

# Quadrant Brownswood Tenant Co-operative

## Reasonable Behaviour and Respectful Engagement Policy

For the purposes of this policy:

| Word                             | Definition  |
|----------------------------------|---|
| <b>The Co-operative</b>          | means Quadrant Brownswood Tenant Co-operative.  |
| <b>Member</b>                    | means a tenant or member of the Co-operative, including any person engaging with the Co-operative in connection with Co-operative business.   |
| <b>Management Committee (MC)</b> | means the elected volunteer committee responsible for the governance and management of the Co-operative.  |
| <b>Individuals</b>               | includes Management Committee members, volunteers, agents, contractors and other members acting in connection with the Co-operative.  |
| <b>Engagement</b>                | means any communication or interaction connected with the Co-operative, whether written, verbal or in person.   |
| <b>Reasonable behaviour</b>      | means engagement that is respectful, proportionate, conducted in good faith, and focused on issues or decisions rather than individuals.  |
| <b>Unreasonable behaviour</b>    | means behaviour which, by its nature, frequency, tone or cumulative effect, undermines respectful engagement, disrupts governance, places undue pressure on volunteers or decision-makers, or causes distress, intimidation or disruption, regardless of stated intent. |
| <b>Cumulative effect</b>         | means the combined impact of repeated or persistent behaviour over time, even where individual incidents might appear minor in isolation.   |
| <b>Agreed channels</b>           | means the Co-operative's established processes for engagement, including meetings, consultations, correspondence with the Managing Agent, or use of the Complaints Policy.  |

### 1. Purpose

This policy supports a respectful, constructive and safe environment for all members of the Co-operative, including those who volunteer their time as members of the Management Committee (MC).

This policy is intended to provide clarity and consistency, and does not prevent members from raising concerns or engaging in appropriate dialogue through agreed processes.

QBTC recognises that members may strongly disagree with decisions, express frustration or pursue complaints robustly. This policy is not intended to prevent challenge, scrutiny or dissent, but to address behaviour that becomes abusive, intimidating, persistent or disruptive.

The Co-operative encourages scrutiny of decisions and open discussion, while recognising its duty to protect members, volunteers and service providers from harassment, intimidation or unreasonable pressure.

The standards set out in this policy apply equally across all forms of communication. Behaviour that may be reasonable in one context may be unreasonable in another, depending on frequency, tone, persistence, setting and impact. The Co-operative will consider the overall pattern of behaviour rather than isolated incidents when assessing whether engagement is reasonable.

Action taken to manage behaviour does not prevent the Co-operative from continuing to consider the underlying issue or complaint through the appropriate process.

## **2. Relationship to Other Policies**

This policy operates alongside the Complaints Policy and the Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Policy. The ASB Policy primarily addresses behaviour affecting neighbours or the wider community. This policy focuses on behaviour directed towards governance processes, volunteers, and those acting on behalf of the Co-operative. Where appropriate, matters may be considered under more than one policy.

## **3. Forms of Communication Covered by This Policy**

This policy applies to all forms of communication and engagement connected with the Co-operative, whether formal or informal, and whether written, verbal or in person.

For clarity, this includes (but is not limited to):

- written communications, such as emails, letters, messaging platforms, online portals and social media where used to engage with Co-operative business
- verbal communications, including telephone calls, video calls and voicemail messages
- in-person communications, including conversations at meetings, in communal areas, or in the vicinity of Co-operative properties
- communications made at General Meetings, Management Committee meetings, sub-group meetings, consultations and other Co-operative forums
- informal or ad-hoc approaches to Management Committee members, volunteers, agents or contractors where the subject matter relates to Co-operative business

## **4. Behaviour and Standards of Engagement**

Members are expected to engage respectfully and in good faith, raise concerns

constructively through agreed channels, respect the voluntary nature of MC roles, and focus scrutiny on decisions rather than individuals.

The Co-operative recognises that members may feel strongly about issues that affect their homes and community. However, behaviour may be considered unreasonable where it goes beyond robust challenge and has the effect of undermining respectful engagement, disrupting governance, or placing undue pressure on volunteers or decision-makers.

In assessing whether behaviour is reasonable, the Co-operative will consider the impact of the behaviour rather than the individual's stated intent. Behaviour may be considered unreasonable where it causes distress, disruption or intimidation, or undermines effective governance or participation, regardless of whether harm was intended.

The Co-operative will also consider the cumulative effect of behaviour over time, including patterns of repeated or persistent conduct, rather than viewing incidents in isolation.

Examples of unreasonable behaviour may include (but are not limited to):

- hostile, threatening or demeaning language
- accusations of incompetence, dishonesty or bad faith
- use of legal or regulatory threats where no such process is underway
- persistent repetition of issues already addressed
- attempts to dominate meetings or intimidate volunteers
- approaching or challenging MC members in person outside formal Co-operative settings

#### *4.1 Intrusive or Probing Behaviour*

The Co-operative recognises that members may legitimately question decisions, processes and governance arrangements. However, behaviour that moves beyond scrutiny of decisions and into scrutiny of individuals is not appropriate.

- attempting to obtain information about a Management Committee member's personal tenancy matters, including (by way of example) complaints, repair issues, transfers, arrears, disputes or other housing-related matters
  - seeking to use an individual's personal tenancy circumstances to question their legitimacy, objectivity or right to participate in Management Committee decision-making
  - repeated questioning into individuals' motives, relationships, employment, finances or personal circumstances
  - seeking to infer wrongdoing, conflicts of interest or hidden agendas without evidence
  - making or circulating insinuations about individuals' integrity or intentions
  - continuing to pursue personal lines of enquiry after explanations have been provided
- Personal tenancy matters of Management Committee members are treated in the same confidential manner as those of all members and are not subject to disclosure as part of Co-operative governance or engagement.

#### ***4.2 Written Communications***

Written engagement should be clear, proportionate and focused on the issue being raised. Written behaviour may be considered unreasonable where it includes, for example:

- excessive volume or frequency of correspondence on the same issue
- communications that are unduly lengthy, repetitive or quasi-legal in tone
- reframing matters repeatedly in order to prolong engagement after a response has been provided
- copying multiple parties unnecessarily or in a manner that escalates pressure
- language that implies misconduct, bad faith or ulterior motives without evidence

The Co-operative may place reasonable limits on written engagement where correspondence becomes disproportionate or impedes effective governance, in line with Housing Ombudsman guidance.

#### ***4.3 In-Person Conduct***

The Co-operative recognises that informal, face-to-face engagement can be a valuable part of co-operative life. However, in-person interactions must remain respectful, proportionate and mindful of context.

In-person engagement should:

- take place, wherever possible, through agreed Co-operative forums or processes
- respect personal boundaries and the right of individuals not to engage outside formal settings
- avoid placing pressure on volunteers or decision-makers

In-person behaviour may be considered unreasonable where it includes, for example:

- approaching or challenging Management Committee members or volunteers outside formal Co-operative settings in a persistent, confrontational or pressurising manner
- continuing engagement after an individual has indicated they are unwilling or unable to engage
- raising the same issues repeatedly in informal settings after they have been addressed through agreed processes
- behaviour that has the effect of intimidating, undermining or discouraging participation in Co-operative roles

#### ***4.4 Complaints and Behaviour***

Raising a complaint does not justify unreasonable, intrusive or intimidating behaviour. Complaints will be handled in accordance with the Complaints Policy, while behaviour may be addressed separately under this policy where appropriate.

Members are entitled to raise concerns and pursue complaints. However, engagement relating to a complaint must remain proportionate, use agreed channels, and recognise the voluntary nature of Management Committee roles.

Where behaviour associated with a complaint becomes unreasonable — including through excessive or repetitive correspondence, personal accusations, or conduct that places undue

pressure on individuals — the Co-operative may address the behaviour separately, without affecting consideration of the complaint itself.

In doing so, the Co-operative will take account of the overall impact and pattern of behaviour, rather than stated intent or isolated incidents.

#### *4.5 Meeting Conduct*

Meetings are a forum for collective decision-making, not personal confrontation. The Chair has authority to manage discussion, apply time limits, and intervene where conduct breaches this framework.

Meetings are a forum for collective discussion and decision-making, not personal confrontation. All participants are expected to engage respectfully, listen to others, and contribute constructively in line with co-operative principles.

The Chair is responsible for the orderly conduct of meetings and has authority to manage discussion to ensure meetings are safe, inclusive and effective. This includes applying time limits, directing discussion back to the agenda, and intervening where conduct breaches this framework.

In exercising this role, the Chair may:

- remind participants of expected standards of behaviour
- limit repeated or circular contributions on the same issue
- require comments to be directed through the Chair
- pause or adjourn discussion to de-escalate tension
- ask a participant to refrain from personal remarks or accusations
- suspend or close a meeting where conduct cannot be brought back within acceptable bounds

Behaviour at meetings may be considered unreasonable where it includes, for example (but not limited to):

- personal attacks, accusations or commentary directed at individuals rather than issues
- repeated interruption or refusal to allow others to speak
- attempts to dominate proceedings or undermine the authority of the Chair
- raising matters outside the scope of the agenda in a way that disrupts proceedings
- using confrontational, intimidating or aggressive language or tone
- making side comments, asides or commentary (verbal or non-verbal) that have the effect of undermining, belittling or disrupting the discussion, the Chair's role, or other participants
- persisting with points after a decision has been made or the Chair has ruled the matter closed

This includes behaviour that, taken cumulatively, detracts from a respectful and inclusive meeting environment, even if individual remarks might appear minor in isolation.

The Chair's role is not to suppress debate, but to ensure discussion remains focused, respectful and proportionate, and that all participants are able to contribute fairly. Where meeting conduct raises concerns under this policy, the Co-operative may address the behaviour outside the meeting through the steps set out in Section 5.

## 5. Behaviour Thresholds and Responses

The Co-operative will take a proportionate and staged approach to addressing unreasonable behaviour, with the aim of restoring constructive engagement wherever possible. Not all steps will be required or appropriate in every case. Depending on the seriousness or impact of behaviour, the Co-operative may move directly to a formal response.

Responses may include:

### *Informal reminder*

- Informal reminder – where tone or conduct begins to cause concern, a member may be reminded of the expected standards of behaviour under this policy and asked to adjust their approach.

An informal reminder is intended to be supportive and preventative, and to address concerns at an early stage before behaviour escalates.

### *Formal written warning*

- Formal written warning – where behaviour is serious, persistent or has a significant impact, including (but not limited to) intimidation, confrontation, personal accusations, intrusive conduct, or repeated unreasonable engagement. A formal warning may follow an informal reminder or mediation, but may also be issued without a prior informal step where this is considered appropriate.

A formal written warning may be issued by the Chair, Deputy Chair or Secretary on behalf of the Management Committee. The warning will set out the concerns identified, the behaviour expected going forward, and a review period (normally three to six months), after which the position will be reassessed.

Where behaviour improves during the review period, no further action will normally be taken.

### *Mediation*

- Where behaviour remains persistent or significant following a formal written warning, the

Co-operative may, at its discretion, offer or facilitate mediation as a means of supporting constructive engagement and restoring working relationships.

- Mediation will normally be voluntary and proportionate, and may be considered where it is assessed as likely to be constructive, having regard to the nature of the behaviour, its impact, and the cost implications.
- The use of mediation does not prevent the Co-operative from taking further action under this policy where behaviour continues or escalates.

#### ***Restrictions or Acceptable Behaviour Agreement (ABA)***

- Restrictions or Acceptable Behaviour Agreement (ABA) – where behaviour continues despite a formal written warning, or where the cumulative impact of behaviour warrants additional safeguards.

This may include reasonable limits on the frequency, format or channel of engagement, or an agreed framework setting out how engagement will take place going forward. Any restrictions will be proportionate, clearly explained, time-limited where appropriate, and aimed at supporting constructive engagement rather than preventing participation.

#### ***Further action***

- Further action – where behaviour persistently undermines effective governance, the wellbeing of members or volunteers, or the safety of the community.

This may include action under the Anti-Social Behaviour Policy, Unreasonable Behaviour Policy, or relevant membership or tenancy processes, in line with the Co-operative's rules and legal obligations.

Any response under this section will be based on the overall impact and pattern of behaviour, will be proportionate to the circumstances, and will not prevent a complaint from continuing to be considered under the Complaints Policy.

## **6. Alignment with Anti-Social Behaviour Policy**

Where behaviour goes beyond unreasonable engagement and causes, or is capable of causing, distress, intimidation, fear or harm, or affects the peace, safety or security of others, the Co-operative may address the matter under its Anti-Social Behaviour Policy in addition to this framework.

The application of the ASB Policy will depend on the nature, seriousness and impact of the behaviour, and does not prevent the Co-operative from continuing to address behaviour affecting how the Co-operative is run or how members engage with volunteers, agents, contractors and others acting on its behalf under this policy.

## **7. Assessment and Decision Making**

In considering whether behaviour falls within the scope of this policy, and in determining an appropriate response, the Co-operative will take account of relevant information available at the time. This may include, where appropriate:

- the nature, frequency and cumulative impact of the behaviour
- the context in which the behaviour occurred
- written records, correspondence or contemporaneous notes
- information provided by those directly affected, including members, volunteers, agents, contractors or service providers acting on behalf of the Co-operative
- any steps already taken to clarify or resolve the matter informally

The Co-operative is not required to conduct a formal investigation in every case and will apply a proportionate approach, taking into account the seriousness of the behaviour and its impact.

In serious cases, or where decisions under this policy may have a significant impact on a member, the Co-operative may consider obtaining independent advice to help ensure fairness and proportionality. Any such advice will be used to inform, but not replace, decision-making by the elected Management Committee.

Responsibility for assessing behaviour and determining any response under this policy rests with the Co-operative, through its elected Management Committee, in line with its rules and governance arrangements.

## **8. Member Rights and Safeguards**

The Co-operative is committed to applying this policy fairly, proportionately and consistently. Nothing in this policy is intended to prevent members from raising concerns, challenging decisions, or pursuing complaints through the Co-operative's Complaints Policy.

Where a member considers that this policy has been applied unfairly, unreasonably or inconsistently in their case, they have the right to raise a complaint under the Complaints Policy. Any such complaint will be considered on its merits, focusing on the fairness, proportionality and consistency of how the Co-operative applied this policy, regardless of whether the member agrees with the characterisation of the behaviour

Members may refer a complaint about how the Co-operative has managed or responded to behaviour under this policy to the Housing Ombudsman in the usual way, in relation to the Co-operative's handling of the matter.

This policy will be reviewed periodically to ensure it remains fair, effective and consistent with good practice and regulatory guidance.