Personal Relationships Policy

(Ref: HR /25)

Purpose of Policy: This policy sets out the manner in which Manor Estates Housing Association will deal with instances of personal relationships in the work place.

Policy Monitoring Details	
Department:	CEO / Corporate
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Status:	Group
Date Approved by Board:	November 2023
Updated:	
Planned Review Date:	November 2028
Regulatory Outcomes being achieved:	**Standard 5: The RSL conducts its affairs with honesty and integrity.** *The RSL upholds and promotes the standards of behaviour and conduct it expects of governing body members and staff through and appropriate code of conduct*
Relevance to Association's Values	This policy supports the Association's values
Tenant Consultation Required:	No

Introduction

We recognise that employees may form personal relationships with colleagues or others connected with their work. While we do not wish to interfere with these relationships, Manor Estates HA is duty bound to ensure that all staff behave appropriately, adhere to our standards of conduct set out in our policies and avoid behaviours which could lead to allegations of impropriety.

This policy sets out Manor Estates HA expected standards regarding personal relationships connected to work. We ask that you speak to your line manager if you are unsure of the

standards expected of you. If the expected standards set out below are not met, we will manage any breaches following our disciplinary procedure.

This policy applies to all Board members, staff, workers and volunteers within Manor Estates HA. It also applies in respect of members of your household.

Definitions

Personal Relationship

• For the purposes of this policy, the term personal relationship is defined as any emotional or romantic relationship which goes beyond the normally accepted boundaries of the professional sphere between colleagues. This will include formal, family relationships (for example, where people are married or living together or members of your household). It will also include less formal situations (for example, where the parties consider that they are "seeing each other" or "going out together")

Policy Aims:

- To be clear on our standards and expectations concerning personal relationships at work.
- To manage any situations out with the expected standards in accordance with this policy.
- To manage situations that may arise in a fair, consistent and appropriate way, and to safeguard against discrimination.

In issuing this policy, we seek to address the following, non-exhaustive, issues which may arise where there is a personal relationship:

- Lack of transparency in relation to workplace matters.
- Risks to the confidentiality of business information.
- Legal risks regarding discrimination and harassment.
- Potential conflicts of interest of those involved in personal relationships.
- Actual or perceived bias regarding recruitment, promotion, rostering, annual leave allocation, appraisals, discipline and grievance and other operational matters where staff in a personal relationship are also in a direct reporting or subordinate relationship.
- Potential for negative effect on general public perception of fairness, objectivity and impartiality.
- Embarrassment of other staff.
- Fear of favouritism by other colleagues.
- General adverse impact on team dynamics and reduction in team morale.
- Outputs may be disrupted in the event of relationship breakdown.
- Impact on management resources and increased legal risks in the event of relationship breakdown.
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Manor Estates HA will not appoint anyone to a vacant employment position or to the Governing Body, if the applicant is already in a personal relationship with another member of the organisation's staff or Board member, or if they are a Partner/Relative or member of the household of an existing staff or Board member.

Under the terms of this Policy, we expect that you will:

- not allow any personal relationships with a colleague, contractor, client, customer or supplier to influence your conduct, judgement or decisions while at work.

- declare any personal relationship with a colleague or any other person connected to your employment to your CEO without delay.
- respect your surroundings, your colleagues and our organisation in the context of any personal relationships which you hold.
- not behave inappropriately during working hours, or out with working hours with any matters connected or associated with your employment
- be aware of your behaviour in any social media interaction connected to personal relationships with any colleague or other person connected with the organisation
- follow the highest standards of behaviour at conferences and all other internal or external events you are attending in connection with, or on behalf of Manor Estates HA.

All staff and Board members are required to complete an annual declaration of interest form, this will include disclosing any personal relationships at work.

What you can expect from Manor Estates HA:

- We will treat any information concerning a personal relationship connected to your work in the strictest of confidence. The information will be recorded on the personnel files of both employees if both of you are staff or volunteers with us.
- If a personal relationship develops, your director will discuss the situation with those involved.
- If appropriate measures or working arrangements cannot be put in place, the organisation will then liaise with all parties involved to agree a plan to minimise the potential negative impact of the personal relationship on the business, or to safeguard against potential conflicts of interest/power imbalances.. If no other arrangements are suitable in minimising the impact which the relationship has on the business, the company may resort to terminating the employment of both parties.

Managers are also reminded that we have a duty to protect the health and safety of our staff and that this includes mental health. If a manager has concerns regarding the health impact of a personal relationship on a member of staff they should bring this to the attention of the CEO without delay.

Suppliers and contractors:
Where an employee develops or has a personal relationship with a client, customer, contractor or supplier, in particular where the employee's job has the authority or a close connection with the individual, we expect:

- the relationship to be declared to the CEO as part of the annual declaration of interest (where there is an existing relationship)
- where a new relationship develops, this must be declared to the CEO immediately.

In these circumstances, Manor Estates HA may decide to move the employee to another job/remove them from the situation, and consider other working arrangements in line with the needs of the organisation

Governing Body:

In situations where there is a personal relationship between a Governing Body Member and another volunteer, a client, customer, contractor or supplier, the Governing Body Member/volunteer will be excluded from any discussions connected to the person they have a personal relationship with. If this is not possible or appropriate, the Governing Body member will be required to step down from their position.

No Board members can be in a personal relationship with an employee or close relative of an employee of the Housing Association (Rule 37.4)

Termination
If a personal relationship develops and there are no alternative solutions which can be identified to mitigate the impact which this will have on the work of the organisation, the Association may consider termination of employment. Both employees will be given six months (exclusive of notice period) to find suitable alternative employment. At the end of the period, if neither employee has found a new job then the Association will move to terminate the employment contract with the person with the shortest length of service. The following fair process will be followed:

Procedure

- the employees will be invited by the employer to put forward suggestions for a suitable alternative working arrangement that meets the needs of the business.
- the CEO will prepare a report responding to the alternative working arrangements and whether it is appropriate to continue with the employment relationship. The employees will be invited, in writing, to a formal meeting with a panel of three members of the governing board. Along with the letter, the employee will also receive the CEOs report and any other information the panel will have available to them.
- At the meeting, they will have the right to be accompanied by a trade union representative or workplace colleague, and both parties (the employer and employee) will be given the opportunity to put forward their case.
- The Chair will conduct the meeting
- the decision of the panel will be communicated in writing to the employee within 10 working days of the decision being made; this letter will also provide details of how to appeal to the JNC (EVH).
- the employee will be paid all accrued annual leave, TOIL and flexi not yet taken to the date of termination. As well as any payment in lieu of notice as set out in their contract of employment if a decision to dismiss is made.

DISCRIMINATION, HARASSMENT AND OTHER POLICIES

All staff are reminded that they remain subject to our policies held in our Staff Handbook, and that breach of these policies may result in disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.

We are committed to providing a workplace which is fair and equal. Any member of staff who has concerns about their treatment should raise this informally with their line manager in the first instance (if appropriate), or otherwise use the formal grievance procedure.

We will not tolerate any form of harassment of our staff and will take any allegations extremely seriously. Staff are reminded to consider their legal obligations towards other colleagues. These may be especially pertinent at the beginning or end of a relationship, when professionalism and discretion will be particularly important.

This policy will be monitored and reviewed as appropriate. The next review date is November 2028

Other Relevant and Related Policies
Acceptable Use Policy
Entitlement, Benefits and payments