

AGHALEE VILLAGE HALL

CODE OF CONDUCT POLICY

1. INTRODUCTION

This Code is intended as a guide, to indicate the standards of conduct and accountability which are expected of Aghalee Village Hall staff, volunteers and Management Committee and other individuals involved with Aghalee Village Hall.

This Code is designed to assist Aghalee Village Hall as a whole to function efficiently and to understand what conduct is expected of individuals when they are operating as a member of Aghalee Village Hall and its sub-groups, forums, theme groups and any other meetings, which take place under the auspices of Aghalee Village Hall.

The key aims of this Code are:

- To be clear about how we are expected to conduct ourselves.
- To enhance opportunities for the fullest participation.
- To recognise and value the strengths, experience and expertise that all those involved with Aghalee Village Hall.

GOVERNANCE

This Code should compliment any staff contract of employment, grievance and disciplinary procedures.

THE PRINCIPLES

Selflessness

Volunteers and committee members should take decisions solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family or their friends.

Integrity

Volunteers and committee members should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might influence them in the performance of their duties.

Leadership

Volunteers and committee members carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, should show leadership in all their actions.

Objectivity

In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, of volunteers and committee members should make choices on merit.

Accountability

Volunteers and committee members are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.

Openness

Volunteers and committee members should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.

Honesty

Volunteers and committee members have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the interest of the Aghalee Village Hall.

2. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

Individuals must not discriminate against people they come into contact with during their work with, or on behalf of, Aghalee Village Hall on the basis of their ethnic origin, gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability, age, colour, family circumstances, working arrangements, social class, national or social origins, political or other opinions.

All individuals will be expected to comply with Equal Opportunities legislation and the agreed relevant equality and diversity policies of Aghalee Village Hall.

We are all different and it is expected that this diversity will be respected and welcomed.

This will be demonstrated by:

- Not making assumptions about a person or a group of people.
- Not making judgements about a person or a group of people.
- Not discriminating against any person or group of people on the basis of their ethnic origin, gender, religion, sexuality, disability, age, colour, family circumstances, working arrangements, social class, national or social origins, political or other opinions.

3. BEHAVIOUR DURING FORMAL MEETINGS

Much of the work of Aghalee Village Hall will be undertaken at meetings, small and large. The effectiveness of these meetings is critical because they will be:

- The principal decision making tool of Aghalee Village Hall.
- The principal method of wider community and partner involvement.

The behaviour of participants at a meeting is important to the success of the meeting. Some people may lack the confidence to express themselves fully in a meeting with other people, whereas some find it all too easy to dominate.

Effective meetings can be achieved if all individuals are committed to some simple ground rules for behaviour before and during meetings.

- Individuals have a responsibility to be properly prepared for meetings by reading the paperwork beforehand and by committing themselves to attending meetings as required.
- Individual and personal disputes should not be allowed to affect conduct within the meeting but should be resolved elsewhere.
- All contributions should be addressed to the meeting via the Chairman. Individuals wishing to speak should seek the attention of the Chairman and wait their turn to speak only when directed by the Chairman.
- Individuals should not have meetings within meetings by discussing issues with other individuals or groups of individuals when another person has been directed by the Chairman to speak. All comments and queries should be directed to the whole meeting via the Chairman.

- Individuals should respect the contributions of others by not interrupting when someone is speaking even when you may not agree with what they are saying.
- In contributing to the meeting individuals will ensure that comments they make do not amount to a personal attack on another individual and should avoid using heated, emotional and value loaded language and behaviour.
- Individuals should be constantly aware in their remarks of their equal opportunities responsibilities and avoid the use of potentially offensive language and comments.
- Individuals should above all remember that collective decision making means not always getting the decision you want and accepting the responsibility of abiding by majority decisions.

It is very important that decisions taken in meetings are well informed by having appropriate, accurate information and debate on the topics concerned. Aghalee Village Hall Stakeholders must be able to feel that decisions, particularly those affecting the spending of public funds, are fair and have not been influenced by the vested interests of those making these decisions or based on misinformation. For this reason one of the most important areas of appropriate behaviour during meetings, in addition to the above, relates to declarations of interest.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

At meetings the Chairman will ask individuals in attendance to declare whether they have any personal, financial or other material interest in any item on the agenda. (More detailed information about what kinds of areas may constitute a Conflict of Interest can be found in the Aghalee Village Hall Conflicts of Interest Policy.) The Chairman and the remaining voting members of the meeting will then decide whether individuals declaring an interest must leave the meeting for the relevant item or just not take part in the discussions or decision making.

OUTSIDE OF FORMAL MEETINGS

It is just as important that individuals conduct themselves appropriately outside of official meetings since they may be seen as representing Aghalee Village Hall and its views in a number of other circumstances including non Aghalee Village Hall meetings. Some of the issues to consider are outlined below:

- **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Aghalee Village Hall meetings may occasionally receive information, which is not in the public domain often relating to individuals, organisations or financial matters. It is the responsibility of each individual to ensure that this information remains confidential to the meeting or the organisation unless prior authorisation has been given by the Chairman for this to be discussed elsewhere. Individuals must never use confidential information for their personal advantage or to the advantage or disadvantage of anyone known to them or to disadvantage or discredit the organisation.

- **COLLECTIVE DECISIONS**

Individuals will inevitably have differences of opinion on issues debated at meetings. After full discussion when the meeting has reached a conclusion all individuals must support this decision whether they voted for or against it. Speaking against agreed decisions in public will only serve to undermine Aghalee Village Hall and individuals have a responsibility to stand by the collective decisions of Aghalee Village Hall and to present a united front.

- **COMMUNICATIONS WITH OTHER AGENCIES**

There will be occasions when individuals will be asked to, or wish to, communicate with external agencies e.g. Government Office, the local council, press etc. In order to ensure they are fully apprised of the latest information and that communications are consistent throughout the organisation this should only be done following contact with the Chairman of Aghalee Village Hall.

- **HOSPITALITY AND GIFTS**

Individuals should be careful not to accept any gift or hospitality which might interfere with or be perceived as interfering with Aghalee Village Hall business or services.

This does not include gifts of minor value such as pens or calendars, or working lunches or functions attended in an official capacity. However, any other gifts or hospitality offered should be reported to the Chairman who will then determine the action to be taken.

In the case of gifts these may then be returned or donated for charity use. Where a gift is not returned, the donor will be advised of the use to which it has been put.

4. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

It is important to have a clear understanding of the various roles and responsibilities of the different individuals and groupings, which operate within Aghalee Village Hall.

STAFF/VOLUNTEERS

The day-to-day management of the staff and volunteers rests with the Management Committee and any Co-ordinators employed by Aghalee Village Hall. It is not the role of Holding Trustees or others to act as Chairman of the staff and volunteer team or to give direct instructions to members of staff or volunteers. Reasonable day-to-day contact between staff, volunteers and Holding Trustees during working hours is encouraged as it is recognised that good quality trusting relationships between staff, volunteers and Holding Trustees is essential to the effective delivery of Aghalee Village Hall's work. It is therefore expected that:

- Holding Trustees, Management Committee, staff and volunteers would treat each other with courtesy and respect at all times in both formal and informal situations.
- Staff and volunteers will endeavour to give appropriate advice to all Management Committee/Holding Trustees as requested.
- Staff, volunteers, Holding Trustees and Management Committee will not seek to use their positions to exercise inappropriate influence e.g. to secure improper advantage for themselves or any other person.
- Staff, volunteers, Holding Trustees and Management Committee will pay due respect to the private lives of all individuals involved in activities relating to AVH.

HOLDING TRUSTEES

The Holding Trustees function is to hold the property in Trust, and for no other purpose.

CHAIRMAN

This is a role within the Aghalee Village Hall structure and is concerned largely with:

- Promoting the good conduct of any individuals representing Aghalee Village Hall.
- Directing and supporting the members as necessary.
- Keeping order and making sure that the agreed rules of conduct are followed.
- Minimising any sense of confusion and frustration by ensuring that the agenda is properly covered, that jargon is not used or is explained and that individuals understand the debate and what decisions are required and why.
- Making sure that everyone who wants to contribute is encouraged to do so.
- Summarising the decisions taken and the action points which arise from this.

It is the role of the Chairman to implement the Management Committee's legitimate decisions and to manage on a day-to-day basis the affairs of the team, within the budgets, legal and statutory framework and other relevant Government criteria set for Aghalee Village Hall's work.

CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS

Any concerns or complaints regarding the work of staff or volunteers should be directed through the Chairman. Any concerns or complaints regarding work related issues concerning the Chairman should be directed through the Vice Chairman. Where appropriate, the disciplinary procedure will be invoked.

5. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

It is a requirement within the funding agreement for the distribution of public funds that there is a formal written procedure for the avoidance of conflicts of interest. **(See separate Conflicts of Interests Policy).**

6. BREACHES OF THE CODE

It is always preferable for breaches of the code to be dealt with in a timely manner. A sub-committee will be established by the Management Committee if required. The role of this sub-committee will be to investigate potential breaches of the Code of Conduct and would be authorised when appropriate to give:

- A written warning concerning future conduct.
- A fixed term suspension from involvement in specific/all meetings of Aghalee Village Hall.

If it is decided that permanent suspension from meetings of Aghalee Village Hall is warranted, or in the case of a member removal from office, then a report will be taken to the next full meeting of the Management Committee for decision.

Where the breach of code takes place outside a meeting then complaints must, in the first instance, be made in writing to the Chairman. The Chairman will then, in consultation with the Officers decide whether a sub-committee is set up to investigate as outlined above. A copy of the complaint will be sent to the individual and to the other sub-committee members 7 days before any review meeting.

The sub-committee will allow the individual to attend the meeting and to speak in reply to the complaint.

If there is any dispute about the facts the sub-committee may call for evidence and reconvene at a later date but within a further 14 days.

If it is agreed that the code has been breached then appropriate sanctions will be taken.

Where the breach of code occurs during a Committee meeting:

- Participants should raise breaches of the code as a point of order through the Chairman.
- If the Chairman agrees that a breach has taken place, a first oral warning will be issued to the person concerned. This will be noted in the minutes.
- If an individual breaches the code for a second time they may be asked to leave the meeting. This will be noted in the minutes, explaining briefly the reasons for exclusion from the meeting.
- Following exclusion from a meeting the Chairman will arrange a meeting of a sub-committee to discuss the breach. This sub-committee will meet within 14 working days of the original meeting.
- The meeting will decide whether it is appropriate for the individual to attend any Committee meetings or functions during this review period depending on the nature of the complaint.