

# code of conduct policy

<b>Who's this for?</b>	all
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<b>Author</b>	junior hr business partner, hr
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The following general standards are required by all settle employees:

- employees should behave in a respectful, professional and polite manner
- employees should comply with all reasonable management instructions
- employees should cooperate fully with colleagues and management
- employees should uphold and further the settle's positive public image at all times
- satisfactory standards of performance should be maintained at all times

Everyone who comes into contact with settle employees is entitled to expect the highest standard of conduct.

The Board is responsible for all actions carried out by staff throughout settle including the proper management of large sums of public and private funds and the housing and care of large numbers of people.

This Code of Conduct has been adopted to ensure that all employees know what is expected of them and they must follow both the requirements and the spirit of the standards set out within it. It forms part of your contract of employment and breaches of it could lead to disciplinary action.

settle has a range of policies and procedures on the intranet and this Code of Conduct makes reference to several of them. You should ensure that all policies, procedures, and other regulations are followed at all times.

Managers are responsible for ensuring that staff reporting to them are aware of this Code of Conduct.

## dignity at work

At settle we aim to ensure:

- the dignity at work of all our employees
- that we all respect and value differences
- we make full use of the talents of all the workforce
- there are policies and procedures in place to prevent acts of discrimination, exclusion, unfair treatment and other negative or demeaning behaviours
- that we demonstrate our commitment to equal opportunities for all
- that we are all open and constructive in our communications
- that managers and employees are able to handle conflict, proactively addressing issues at an early stage through feedback and performance management, and that we educate and promote the development of positive behaviours
- we are all fair and just in our dealings

## our values

settle is a value-driven organisation. We care about and believe in what we do. Our values are at the heart of what makes settle what it is and they underpin everything that we do.

These values and the corresponding behaviours unite everyone at settle and help us to operate in a consistent way. All staff are expected to demonstrate and promote the values of the organisation in all that they do.

Our values are:

### **Trusting**

We trust each other to do the best we can, every time.

### **Collaborative**

We are all part of the same team and every contribution matters.

### **Pioneering**

We generate ideas and try them out, we love the new and being creative.

### **Entrepreneurial**

We will be commercial; ambitious in making a profit so we can build much needed new homes.

### **Bold**

We are not afraid to do things differently.

### **Proud**

We are passionate about what we do and take pride in a job well done.

## customer care

All employees are expected to treat tenants and other customers with courtesy and respect at all times, in the same way that they would expect to be treated themselves. You should be aware of and work to settle's Customer Care Policy and any service standards which apply to your area of work.

Your general actions, behaviour and demeanour while at work should be such as to present settle as a professional and effective organisation. Staff are expected to act in the best interest of settle at all times. You should avoid doing things which might imply a sloppy or uncaring attitude, and you should dress and conduct yourself appropriately for the duty or function you are engaged in.

From time to time settle will have to deal with difficult customers. In such circumstances you should maintain high standards of professionalism and fairness. Rudeness to our customers is not acceptable in any circumstances.

## confidentiality

settle is committed to the open conduct of its business. However, there will be times when high levels of confidentiality should be maintained.

You must abide by procedures designed to protect the confidentiality of information held about tenants or other customers.

You should not disclose information about tenants to third parties, including neighbours, unless authorised to do so, or with the tenant's consent.

Confidential business information should not be disclosed to external parties unless it is appropriate to do so. This would include matters relating to settle's finances, future development programmes, discussions with potential partners and contract proposals. Some information in these areas is already in the public domain but staff who have any doubts should seek clarification from the Chief Executive or a member of the Executive Management Team, before disclosing any information which might be commercially sensitive.

You should exercise care in disclosing information which comes within the General Data Protection Regulation and seek advice from your manager if necessary.

## equal opportunities

settle is committed to achieving equality of opportunity and fair treatment in every area of its work. You are required to comply with the spirit and letter of settle's Equal Opportunities Policy and related procedures at all times.

## harassment

You must abide by settle's policies and procedures relating to harassment. The harassment of other members of staff, tenants or other customers, for whatever reason is considered to be a serious breach of the Code of Conduct and may be regarded as gross misconduct.

You should not display materials in the workplace which other people might find offensive, or use language which work colleagues or customers might find offensive.

## relationship with the board and sub committees

You are responsible to the Board of settle through the line management structure leading to the Chief Executive. If work brings you into contact with Board Members, mutual respect between you and them is essential to the good running of settle. Close familiarity between individual Board Members and yourself could prejudice this and should be avoided. You must not use informal channels to influence Board Members on matters of Board business.

If you are at a Board or Committee meeting which is discussing an item which poses a conflict of interest for you, you should declare that interest. If the interest is clear and substantial you should take no part in discussion and should offer to leave the meeting.

## health and safety

You have a responsibility to ensure that your conduct does not endanger the health or safety of yourself or other employees, visitors, tenants and customers. You should abide by settle's health and safety policies and procedures at all times and you should bring to the

attention of your line managers any circumstances which might have health and safety implications.

## employment matters

You must not be involved in the appointment where you are related to an applicant, or have a close personal relationship with him or her. Any such relationship should be declared to your line manager.

Similarly, you should not be involved in decisions relating to discipline, promotion or pay adjustments for any employee who is a relative, partner or close personal friend. You should not use your position as an employee to gain any advantage or preferential treatment.

## the organisation's property and assets

You are expected to take reasonable measures to protect settle's property and assets from theft, damage or misuse.

## identification badges

All employees will be issued with a settle identification badge which clearly displays their first name, last name and photograph. This must be worn and be visible at all times when employees are at work.

All employees, visiting tenants in their own homes, must produce an identification badge on their initial contact with the tenant.

Employees are responsible for the care and safekeeping of their ID Badge. Lost or stolen ID Badges must be reported to the Facilities Team immediately.

The ID Badge is the property of settle and must be returned to your line manager on leaving the company.

## computer systems and software

You should not do anything which would risk the integrity of settle's information technology systems. This would include the use of unauthorised or unlicensed software on settle's system. You must not copy software products licensed to settle.

All software or disks incorporated onto settle's system must be virus checked and approved by the Head of IT.

When working from home, employees must always log in via Citrix Receiver for data security purposes.

## tendering and purchasing

settle staff must not take part in the procurement of services from any company or business in which they, or a close relative have a financial interest (other than salaried employment).

In the event that a company or business in which a member of staff or a close relative has a financial interest is being considered as a potential supplier, that member of staff must immediately declare his/her interest to their line manager and take no further part in the procurement process.

If that company or business is subsequently chosen as a supplier, the Governance Officers must be informed and reported to the Board.

## alcohol, illegal drugs and substance abuse at work

Alcohol, drugs or substance abuse impairs judgement and you can put yourself, your work colleagues and members of the public at risk if you undertake your duties whilst under the influence of drink, drugs and dangerous substances. settle prohibits the drinking of alcohol by employees [and contractors] in the workplace or on company business other than reasonable drinking of alcohol in connection with approved social functions.

A breach of these provisions is a disciplinary offence and will be dealt with in accordance with settle's disciplinary procedure. Depending on the seriousness of the offence, it may amount to gross misconduct and could result in the employee's summary dismissal.

## no smoking policy

As a company, settle has an obligation to prevent smoking in the work place. You are not permitted to smoke while at work or on settle premises other than at settle designated smoking points.

Smoking while attending external meetings on behalf of settle, including meetings with tenants in their homes, tenants' association meetings etc is not permitted.

The workplace includes settle owned vehicles and therefore both drivers and passengers must refrain from smoking within settle owned vehicles.

## corruption and fraud

You must be aware that it is a serious criminal and disciplinary offence to corruptly receive any gift, loan, fee, reward or other advantage in return for doing (or not doing) anything or showing favours to any person or organisation. You should only use settle's monies and assets for their intended and lawful purpose.

If you are aware of potentially corrupt or fraudulent activities of other employees you have a duty to report this to your director or the Chief Executive. settle's policy is to report all cases of fraud to the police.

## financial grants and loans

You must keep your personal money entirely separate from settle's, and must not receive any reimbursement, payment or grant from any fund associated with settle except those contained within your conditions of employment.

## relationships with residents

You should be courteous, efficient and impartial with residents at all times and never allow personal relationships with a resident to conflict with your duty as an employee of settle. You must never allow yourself to be compromised by, or take advantage of, your relationship with a resident.

You must not receive or give loans to tenants or other residents, or invite or influence a resident to make a will or trust which you are named as executor, trustee or beneficiary of. Handling residents' money must be done with extreme care, always receipting every transaction.

You should not exploit your position by buying, selling or lending anything to or borrowing anything from a customer or their representative that you come into direct contact with in a work related capacity. If there is any doubt then seek advice from your manager.

## dress code

Whilst at work your dress and general appearance should be clean, tidy and consistent with the professional image which settle seeks to project.

You are expected to attend work dressed in a manner appropriate for your duties. You will be expected to wear the appropriate uniform if your post is a designated one for which a uniform is expected to be worn.

Trainers, shorts, jeans, clothing sporting large slogans and similar casual dress are not considered appropriate attire for the workplace unless issued as part of uniforms or work clothes.

## relationships with the press and media

You must not without permission, pass or distribute to the press or media any information or materials relating to settle. Similarly you must not write letters to the press or write media articles about settle and its activities, or write letters or articles in your capacity as an employee of settle without prior permission.

You must not make comments or statements to the press. If approached by the media you should take details about the enquiry and pass it on to your director.

## bribery, gifts and hospitality

You must not offer, seek or accept bribes or inducements to act improperly or corruptly.

Employees who receive gifts and/or hospitality should not place themselves under an obligation that might influence or be perceived to influence their future decisions or conduct.

You should not accept cash or personal gifts with a significant monetary value under any circumstances. Gifts of nominal value, for example, pens and similar items can be accepted.

You should be cautious when accepting hospitality, ensuring that it is appropriate and not too lavish. You should be careful that the receipt of hospitality could not be construed as a way of exerting improper influence over you or the organisation. As a general rule you should not accept hospitality which your employer would not reciprocate in similar circumstances.

If you have any doubt about hospitality offered to you, either decline or seek advice from your director. When declining hospitality you should be courteous, but draw the attention of the person making the offer to the existence of this code.

If invitations are received on a regular basis from one source, the relevant director should be alerted, and hospitality declined.

You should, where possible, seek advice from the appropriate member of the management group or director prior to giving or receiving hospitality.

## interests and conduct outside work

settle has no desire to place restrictions on, or interfere with an employee's private life. However there may be circumstances when an employee's external interests affect their employment with settle.

You must obtain written consent from your director before taking outside paid employment. Such employment must not interfere in any way with your existing job and should not conflict with the interests of your job or settle.

You should obtain written permission before undertaking voluntary activities if those activities or organisations are in some way related to the activities of settle, (for example, membership of the Committee of a local voluntary agency with whom settle has contact, or of the Committee/Board of another housing organisation). It is the policy of settle that you should not be involved with any organisation which might be in competition with settle.

You should not use your place of work for paid work of any sort and no use should be made of office facilities in connection with such work. This includes receiving incoming telephone calls or correspondence. This prohibition also applies to unpaid or voluntary work unless the express permission of your line manager is obtained.

This code refers to your work related conduct. However, there may be circumstances in which your conduct outside work, while not directly related to your employment, might adversely affect the reputation and perceived integrity of settle. There may be circumstances when conduct outside work, for example, conviction for a criminal offence, may result in disciplinary action being taken against you.

Staff are free to make use of social networking media such as facebook and twitter in their own time and on their own computer equipment.

However, making comments on such media which are derogatory or otherwise inappropriate about settle, its managers, staff or tenants, which bring the organisation into



disrepute or which otherwise conflict with the requirement of this Code of Conduct, is prohibited and may result in disciplinary action being taken.

## political activity

It is important that settle is seen to be politically neutral and must not be linked, directly or indirectly, to any political organisation. You are free to join political groups and work and campaign on their behalf. However, such political activity must be such so as not to compromise settle's neutrality.

You should discuss with your manager any intentions to stand for political office. There may be circumstances in which holding office on a council may conflict with settle's interests.

## declaration of interests

You should declare any conflict of interests as and when they arise during the course of settle's business or other activities. This would include connections or interests relating to the housing of tenants/applicants, letting of contracts, employment of staff, the sale or acquisition of property etc.

You should declare to your manager if you are a member of any organisation not open to the public, which has secrecy about its rules or membership or conduct.

The restrictions extend to Board Members and to the close relatives of employees and Board Members. Benefits include the granting of tenancies, leases and contracts of employment.

If you are in any doubt as to whether an action may contravene this Code of Conduct, for example, when dealing with the potential allocation of a property to an employee's relative, you should seek the advice of your line manager.

## housing and accommodation

Applications for permanent housing from staff, Board Members or their close relatives will be identified by a question on the Common Housing Register registration form at present. These applications will then be referred to a partner agency for processing. There will be no preferential consideration in the provision of any housing for Board Members and staff.

When a Choice Based Lettings bid is received, settle staff will check the data and award the tenancy to the successful bidder as normal. However, at no stage will the processing of the bid or viewing of the property be dealt with by a member of settle staff related to the applicant (see North Hertfordshire Housing Partnership Protocol.)

If the related person is successful in their bid, they will be required to complete a New Tenant Registration form at the time of sign up and this will be sent to the Governance Team. The Governance Team will keep a register of all positive declarations and report these regularly to Board.

Applications for shared ownership properties, rent to Homebuy, intermediate market rent or outright sale are handled by the Development Team. Any related to staff or Board Members will be identified at the time of application and arrangements put in place to ensure that staff members concerned are not involved in the valuation of applications, showing applicants round properties or agreeing prices. In a process similar to that for social housing lettings, a Shared Ownership Declaration Form will then be completed at the time of sign up and sent to the Governance Team. The Governance Team will keep a register of all positive declarations and report these regularly to Board.

All allocations or sales of non social housing property to relatives of staff or Board Members will be reported to the Governance Officers for entry into the Homes Allocations and Sales Register.

## whistleblowing

You have a duty to report to your line manager or others as appropriate any breaches of the Code of Conduct, any actions which might question the integrity of settle or any potential fraud or misuse of settle's assets. All allegations made under this policy will be treated in confidence, and no action will be taken against you for making allegations of dishonesty or fraud if they subsequently transpire to be unfounded, provided they were made in good faith.

If you have any suspicions about dishonest or unethical behaviour, you should first bring them to the attention of your line manager. If you feel that this is inappropriate you should discuss the matter with your director or the Chief Executive.

If you think that something should be brought to the attention of Board Members, you are encouraged to contact the Chairman of settle's Board.

settle's policy on whistleblowing provides more details on how you can raise your concerns and, if necessary, how you can bring serious matters of public interest to the attention of people outside settle.

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