

Personal Relationships at Work Policy

We will provide this policy on request at no cost, in large print, in Braille, on tape or in another non-written format.

Introduction

Loretto Housing does not wish to interfere in the personal or domestic lives of its Board members or employees.

However, we recognise that over familiarity between employees and between employees and Board members could be detrimental to the organisation.

Whilst not all situations raise issues of conflict of interest, this is not always the case. The implications of close personal relationships at work can include:

- The effect on trust and confidence of colleagues in relation to a conflict of interest, fair treatment, their own ability to discuss issues openly within their team or with their line manager;
- Perceptions of service users/tenants and the general public in relation to the professionalism and fairness of the organisation, its employees and Board members;
- Operational issues affecting the ability to deliver the service effectively;
- Conflicting loyalties and breaches of confidentiality.

The purpose of the policy is therefore, to assist the organisation to deal sensitively, but effectively, with situations where employees, have or form a close personal relationship with someone with whom they work.

These procedures are intended to avoid any possible conflict of interest or accusation of bias, favouritism or prejudice. Ensure that all employees feel confident of fair treatment without the fear that a close personal relationship will influence their or other employees' treatment or broader working relationships.

To avoid any accusation of bias, employees and Board members must not be involved in any appointment where they are a relative or partner of, or have a close personal relationship with, the individual being considered for appointment. Employees and Board members who are involved in decisions relating to discipline, grievance, promotion or pay adjustments for any other employee or Board member where there is a similar relationship, must declare this interest and a senior manager must take the decision as to whether this involvement is detrimental to the decision making process and/or could have an adverse affect on the organisation's reputation.

Definition of Close Personal Relationships

For the purposes of this policy a "close personal relationship" can be defined as:

- Employees and Board members who are married, dating or have a partnership or co-habiting arrangement;
- Immediate family members of an applicant, employee, or Board member e.g., parents, children, siblings, grandparent/grandchild.

- Other relations of an applicant, employee, or Board member e.g., extended family such as piblings/cousins/niblings.
- Any other individuals with whom there is a close personal relationship e.g. close friendships, business associates, current or past relationships such as foster care or adoption.

Responsibility of the Manager

- Deal promptly and sensitively with issues involving close personal relationships at work.
- Conduct matters involving close personal relationships at work in a consistent, fair and reasonable manner.
- Maintain confidentiality where possible.
- Deal with formal disciplinary action under the disciplinary procedure.
- Bring a close personal relationship to the attention of your line manager.
- Ensure that any close personal relationship at work does not interfere with or prejudice your employment or casts doubt on the objectivity of your decision making.
- If a close personal relationship at work does interfere with, prejudices or casts doubt on the objectivity of your decision making, you should take the appropriate steps to make your line manager aware of the situation. Joint decisions will then be taken on how to avoid any possible allegations of favouritism or harassment, how to avoid adverse criticism and resolve the situation.

Responsibility of the Employee

- If involved in a close personal relationship this should be brought to the attention of your line manager.
- Ensure that any close personal relationship at work does not interfere with or prejudice your employment.
- If a close personal relationship at work does interfere with your work you should take the appropriate steps to make your line manager aware of the situation. Joint decisions will then be taken on how to resolve the situation.

Responsibility of the Boards

- If involved in a close personal relationship this should be brought to the attention of the Chairperson.
- Ensure that any close personal relationship does not interfere with or prejudice your working relationship.
- If a close personal relationship at work does interfere with, prejudices or casts doubt on the objectivity of your decision making, you should take the appropriate steps to make the Chairperson aware of the situation. Joint decisions will then be taken on how to avoid any possible allegations of favouritism or harassment, how to avoid adverse criticism and resolve the situation.
- A Board member who has been in a relationship that has broken down and subsequently the working relationship is affected, should give consideration to withdrawing from any Boards or decisions where the person they had the relationship with could be affected. If the difficulties are too great, resignation should be considered.

Relationships formed whilst in post

Close personal relationships may form between colleagues during the course of employment. Such situations should be managed with care and sensitivity in the interest of all concerned. It is important, however, to ensure that any approach or actions are not unfair or discriminatory.

Disclosure of a close personal relationship

Where a close personal relationship is formed whilst in post, this should be disclosed, in confidence, to their line manager or Chairperson by the employees or Board members concerned. This disclosure should be recorded in the employee's file. Failure to disclose a personal relationship could leave an employee and Board member open to allegations of misconduct, should subsequent issues arise.

Employees and Board members are expected to exercise judgement as to whether or not the friendship or relationship has developed to such an extent that it can be described as a close personal relationship and that the relationship should be disclosed.

Transfer of employees

The organisation reserves the right to move an employee to another service/section where a relationship is or is perceived to be causing difficulties, following appropriate discussion with all parties concerned. It is not our policy to have family members working together in the same section or service and where such a situation could arise (e.g. promotion or where a post has been advertised externally and been gained through selection) consideration will need to be given to moving one of the employees concerned to another service/section.

Annual leave

The organisation cannot guarantee that holidays for couples and/or family members can be granted at the same time and the granting of holiday allocation will depend on the needs of the service/section.

Conduct

All existing policies in relation to equal opportunities, recruitment and selection, training and development and good practice must be upheld.

The highest standards of behaviour are required at work, conferences and other events where individuals are there as a result of their Board membership or employment with Loretto Housing. Breaches of behaviour will be dealt with under the organisation's disciplinary procedures.

Employees and Board members are expected to maintain the highest standards of propriety and should ensure their work is not affected and work time, activities and events should not be used to further their personal relationships. Employees and Board members should be aware that demonstrations of close affection can create an uncomfortable environment for work colleagues and Board members.

Employees and Board members must be aware that behaviour towards another employee and Board member that is not reciprocated is not acceptable and can amount to victimisation/harassment which would be dealt with under the Dignity at Work Policy/Disciplinary Policy.

In line with the organisation's Good Practice Policy relationships between service users/supported tenants and employees are prohibited.

If an employee feels they are being unfairly treated in relation to this policy, they can refer to the grievance procedure for further guidance.

The organisation provides support to individuals through the Employee Counselling Service where they can discuss their situation in confidence by requesting a management referral.

External Relationships

Relationships with external agencies and companies that are likely to become a serious conflict of interest must be noted in the organisations Register of Interests, which is held by the Administrator at head office. The employee must also notify their line manager about any external relationships that could become a serious conflict of interest.