f. not speak or write to another organisation or individual in the name of the Forum without the prior collective consent of the membership or approval by the Chair;
- g. share responsibility for decisions taken by the Forum and support them publicly without undermining the collective decision-making process.

### **2. CONDUCT FOR MEETINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

When taking part in Forum meetings (including online discussions and sub-groups, where relevant), all members will be expected to:

- a. abide by the Forum's Meeting Ground Rules (see Appendix II);
- b. notify the Chair before the meeting of any prospective agenda items;
- c. prepare for meetings by reading all relevant papers in advance, where possible, to be able to make effective and positive contributions to discussions;
- d. be on time for the start of the meeting, and send notice and any contribution in advance if delayed or unable to attend when specifically expected;
- e. engage in debate and voting according to the Forum's agreed policies and procedures, including Standing Orders (see Appendix III);
- f. share the debate so that all members are encouraged to contribute;
- g. listen to other members without interrupting;
- h. respect other members' ideas, opinions and experiences;
- i. help each other to reach effective decisions;
- j. fulfil any assigned actions and report back on progress at the next meeting or before, as appropriate.

### **3. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

In the course of Forum meetings or activities, all members will be expected to:

- a. avoid any conflict between the interests of the Forum and their own personal or organisational interests which may influence their approach to any matter under consideration by the Forum – this includes avoiding perceptions of conflicts of interest as well as actual conflicts of interest;
- b. declare any such conflict of interest as soon as it arises and withdraw from discussion or voting as deemed appropriate by members present;
- c. agree to any such disclosure of interest and subsequently agreed actions being recorded.

### **4. CONFIDENTIALITY AND PRIVACY**

With regard to general behaviour and any information disclosed in the course of Forum meetings or activities, all members will be expected to:

- a. recognise and respect all individual members' right to privacy, confidentiality and personal space;
- b. highlight any confidentiality issues before revealing sensitive details which must not be disclosed outside of the specific Forum context in which they are divulged;
- c. notify any breaches of confidentiality immediately to the Chair or other Management Board member.

### **5. BREACHES OF THE CODE OF CONDUCT**

In the event of a breach of the Code of Conduct being notified to the Chair or other Management Board member, a member may be asked to leave the premises, reprimanded in writing, expected to resign from the Management Board, suspended from Forum membership or have their membership withdrawn in accordance with the Constitution.

Examples of behaviour likely to be considered breaches of the Code of Conduct:

- a. seeking to undermine the activities of the Forum;
- b. behaving in a manner likely to bring the Forum into disrepute;
- c. speaking or acting on behalf of the Forum without the agreement of the collective membership or the Management Board;
- d. failing to respect the privacy of individuals or to observe a member's request to keep information confidential within the Forum;
- e. being abusive, aggressive or intimidating to other Forum members or members of other groups;
- f. knowingly misrepresenting or misleading the Forum, its members, other organisations or the general public;
- g. intentionally disregarding the agreed policies of the Forum, the direction of the Chair or a decision taken collectively by members;
- h. using membership of the Forum to gain personal or unfair advantage;
- i. misuse of Forum funds.

## 6. GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES

- a. Where a grievance or complaint is raised about a Forum member organisation or an individual, this must be made in writing to the Forum Chair. The Chair and Vice-Chairs will first attempt to resolve the issue informally and by agreement between the parties.
- b. Where this is not possible, the Chair will report the matter to the Forum Management Board, which may decide to withdraw or suspend the organisation's membership of the Forum. The organisation or individual concerned will have a right of appeal to the next Ordinary Meeting of the Forum, where any decision will be considered final.
- c. Where a grievance or complaint is raised about the Forum Chair or his or her organisation, this must be made in writing to the Forum Vice-Chairs, who will first attempt to resolve the issue informally and by agreement between the parties.
- d. Where this is not possible, the Vice-Chairs will report the matter to the Forum Management Board, which may decide to suspend the Chair from his or her role and/or withdraw the organisation's membership of the Forum. The Chair will have a right of appeal to the next Ordinary Meeting of the Forum, where any decision will be considered final.

## 7. FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CODE OF CONDUCT

It is expected that this Code of Conduct will continue to develop to reflect good practice. The Code should be reviewed at least annually and any changes will be ratified and minuted at an Ordinary Meeting.

The above Code of Conduct was ratified at an Ordinary Meeting held on ..... 2015.

Signed ..... Chair Name: .....

..... Vice-Chair Name: .....

Signed ..... Vice-Chair Name: .....

## Appendix I

### Membership Guidelines

All Members of Harrow Voluntary and Community Sector Forum should:

- submit a membership application for their organisation, to be considered for acceptance at the next Forum meeting;
- adhere to the Forum's Constitution and Code of Conduct including Meeting Ground Rules;
- familiarise themselves with the Terms of Reference of any Forum sub-group or working group to which they belong;
- participate and contribute to the Forum as an equal member;
- have the right to ask the Chair for an item to appear on a future Ordinary Meeting agenda;
- have voting rights and be able to take part in Forum elections;
- be eligible to nominate and be nominated for Forum Management Board roles;
- promote and abide by the Forum's fundamental organisational values of:
  - Co-operation
  - Respect for all
  - Equality
  - Mutual support
  - Tolerance
  - Consensus
  - Independence of the Voluntary and Community Sector
  - Diversity within the Voluntary and Community Sector
  - Democratic accountability

The Forum may withhold, suspend or withdraw membership from any group or individual not upholding the collectively agreed guidelines, policies and procedures.

## Appendix II

### Forum Meeting Ground Rules



- 1. We will keep our mobile phones switched off or on silent.**  
This means we will not allow the meeting to be distracted by phone calls.  
We will leave the room before answering.
- 2. We will honour the authority of the Chair of the meeting**  
This means we will direct all contributions through the Chair and respect his or her role as meeting leader.
- 3. We will keep to the topic under discussion**  
This means we will stick to the agenda and the guidance of the Chair of the meeting. We will not wander off track or use the meeting as an excuse to push our own pet hobbyhorses.
- 4. We will not keep on going over old ground**  
This means we will not repeat what has already been said or keep referring to the mistakes of the past. We want to keep our eyes firmly on moving forward.
- 5. We will not speak when someone else is making a point**  
This means we will not talk over someone who is already speaking (except for timekeeping interventions by the Chair), or hold private conversations between individuals during whole group discussions.
- 6. We will value contributions from all of our members**  
This means we will share the responsibility of making sure that all members feel safe to express their views. We will not let discussion be dominated by a few confident speakers. We will accept differences in people's ability to communicate.
- 7. We will use clear, simple language and limit our use of jargon and acronyms**  
This means we will do our best to avoid words and abbreviations that members might not know or might have difficulty understanding.
- 8. We will not be discriminatory, offensive, disparaging or insensitive**  
This means we will not use or tolerate language or behaviour that is unlawful, rude, inappropriate or patronising.

Members may receive a warning or be asked to leave a meeting by its chair if they do not uphold the meeting ground rules outlined above.

Let us always remember **the Nolan Principles:**

**Selflessness** – We should never act improperly to gain financial or other material benefits for ourselves or to confer an unfair advantage or disadvantage on any other person or group.

**Integrity** – We should not behave improperly or put ourselves in any situation where our integrity may be questioned, and should at all times avoid any appearance of such behaviour.

**Objectivity** – We should make impartial decisions based on merit, including when making appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards or benefits.

**Accountability** – We should be accountable to the membership for our actions and decisions on behalf of the Forum, which must be able to stand the test of scrutiny by all stakeholders and under the law.

**Openness** – We should be as open as possible about all our decisions and actions, give our reasons and restrict information only if the wider public benefit clearly demands.

**Honesty** – We have a duty to be truthful when dealing with fellow Forum members and with other individuals and organisations.

**Leadership** – We should promote and support these principles by leadership and by example.

## Appendix III

### Standing Orders for Ordinary Meetings

**Notice of Meetings** – Notice of the date, time and place of the meeting shall be despatched, normally with an agenda, to all Forum members not less than 14 days before the meeting.

**Meeting Documents** – Papers for discussion shall be circulated with the agenda or as soon as possible afterwards. Papers shall generally be sent electronically, although any Forum member may request to receive documents in hard copy.

#### **Location of Meetings**

Meetings shall be held in accessible, easy to reach venues.

**Timing of Meetings** – Times shall vary in order to maximise accessibility by Forum members who may find it difficult to attend at permanently fixed times.

**Quorum** – The quorum for Forum Ordinary Meetings shall be ten organisational members including not less than three members of the Management Board.

**Chair** – The Chair of the Forum shall chair any meeting, if present. Otherwise a Vice-Chair shall take the chair. If none of these persons is present within ten minutes of the scheduled meeting start time, members present shall choose one of their number to chair that meeting.

**Length of Meetings** – Meetings shall end two hours after they begin.

**Agenda** – The standard Order of items at Ordinary meetings shall be:

- Welcome/Intro /Apologies/Conflicts of Interest
- Agenda Review
- Individual items for information, discussion or decision
- Forum members offers & wants
- Minutes of the last meeting – accuracy and Matters Arising
- Any Other Business
- Member Networking
- Date of next meeting
- Close

#### **Voting Procedures**

- Any member may move for a vote on a proposal in order to progress the business of the meeting.
- Any motion shall have a proposer and a seconder before it may be put to a vote.
- Any member may move for a vote on an amendment to a motion.
- Any amendment shall be proposed, seconded and voted upon before the main motion is put to a vote.
- Only members of the Forum present may vote.
- No member organisation shall exercise more than one vote per decision.
- Voting at all meetings shall be by a show of voting cards, except that elections to Management Board positions shall be by secret ballot.
- A simple majority of votes shall carry any decision.
- The Chair of the meeting shall maintain a neutral position and shall hold only a casting vote.
- The Chair of the meeting shall announce the result of the vote.