



# Anti-Fraud Policy

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## **1. Introduction and Scope**

1.1 NG Homes Group ('the Group') is made up of North Glasgow Housing Association (trading as NG Homes), and its subsidiaries, ng2 Limited (ng2), NG Property (Scotland) Limited (NGPS), Design Services Glasgow Limited (DSGL). The Group is committed to achieving the highest standards of openness, probity and accountability. It recognises the particular importance of this as it works to maintain its reputation and that of the housing association sector as a whole.

1.2 In pursuit of its aim to carry on a viable and sustainable business it takes appropriate actions to identify and guard against adverse financial and business risks. In this context, the Group is committed to reducing its risk of fraud to the lowest possible level.

1.3 This policy outlines the broad principles the Group will adopt in order to protect the organisation and the public funds it receives, its assets and its services against fraud. It is of relevance to Board and Committee Members, staff, tenants and residents, members of the public, contractors, consultants and service providers. In particular it aims to emphasise the importance the Group places on deterring fraud, and the specific responsibilities on all members of staff to identify and report any suspicion of fraudulent activity.

## **2. Context and Definition**

2.1 For the purpose of this policy fraud may be defined as "wrongful or criminal deception intended to result in financial or personal gain." The Group identifies fraud as a distinct business problem and risk. It operates a separate Anti-Bribery Policy outlining its approach to dealing with this discrete, but often related issue.

## **3. Strategy and Principles**

3.1 The Group recognises the potential for fraudulent activity taking place within or targeting any area of its business. At a strategic level, its response embraces identified good practice. The key elements of this involve:

- developing and maintaining an anti-fraud culture;
- creating a strong deterrent effect;
- preventing fraud by designing weaknesses out of processes and systems;
- detecting fraud, where it is not prevented;
- investigating suspicions of fraud in an expert, fair and objective manner;
- seeking to apply a range of sanctions where fraud is believed to be present;

- seeking redress and recovery of any losses that are incurred.

3.2 Central to this anti-fraud 'strategy' are a range of operational policies, systems and procedures that are designed to deter, and enable detection and reporting of fraud. In particular, this includes:

- Financial Regulations, Treasury Management, and Delegated Authority policies and the controls detailed therein;
- Standing Orders and other governance related policies, covering matters including Whistleblowing, Payments and Benefits and Conflict of Interest; and the associated management systems;
- service based policies, guidance and operating procedures covering tenancy related matters; repairs, maintenance and development activities; estates services; care and support services; and staff recruitment.

3.4 Established Internal Audit arrangements further support the detection of fraud, through testing the appropriateness, adequacy, effectiveness and robustness of relevant policies and systems. Similarly, through the annual examination of the financial statements, the External Auditor identifies any audit and accounting issues and assesses the effectiveness of internal control.

#### **4. Roles and Responsibilities**

4.1 The NG Homes board and the subsidiary boards is responsible for ensuring the Group:

- operates an anti-fraud culture;
- maintains effective risk management and internal control systems;
- has relevant policies and systems in place to deter, detect and report suspected fraudulent activity;
- maintains appropriate procedures that ensure reported incidents of suspected fraud are promptly and vigorously investigated; and effective sanctions and redress are applied in instances where fraud is detected.

4.2 Ng Homes Board is also responsible for ensuring it conducts its own affairs in accordance with the Scottish Housing Regulator's regulatory standards of governance and financial management; and recognised principles of good governance. In adhering to the published Code of Conduct individual Board Members are responsible for reporting any suspicions of fraud or

attempted fraud they encounter; and otherwise acting with integrity and propriety, within the law, and in accordance with relevant policies and procedures.

### **ng2, NGPS and DSGL boards**

4.3 ng2, NGPS and DSGL boards will ensure the responsibilities set out in 4.1 and 4.2 are fulfilled in their entirety in each of the respective organisations.

### **Audit Committee**

4.4 As detailed within its terms of reference, the Audit Committee's role includes:

- monitoring and reviewing the effectiveness of internal, including financial, controls and risk management systems;
- reviewing internal audit reports;
- reviewing findings of external audit;
- monitoring and reviewing the effectiveness of internal audit activities; and also, in reviewing arrangements for whistleblowing and detection of fraud.

### **Chief Executive Officer**

4.5 The Chief Executive Officer has the authority to invoke the provisions of the Fraud Response Plan (see section 6.) As part of this the Chief Executive Office is responsible for:

- convening an initial meeting of the Fraud Response Team;
- appointing an Investigating Officer, where the Fraud Response Team decides that a fraud investigation is the appropriate course of action;
- informing the Chair of the Audit Committee that an incident of suspected fraud or attempted fraud has been reported and is to be investigated.

The Chief Executive Officer also has a particular role in relation to whistleblowing. This is defined within the Whistleblowing Policy.

### **Executive Team (ET)**

4.6 ET has collective responsibility for:

- developing and maintaining effective policies, procedures, and control systems for deterring, detecting and reporting fraud; and ensuring these are both working effectively, and periodically reviewed in accordance with good practice;

- ensuring the Board has up to date and accurate information on regulatory requirements in relation to governance and financial management, governance good practice and expected standards of conduct;
- fostering a culture of honesty and openness amongst all staff, and ensuring staff are aware of expectations relating to their professional conduct and the requirements of this policy;
- ensuring all staff have the required level of knowledge and understanding of the range of policies, procedures and systems that are relevant to the Group's anti-fraud strategy;
- implementing any relevant operational anti-fraud measures, including segregation of duties;
- ensuring staff receive appropriate training that enables them to identify suspected fraud;
- ensuring the notification requirements of regulators are met.

4.7 Individual members of ET, primarily including the Chief Executive Officer, DCEO, Director of Corporate Services and Director of Housing Services, have roles in relation to the Fraud Response Team as detailed in the Fraud Response Plan.

4.8 The CEO also has a particular role in relation to whistleblowing. This is defined within the Whistleblowing Policy.

### **Staff Members**

4.9 In adhering to the published Code of Conduct all staff members are responsible for:

- being vigilant to possible indicators of fraud or attempted fraud, within their respective areas of work;
- reporting any suspicions of fraud or attempted fraud they encounter; and otherwise,
- acting with integrity and propriety, within the law, and in accordance with relevant policies, systems and procedures.

4.10 Similarly, staff members should report to their line manager any areas of weakness they identify in procedures or systems; or suggested ways of reducing the possibility of fraud.

## **5. Reporting**

5.1 The Whistleblowing Policy enables staff, Board or Committee members, or any other person to raise concerns relating to conduct which they believe to be improper, illegal or immoral. Notwithstanding this, the Chief Executive Officer should be informed of all suspected or detected fraud at the earliest opportunity. Where suspicions or allegations of fraud relate to the Chief

Executive Officer, the separate policy on Handling Serious Complaints against the Chief Executive Officer should be referred to for guidance on the appropriate process.

5.2 The Group acknowledges the requirement to report fraud, the investigation of fraud and instances of whistleblowing to the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) as a Notifiable Event. It shall report to SHR without delay, in accordance with the SHR guidance note and the policy on Notifiable Events.

5.3 The Group notes that where SHR is notified and makes regulatory enquiries, SHR will report to the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR), in accordance with legal provisions (The Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005) and the associated Memorandum of Understanding between OSCR and SHR. In addition to this, auditors have a statutory duty to report matters of "material significance" to OSCR. This includes "matters suggesting dishonesty or fraud involving a significant loss of, or a major risk to, charitable funds or assets."

5.4 Dependent on the nature of the fraud or suspected fraud, it may be appropriate or necessary to report to other bodies.

## **Monitoring**

5.5 As part of its governance systems, the Group maintains various registers to record certain types of activity. Its Fraud, Whistleblowing and Notifiable Events Registers are of relevance to this policy and will be maintained accordingly.

5.6 The Chair of Ng Homes Board and Chief Executive Officer will sign the Housing Association Fraud Register on an annual basis to verify its completeness. In regards to the subsidiaries the Chair of the respective boards will sign their Fraud register on annual basis; thereafter, the status of all Fraud Registers will be reported to the NG Homes Audit Committee.

## **6. Fraud Response Plan**

6.1 The Group is committed to the rigorous investigation of any suspected fraud. It has in place a Fraud Response Plan, which the Chief Executive Officer can invoke on receipt of an allegation or the identification of suspected fraud. This Plan provides a consistent framework for investigating and reporting fraud, and is contained within Appendix 1 to this policy.

6.2 Fraudulent activity constitutes gross misconduct and where fraud is detected, the disciplinary procedures operated by the Group will be instigated. Where there is direct evidence of fraud, the police shall be informed. The Group will co-operate fully with the police and pursue prosecutions where advised that this is feasible. The Group acknowledges that the decision to

initiate criminal prosecution rests with the police in conjunction with the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service.

6.3 Similarly, where it is determined that an allegation of fraud has been made maliciously, the Group may pursue disciplinary and or legal action against the perpetrator(s).

6.3 It should be noted that suspects have certain legal rights and no action (such as interviewing staff) should be taken without prior consultation with the Chief Executive Officer. Failure to follow appropriate procedures can invalidate disciplinary action and compromise the success of any investigation and or prosecution.

## **7. Other Related Policies**

- Declaration of Interests
- Financial Regulations and delegated authority
- Gifts, Hospitality and Donations
- Treasury Management
- Bribery
- Whistleblowing
- Standing Orders
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Board Members Code of Conduct
- Notifiable Events
- Personal Relationships at Work
- Freedom of Information and Environmental Policy and Procedures

## **8. General Data Protection Regulation**

The organisation will treat your personal data in line with our obligations under the General Data Protection Regulation and our own Data Protection Policy. Information regarding how your data will be used and the basis for processing your data is provided in our Employee Fair Processing Notice.

## **9. Policy Review**

This Policy will be reviewed every two years or earlier in line with regulatory or legislative guidance/changes or good practice guidelines.

## **10. Equality Impact Assessment**

This Policy is equally applicable to all and has no impact on protected characteristic groups.

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **Fraud Response Plan**

#### **1. Introduction**

1.1 The purpose of this Plan is to outline the steps to be followed in the event of a suspected fraud. It provides a consistent framework for investigating and reporting fraud by defining authority levels, responsibilities for action and lines of reporting. This Plan should be read in conjunction with the Anti-Fraud Policy and Whistleblowing Policy.

#### **2. Initiating Action**

2.1 Suspicion of fraud may be captured through a number of means. This includes internal audit work, external audit, or incidences of whistleblowing. In all cases the Chief Executive Officer should be alerted to the matter without delay. In the Chief Executive's Officers absence, another member of the Executive Team should be informed, and they will inform the Chair of the Audit Committee.

2.2 The Chief Executive Officer (or in their absence, another member of the Executive Team) shall, as soon as possible and normally within 24 hours, convene a meeting of the Fraud Response Team. This Team shall normally comprise the Chief Executive Officer, DCEO, Director of Corporate Services and Director of Housing Services, The Team has the task of deciding on initial action to be taken. This action will normally involve:

- engaging the internal auditor to act as Investigating Officer and undertake an investigation;
- informing external auditors of the matter, and agreeing arrangements for keeping the external auditors informed about the work of the Team;
- considering how to secure records/assets and prevent further loss;
- considering the membership of the Fraud Response Team, and the need to involve other members of the Executive Team. This will typically be determined by the area of business where the alleged or suspected fraud has taken place;
- seeking expert legal advice from the Group's solicitors, as required;
- confirming responsibilities and arrangements for submitting relevant regulatory notifications;
- confirming requirements and arrangements for notifying funders.



2.3 The Chief Executive Officer should advise the Chair of the Audit Committee as soon as an investigation under this procedure has been initiated.

### **3. Preliminary Investigations**

3.1 The Investigating Officer must conduct an initial information gathering exercise to enable the circumstances to be investigated rigorously, confidentially and without undue delay. They should thereafter report their initial findings to the Fraud Response Team, any interim conclusions and provide an action plan to guide the full investigation if this is the recommended course of action.

3.2 The Fraud Response Team will consider the Investigating Officer's report, but the information will not be disclosed or discussed with anyone else who does not have a legitimate need to know. In cases where an individual is suspected of fraud, which a subsequent investigation does not substantiate, every effort must be made to minimise potential damage to the individual's reputation.

### **4. Involving the Police**

4.1 Where preliminary investigations establish that there are reasonable grounds to suspect that fraud has taken place, it is the Group's policy to pass details directly to the police, normally without undue delay and prior to any further internal investigation. The Chief Executive Officer will notify the Chair of the Audit Committee of this action.

4.2 The police will lead any further investigations from this stage. All employees are required to co-operate fully with police enquiries in this regard. The Chief Executive officer will establish and maintain appropriate lines of communication with the police.

4.3 The provisions of this Plan apply in full in cases where external frauds, perpetrated by third parties, are identified or suspected and there is any suspicion of collusion of staff members.

4.4 In all other cases of suspected external fraud the Chief Executive Officer, in consultation with the Fraud Response Team and Chair of the Audit Committee shall normally report the matter to the police without delay.

4.5 A major objective in any fraud investigation will be the punishment of any perpetrator, to act as a deterrent to other potential perpetrators. NG Homes and its subsidiaries will follow the respective Disciplinary Policy and Procedures in dealing with any member of staff who has committed fraud; and will normally pursue the prosecution of any such individual.

## **5. Subsequent Investigations**

5.1 Where preliminary investigations provide reasonable grounds for suspecting a member or members of staff of fraud, the Fraud Response Team will decide whether there is a requirement to suspend the suspect(s). It will do so, with reference to the relevant Disciplinary Policy and Procedures. It may be necessary to plan the timing of suspension to prevent the suspect(s) from destroying or removing evidence that may be needed to support disciplinary or legal action.

5.2 In these circumstances, the suspect(s) should be approached unannounced. They should be supervised at all times before leaving the Group's premises. They should be allowed to collect personal property under supervision but should not be able to remove any property belonging to the Group. Any keys to premises, offices and furniture should be returned.

5.3 DCEO or any available officer should arrange for the withdrawal, without delay, of access permissions to the Group's computer systems. The suspect(s) should be requested to hand over all IT and communications equipment provided to them by the Group, including laptops, mobile telephones, and other devices.

5.4 If no suspension takes place following preliminary investigations, the Fraud Response Team should review this at subsequent stages of the ensuing investigation.

5.5 The Investigating Officer shall consider whether it is necessary to investigate systems other than that which has given rise to suspicion, through which the employee may have had opportunities to misappropriate the Group's assets. In consultation with the Fraud Response Team they will also determine whether there is a need to collect additional information in order to provide an appropriate level of evidence.

5.6 Dependent on the nature of the suspected fraud, the investigation may require technical expertise that the Investigating Officer does not possess. In these circumstances, the Fraud Response Team has responsibility for the appointment of external specialists to lead or contribute to the investigation.

### **Access to Information**

5.7 Any requests for information from the press or other external agency concerning any fraud investigation must be referred to the Chief Executive Officer and dealt with in accordance with the Media Handling Procedure and Openness and Confidentiality Policy. Under no circumstances should the Investigating Officer or any other employee provide statements or information to the press or external agencies.

## **6. Recovery of Losses**

6.1 The Investigating Officer shall ensure that the amount of any loss is quantified wherever possible. Repayment of losses will be sought in all cases. Where the loss is substantial, legal advice should be obtained without delay about the need to freeze the suspect's assets through the court, pending conclusion of the investigation. Legal advice should also be obtained about prospects for recovering losses through the civil court, where the perpetrator refuses repayment. The Group will normally expect to recover costs in addition to losses.

6.2 The Investigating Officer, in discussion with the Chief Executive Officer and or DCEO should also decide whether any of the losses warrant a claim under any Group insurance policy. Action to recover losses via insurance will normally be taken only as a last resort.

## **7. Investigation Report**

7.1 On completion of a fraud investigation, the Investigating Officer will submit a written report to the Fraud Response Team. If a fraud has been established, the report shall contain:

- a description of the incident, the people involved, and the means of perpetrating the fraud;
- the measures taken to prevent a recurrence;
- quantification of losses;
- progress with recovery action;
- progress with disciplinary action;
- progress with criminal action;
- actions taken to prevent and detect similar incidents.

7.2 The report will normally be submitted to the next meeting of Audit Committee. Where the fraud is significant, in terms of losses incurred, or particularly novel, unusual, or complex, a special meeting of the Audit Committee may be convened. Audit Committee will report fully to the next meeting of the Board, or where appropriate to the subsidiary's boards, on matters considered and relevant management responses.

## **8. Review of the Fraud Response Plan**

8.1 As a minimum, the Plan will be reviewed every two years to ensure fitness for purpose. It will also be reviewed after any fraud incident in order to identify any need for change.