

Ethical Policy

Aims

The Phone Co-op aims to conduct all of its business dealings in a fair and just way, promoting the wellbeing of people and communities and minimising negative impacts on the environment.

It recognises that behaviour unacceptable in wider society should not be acceptable in business. The Phone Co-op wishes to develop with and sustain with all its members, customers, employees and other stakeholders a relationship that represents best practice and reflects their concerns and those of the wider community.

Principles

Co-operative Values

The Phone Co-op's values are based on the co-operative values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity.

The Phone Co-op:

1. Seeks to demonstrate ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.
2. Seeks to provide a fair economic return to its members, who are customers, financed by profitable trading.
3. Works to achieve a broad base of active members who make a positive contribution to the Society's governance.

Democracy

The Phone Co-op is entirely owned and controlled by its members, who are customers. Employees are also encouraged to become members. Members may submit notices of motions at General Meetings, and are encouraged to attend and vote at these meetings. All members are also encouraged to vote in the election of the Board of Directors, and can seek to become directly involved in the running of The Phone Co-op by standing for election to the Board.

The Phone Co-op encourages democratic participation and seeks to adjust to best practice as co-operative practice evolves.

Transparency

The Phone Co-op:

1. Aims to adopt a policy of clear pricing and to avoid hidden charges.
2. Is a member of the Office of the Telecommunications Ombudsman (www.otelo.org.uk), a dispute resolution service approved by the regulator (Ofcom). Otelo is a free and independent service set up to fairly investigate customer complaints.

Responsibility

Responsible practice

The Phone Co-op:

1. Will not sign up customers without their clear consent – it opposes practices such as slamming¹ and high pressure sales techniques.
2. Strives to offer the best possible service to all its customers in an open and accountable way, as outlined in its Customer Service Charter.
3. Seeks to treat its staff fairly in accordance with its Code of Business Conduct Policy and encourages employee participation.
4. Has an Employee Council and encourages trade union membership.
5. Does not impose sales targets on agents or affinity partners as a condition of their continuing to receive revenue.

Fundraising

The Phone Co-op works with a variety of organisations to help them to raise funds. These may include organisations from the Social Economy sector or other charities and ethical campaigning bodies. The Phone Co-op affinity scheme offers these organisations a percentage of call spend from customers they have recruited through marketing or endorsing Phone Co-op services to their supporters, members or customers.

Co-operative and Social Economy Development Fund

The Phone Co-op contributes some of its profits to its Co-operative and Social Economy Development Fund, which supports the development of other social economy organisations with similar values. The Phone Co-op has contributed to this fund each year an amount equal to the dividend it has paid to members. This fund is being used to make loans to new and developing co-operatives.

Donations

Whilst the main focus of The Phone Co-op's contributions are to the co-operative and Social Economy Development Fund, it will, where possible, respond to national and international appeals for donations from co-operative movement organisations.

¹ Process used by some telecom providers for switching users from a particular telephone network to their own network without the user's permission.

Environment

The Phone Co-op is committed, where practical and within the resources available, to following environmental best practice in all of its activities. Specifically The Phone Co-op is committed to:

1. Offsetting all the carbon dioxide generated by its activities and those of its telecoms suppliers through the purchase of CO₂ offsets.
2. Purchasing electricity from renewable energy sources.
3. Using recycled paper and stationery.
4. Developing systems which significantly reduce paper usage.
5. Promoting the use of public transport by its employees and directors, and offering bicycles for all employees for daily use travelling to and from work.
6. Informing visitors to our offices and people attending events such as the AGM how they can reach the venue by public transport, and encouraging them to do so.
7. Recycling waste products such as paper, toner cartridges, cardboard, etc.
8. Encouraging its staff to consider the environment in all aspects of their work.
9. Improving energy efficiency in the workplaces.

Purchasing

The Phone Co-op is concerned that its suppliers act in a way that is in harmony with the values of its members, customers and employees. Where commercially viable, The Phone Co-op will prioritise those suppliers whose material, ethical and environmental practices are in harmony with its own ethical policy and co-operative values.

The Phone Co-op seeks to develop long-term, mutually beneficial relationships with its suppliers. Such relationships can only be effective if suppliers have a mutual respect for the ethical policies and practices of the Phone Co-op. Relationships are based on trust and honesty at all times.

The Phone Co-op will:

1. Seek to buy from co-operatives and social enterprises, wherever possible and practical.
2. Seek to buy from local sources, supporting local businesses and reducing transportation costs and environmental impact, wherever possible and practical.
3. Source from suppliers with well established ethical and environmental practices, wherever possible and practical.
4. Purchase Fair Trade products, wherever possible and practical.
5. Purchase paper and envelopes from suppliers specialising in recycled paper products.
6. Treat suppliers fairly and pay within the agreed terms.

The Phone Co-op seeks to avoid the use of any supplier which it discovers to be routinely:

1. Engaged in unlawful practice.
2. Engaged in practice that violates basic employee rights.
3. Discriminating against individuals or groups on the grounds of race, gender, age, nationality, sexual orientation or belief.

Where it appears a supplier is engaged in such practice The Phone Co-op will seek to address the issue with the supplier and if this fails will look to source from an alternative supplier.

Internet

The Phone Co-op believes in free speech, that is to say, in the right of individuals and organisations to express their views and to publish information as they wish, providing that the publication of such views or information is not unlawful, and providing that it does not infringe upon the legitimate rights of others.

The Phone Co-op:

1. Does not regard as freedom of speech the promotion of intolerance or prejudice on the grounds of race, gender, sexual orientation or belief.
2. Reserves the right to refuse services that, in its reasonable judgement, enable individuals or organisations to abuse freedom of speech or to promote intolerance.
3. Will not host on its servers any material deemed inappropriate or which may infringe upon the rights of its members, customers or employees.
4. Will take down any website which in its reasonable judgement contravenes this policy.
5. Reserves the right to refuse to host any information for distribution via the Internet, which in its reasonable opinion would lead a significant number of its customers to doubt its commitment to ethical and co-operative values.
6. Accepts however, that many of its customers wish legitimately to use the Internet to express views and publish information which other customers may object to, yet which do not in its reasonable judgement compromise its commitment to co-operative values and its ethical policy.

Continuous improvement

The Phone Co-op will regularly review its business practices and respond to the views of members, customers and employees. It has an Ethical Policy Committee, whose role is to appraise these views and other relevant issues, and, if necessary, to amend this policy and keep it up to date.

Accountability

The Board of Directors is ultimately accountable for The Phone Co-op's ethical policy.

The Chief Executive is responsible for the administration and delivery of this policy.

Assurance

It is the Phone Co-op's intention to seek an external review of this policy and its implementation.

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