Culture handbook

ASTER
GROUP



As Group CEO, I have always said that one of the most important parts of my job is to create an environment where you can thrive.

This is truer today than ever before. Making sure Aster is a great place to work is the bedrock to making sure we're able to deliver the best possible services to those customers we support, both now and in the future.

And while we've got a lot to be proud of when it comes to the culture we've built across the Aster Group, I know there's more to be done.

This handbook is a snapshot of who we are – our story, our strategy, and how we work together through **The Aster Way**. It also sets out **The Aster Offer**. It's really just about being clear with each other – what you can expect from Aster, and what we ask in return – because we all play an important role in bringing **The Aster Way** to life, for our colleagues and our customers.

Bjorn Howard, Group Chief Executive Officer

ASTER GROUP

C&C LONDON HOMES SINCE 1926

enham trust

EAST BORO HOUSING • CARE • SUPPORT

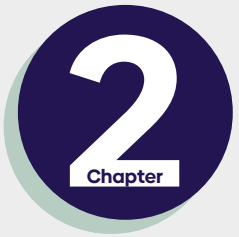
The Aster Story



Our pride and purpose

We exist to have a positive impact in our local communities

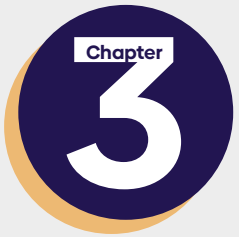
- We provide safe, well-maintained homes
- We build new homes to help tackle the national housing shortage
- We provide charitable services from supporting social entrepreneurs kick-start their businesses, to supporting people living with disabilities in work
- We're relentless in our mission to extend the positive impact we make.



Our current reality

The world around us is in crisis – the soaring cost-of-living and continued housing shortage means we can't keep doing what we've always done

- We're under more pressure than ever to increase our support for the people who need us the most
- Customer expectations are changing, and we need to provide the services they need and deserve, not just now, but into the future
- The future of work and employee expectations are changing at a rate never seen before
- Competition to keep and attract high performing people who can help us achieve our vision is fiercer than it's ever been.



Our opportunity

We have the skills, dedication, and ambition to transform Aster

- Now is the time to modernise our services – rethinking how we can better serve our customers' needs
- Technology will accelerate improvements to our services and set us apart from others in the way we work
- An even more inclusive culture will create a better way of working for everyone
- The deal we make with our people will be built on expectations, trust, and reward for those who contribute to our vision.

Chapter 4

The journey we must take

We need to make Aster a future ready business

- We'll work with our customers to set an Aster standard we can be proud of
- We'll do more to build and manage our homes for a sustainable future
- We'll continue growing our business by teaming up with other charities and housing associations to maximise the good work we do
- From our Board to our frontline, The Aster Way will come to life through the people we recruit, retain and reward.

Chapter 5

The difference we can make

The Aster Way isn't just a set of words – to survive in the future we must all commit to it

- No one is more important than anyone else - we each play a different but equally important role in our collective success
- We must set clear expectations for our people, rewarding those who contribute to our success
- By creating an even more inclusive environment we'll have the courage to do things differently
- We'll make brave decisions that are in the best interests of our customers and colleagues.

Chapter 6

Our desired destination

We'll deliver lasting benefits for our customers, communities, and colleagues

- Our customers will receive a good service, delivered excellently, with a strong local focus
- We'll target the investment in building new homes and maintaining our existing homes in the right places, informed by data
- We'll be a great employer, creating an environment where everyone feels at home doing their best work
- We'll never stop working towards our goal **everyone has a home.**

Our **strategy**

Everyone has a **home**

What we do enables better lives

We provide safety and security through a range of housing and services.

We will continue to grow so we can maximise our impact.

Our strengths are our people and our culture.

Strategic themes

- **Providing** safe, well maintained homes and modern, reliable customer services.
- **Building** as many homes as we can, offering a range of housing options.
- **Empowering** our colleagues, customers and communities to thrive.

Enablers

- **Data technology** and **transformation**
- **Financial strength** and **business health**
- **People** and **culture**



You can think of **The Aster Way** as our culture code. It's how we make sure we're doing the right thing, every time.

It's aligned to the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) Codes of Conduct and Ethics, and the National Housing Federation Code of Conduct, and is all about making sure we're all on the same page when it comes to working with professionalism, integrity and fairness.

the aster way

1. Everyone Matters
We're here to make a really positive difference to people's lives.

2. Owning It
We lead with transparency and take responsibility for our actions.

3. Raising the Bar
We don't settle for "the way it's always been done."

4. Empowering People
We create an environment where everyone can thrive.

5. Stronger Together
We achieve more when we work as one.

What it looks like in practice

01. Everyone Matters

We're here to make a really positive difference to people's lives.

That means:

- Delivering on our promises - on time, every time.
- Listening, adapting and understanding different perspectives.
- Treating everyone with fairness, dignity and respect - no exceptions.
- Keeping information private, secure and confidential, and using all data responsibly.

At the core, it's about trust. When we act with integrity, we put our colleagues, customers and communities at the heart of everything we do.



02. Owning It

We lead with transparency and take responsibility for our actions.

That means:

- Being upfront about what's possible - clear, consistent communication.
- Owning our decisions and the impact they have.
- Using our budgets with value-for-money at the forefront of our minds.
- Doing the right thing and reporting concerns when something doesn't feel right.
- Ensuring our personal interests don't conflict with our professional responsibilities.

We role model the standards we expect. When we act with integrity, we build a culture of trust and professionalism.

03. Raising the Bar

We don't settle for "the way it's always been done."

That means:

- Challenging outdated processes and driving smart, effective change.
- Cutting through complexity - making things simpler and faster.
- Keeping abreast with industry trends and making a commitment to lifelong learning.
- Maximising our resources for long-term sustainability.

We're here to lead the way. By staying curious, creative and agile, we ensure we deliver real impact.



We create an environment where everyone can thrive.

That means:

- Leading with kindness, respect and constructive feedback.
- Backing each other up through challenges and wins.
- Embracing difference because different voices and experiences make us stronger.
- Being approachable, listening and acting on feedback.

When we support and uplift each other, we create a workplace where people feel valued and empowered.



Empowering People

04.

05.

Stronger Together

We achieve more when we work as one.

That means:

- Breaking down silos and building strong, collaborative relationships.
- Encouraging open discussions and constructive challenges.
- Holding each other accountable while staying solution focused.
- Learning from mistakes, sharing insights and continuously improving.

Success is a team effort. We are at our best when we work together, challenge each other and keep pushing forward.



Making **The Aster Way** a reality is all about each of us showing up for our colleagues and customers, every day.

Turning words into action

We all will

Own it

Meet commitments, take responsibility and actively solve problems.

Be real

Communicate openly, honestly and with respect.

Stay adaptable

Listen, learn and adjust to different needs

Keep improving

Seek feedback and embrace growth.

Lift others up

Support colleagues, respect different perspectives and work as one team.

Our leaders will

Lead by example

Be a role model acting with integrity, fairness and consistency.

Empower your team

Give people the tools, trust and confidence to succeed.

Stay present

Be approachable, listen actively and act on feedback.

Champion growth

Support development, encourage innovation and remove roadblocks.

Drive collaboration

Create an inclusive and connected team environment where people thrive.

Our senior leaders will

Shape the vision

Make decisions that reflect The Aster Way themes.

Build trust

Be transparent, visible and accountable for key business decisions.

Remove hassle

Clear the way for teams to succeed, reducing barriers and complexity.

Drive culture

Embed a people-first culture across the organisation, creating a safe environment and encouraging team members to speak up when something doesn't feel right.

Inspire change

Lead with courage, challenge outdated ways of working and push for innovation.

Doing the right thing

Making good decisions

What we do matters, and a lot of the decisions we make aren't black and white. To help guide our decision making, along with **The Aster Way**, we use the CIH Ethical Decision-Making Model.

1. **Identify the Issue**
   Clearly define the problem and consider any ethical concerns.
2. **Review Relevant Policies and Standards**
   Check how The Aster Way, company policies and regulations apply.
3. **Consider the Impact**
   Assess how different choices affect customers, colleagues and the wider community.
4. **Explore Options**
   Think through possible solutions and their consequences.
5. **Seek Advice if Needed**
   Consult with colleagues, leaders or ethical advisors for guidance.
6. **Decide and Act**
   Choose the most ethical course of action and follow through.
7. **Reflect and Learn**
   Afterwards, review the decision-making process to improve future practices.



The Aster Offer

The Aster Offer is all about the experience you can expect as an Aster colleague.

As well as getting the basics right - offering competitive salaries, holiday pay, sick pay and parental leave - we're proud to have a wide-ranging, award-winning offer with a real breadth of benefits.



How you're rewarded

Regularly benchmarked salaries

We benchmark our salaries every three years to make sure you're rewarded fairly for the work you do. Where budgets allow, we aim to offer a pay increase each year.

Pension contributions

Depending on how much you contribute to your pension, Aster will pay up to 10% of your salary in pension contributions.

A flexible approach

Flexibility

We understand the importance of work-life balance and are committed to offering as much flexibility as possible to help you manage your personal and work life effectively – thinking about everything from where and when you work to how much time off you take.

Workspaces that work for you

We offer a range of workspaces, so depending on your role, you can choose the space that's right for you. Whether that's working from home, out in our communities, in one of our office spaces or a co-working space via the Nearu app.

Valuing inclusivity

Family friendly

We support our colleagues who have caring responsibilities, and are committed to offering flexible options to enable colleagues to balance home and work responsibilities.

D&I learning programmes

Our diversity and inclusion learning programmes cover a wide range of topics, helping you understand and appreciate the diverse world we live in.

Women in Leadership apprenticeships

Empowering aspiring female leaders to develop their skills and advance their careers.

Employee-led networks

Our networks provide a platform for colleagues to connect, support and understand each other, and share insight to help improve our ways of working.

Celebrate key events

Learn more about cultural festivals, awareness days, and events that shine a light on diversity and inclusion.

Disability Confident Employer

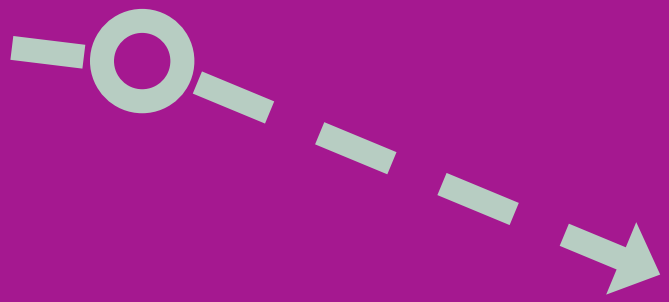
We're committed to supporting colleagues with disabilities, offering resources and adjustments wherever we can.

ADHD coaching

Tailored coaching to help colleagues with ADHD thrive in their roles.

Neurodiversity training and support

Training and support to make sure everyone can succeed.



Helping you to take care of your wellbeing

BUPA cash plan

Financial support for healthcare expenses, ensuring you can access the care you need.

Mental health support

Access to two confidential short-term support counselling sessions and a wealth of resources to help you manage stress and maintain your mental health.

Employee Assistance Programme

Access to help and support via a 24/7 helpline, live chat, text or Whatsapp.

Perkbox wellness hub

Access workout videos, meditation guides, sleep stories and other resources to help you take care of your health.

Award-winning menopause offer

Practical advice and resources to promote awareness and understanding of menopause for all colleagues, as well as dedicated support for colleagues directly experiencing menopause.

Eye care

A free eye test every two years for colleagues who use a computer or screen, and vouchers towards a pair of glasses.

Occupational health

Supporting you to keep safe and well in your role.


2M
DISTANCE
ASTER
GROUP

Enabling
your **learning** and **development**

Our colleague development offer

Our learning and development offer goes beyond compliance and mandatory training – it's all about supporting you to develop your skills and providing personal and professional development. From coaching and mentoring to change management or professional qualifications, we have it covered.



Understanding our strategic priorities

Helping you build the skills and knowledge to support our strategy.



Getting to know the housing sector

Giving you the tools to grow professionally and understand the sector we work in.



Must-do training

The essentials all of us need to stay on top of legal and organisational standards.



Tailored opportunities

A range of learning and development options built to suit you.



Skills for now and the future

Opportunities for everyone to grow and prepare for what's next.

Our Leadership Development Pathway Offer

Making sure our leaders have everything they need to create the right environment for their teams to succeed is really important to us. We have a leadership development offer that supports all leaders, wherever they are in their leadership journey.

Aspiring Leaders

This is for colleagues wanting to develop their career and become our future leaders.

A personal and professional development programme involving both project work and core leadership skills.

Available for:
All colleagues

Leader Welcome

This is for new leaders, with opportunities for development and growth. With a range of leadership development sessions, resources, and networking opportunities.

Available for:
New leaders joining the organisation or existing leaders looking for career development

Building Leader Performance

To provide continuous development and growth opportunities, building on, and enhancing your current knowledge and skills as a leader.

Available for:
All leaders up to Heads of Service

Strategic Leaders

A programme of personal and professional development to help reinforce existing skills while enabling growth and support for your teams.

Available for:
Heads of Service and Senior Leadership Team

Executive Leadership

To support and develop a flexible and resilient leadership team equipped for the challenges of the future.

Available for:
Executive Board

Get involved and keep connected

Volunteering

Access individual or team volunteering opportunities through our dedicated Impact Hub.

Keeping connected events

A chance to come together and collaborate.

Community events

Opportunities to come together and support activities in the communities we work with.

Welcome days for new colleagues

Designed to help you settle in and feel at home.

Colleague surveys

Share your feedback, ideas and suggestions in one of our regular colleague surveys.

Financial perks

Salary sacrifice flexible benefits

Choose the benefits that best suit your needs, including critical illness cover, payroll giving, car leasing and the cycle to work scheme.

Perkbox Perks and Points

Access exclusive deals on a wide range of products and services. And enjoy monthly points to spend on anything from a coffee to Amazon vouchers.

Tools Allowance

If you're a trade colleague, you have access to an allowance towards buying tools.

Life Assurance

We offer all colleagues life assurance to the value of at least three times their salary.

Planning for retirement

Take advantage of individual meetings with a pension expert and access to a retirement modeller to help you plan ahead for retirement.

Recognising you

Leader recognition

All leaders have access to a dedicated budget pot to say thank you to people in their teams.

Peer-to-peer recognition on Perkbox

A platform where colleagues can recognise each other's hard work and contributions.

Christmas parties

All business areas have a budget to celebrate the end of the year, whether that's with a lunch out or a party.

The Aster Way Awards

Recognising outstanding achievements and contributions, celebrating the success of our colleagues. We'll be talking to you to hear more about what you'd like this to look like this year.



ASTER

GROUP

www.aster.co.uk