



**Muirhouse
Housing
Association**



**Muirhouse
Homes Ltd**

Title of Policy:	Personal Relationships
Date of Adoption or Last Review:	11 September 2019
Lead Officer:	Stevie McAvoy, Chief Executive
Date of Next Review:	September 2022
Scottish Social Housing Charter Outcomes and Standards:	Not applicable
Regulatory Standards of Governance and Financial Management:	Standard 5 The RSL conducts its affairs with honesty and integrity.

Policy: Personal relationships

PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This policy describes the framework within which, when necessary, Muirhouse Housing Association (“MHA”, “we”, “our”) will manage issues that arise when personal relationships that go beyond friendship occur in the workplace.
- 1.2 It is not our intention to interfere in the personal or domestic life of Board or staff members. We recognise that strong personal relationships and friendships may start and grow from working relationships, and that many couples first meet at work.

2. PURPOSE

- 2.1 This policy covers personal relationships between;
- Board members
 - Board members and staff
 - Staff members
 - Board or Staff members and tenants
 - Board or staff members and any person in another public or private organisation with which we have a working relationship.
- 2.2 The purpose of the policy is to provide guidance in areas where personal relationships overlap with working relationships and to ensure that neither Board nor staff members are open to allegations of improper behaviour such as bias, abuse of authority or conflict of interest.

3. SCOPE

- 3.1 We have a duty to set and monitor compliance with standards of behaviour and performance which are professionally acceptable and which, in particular, comply with any legislation, or any guidance issued by the Scottish Housing Regulator that may impact on relationships in the working environment. We have a responsibility to operate in an open and publicly accountable manner at all times, which includes maintaining a good reputation.
- 3.2 The Board Members Code of Conduct and the Staff Code of Conduct set out the standards of behaviour expected from Board Members and staff.

- 3.3 The Entitlement, Payments and Benefits policy describes our arrangements for dealing with a specific set of circumstances involving immediate family or other close connections, including when it is necessary to 'declare an interest' and possibly withdraw from any further involvement in an activity or decision.
- 3.4 We have a comprehensive set of policies and procedures which detail the processes that must be followed in carrying out our activities and providing our services. These are designed to minimise the risk of individual preference affecting the decision-making process. We also have a range of HR policies and procedures designed to ensure high standards, fairness and equity in treatment and protection from negative behaviour including bullying, harassment, victimisation etc.
- 3.5 The term 'personal relationships at work' covers a wide array of situations from very long-lasting relationships such as those resulting in marriage or long-term partnership and family relations to more short-term relationships.
- 3.6 This policy is a group policy and applies to Muirhouse Housing Association as well as all its subsidiaries including, but not limited to, Muirhouse Homes.

4. POTENTIAL ISSUES ARISING FROM PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

- 4.1 The Association recognises that employees who work together may form personal friendships and, in some cases, close personal relationships. This policy aims at striking a balance between your right to a private life and MHA's right to protect its business.
- 4.2 MHA does not, as a general rule, wish to interfere with such friendships and relationships. However, we must also ensure that all employees continue to conduct themselves in an appropriate, professional and responsible manner while at work and that everyone continues to fulfil their job duties both diligently and effectively.
- 4.3 Intimate personal relationships between employees that cause disruption to the business, or that may bring MHA into disrepute, can adversely affect service to customers or fellow employees.
- 4.4 Personal relationships may impact MHA when the personal feelings or views of one or more persons involved adversely affect their standards of work performance, the quality of their decisions, or their attitudes and/or behaviour (through speech, written communications or actions) towards fellow Board members or staff colleagues.

4.5 Examples of potential problems, particularly in a small organisation, are:

- a) Where there is a line management relationship between the two staff involved, there can be difficulties in exercising discipline, and actual or perceived partiality by the manager towards their partner, which in turn can cause resentment in other staff and affect teamwork/overall performance.
- b) A relationship between two Board members may result in 'personal agendas' being promoted which are not in the MHA's best interests or, at worst, a personal power base being maintained against the best interests of MHA and the community.
- c) A relationship between a Board or staff member and a tenant may result in actual or perceived partiality or favouritism towards that tenant, or, if the relationship breaks down, to allegations of discrimination against the tenant.
- d) Close relationships may result in 'collusion' in procurement decisions, not only where the relationship is within MHA (involving both Board and staff members) but also where the relationship involves a staff member in a company providing or seeking to provide goods and services to Muirhouse Housing Association.
- e) When a personal relationship ends there can be difficulties, particularly in a small organisation, in the staff involved continuing to work together, and possibly even claims of harassment or victimisation.

4.6 Where the work of staff brings them into contact with Board members both the Board Members Code of Conduct and Staff Code of Conduct state that mutual respect between Board and staff should be shown at all times, and that close personal familiarity between Board and staff members should be avoided wherever possible.

4.7 This is to avoid situations such as possible breaches of confidentiality or accusations of favouritism on the part of the Board Member.

4.8 In line with our Standing Orders two Board Members who are in, or enter into, a relationship with each other may not be Office Bearers at the same time.

5. DEALING WITH POTENTIAL OR ACTUAL ISSUES

5.1 We rely on the integrity, honesty and openness of our Board members and staff to comply with all Codes, policies and procedures so as to minimise any potential problems, and to raise any issues or concerns as soon as possible so that they may be dealt with promptly.

- 5.2 Where there is the potential for a new close relationship between two people, as listed in section 2.1 of this policy, that may give concerns or practical problems, we insist those involved advise the appropriate person of the relationship as soon as possible. For employees this would be their line manager as well as the Chief Executive, for Board members this would usually be the Chair.
- 5.3 We recognise that to a large extent the timing of when to report a relationship will be a matter of judgement for the individuals concerned, unless any actual incidents have occurred which require action by the appropriate line manager or the Board Chair.
- 5.4 We require such an approach at an early stage if the two persons intend, for example, to live together or get married. This is to comply with our policy on Entitlements, Payments and Benefits, which covers the granting of 'benefits' to close relatives, including spouses and co-habitees.
- 5.5 In particular we will expect any Board or staff member with the authority to take procurement decisions to advise of any close personal relationships with an employee, especially one in a senior position, in any organisation or company supplying goods or services to Muirhouse Housing Association.
- 5.6 For Board members, the 'appropriate person' will normally be the Chair, who will consult with the Chief Executive. The Chief Executive should also advise the Chair.
- 5.7 For staff members, the appropriate person will be their line manager, though they may also choose to advise the Chief Executive.
- 5.8 We will then discuss with the parties involved any practical issues or potential concerns and, where relevant, how to avoid any potential or actual conflict of interest that may be caused by a new relationship.
- 5.9 For example, a practical issue might be where a two staff wish to take the same time off for holidays, or how to avoid inadvertently breaching confidentiality where one of the partners is not entitled to the information.
- 5.10 The same approach will be followed when we are advised that a close relationship has broken down, with regard to dealing with ongoing working relationships etc.
- 5.11 We will agree with those involved what information is provided to other Board members or staff colleagues, as appropriate. The individuals concerned may share whatever information they wish to with colleagues.

- 5.12 We recognise the potential risks arising from ‘affection’ from a workplace relationship, including unwanted attention, taking incorrect advantage of the line management relationship, or harassment etc., and are clear that such behaviour is unacceptable and will be dealt with in accordance with our Codes of Conduct and disciplinary procedures as appropriate.
- 5.13 Displays of overly affectionate behaviour between couples within the workplace, especially involving physical contact, will not be acceptable and any breaches will be dealt with in accordance with our Codes of Conduct and disciplinary procedures as appropriate.
- 5.14 This applies not only within office working hours, but also at formal or informal functions arranged by Muirhouse Housing Association, or where for example the couple attend a conference etc. We expect normal standards of decency and behaviour to apply at all times, and that the time spent at such events, conferences etc. will not be used to further the personal relationship.

6. OPTIONS FOR ACTION

- 6.1 Where a close relationship, or the ending of a close relationship, results in serious concerns regarding actual or potential behaviour, and this causes ongoing difficulties to a staff team, to all staff, or to the Board which we have not been able to resolve through initial discussions, action etc., we may have to consider the following:
- taking disciplinary action against a Board Member under the Board Members Code of Conduct, including the potential of
 - requiring the Board member to withdraw from meetings etc. for a specified period, or
 - resigning from the Board.
 - taking disciplinary action against a staff member under our disciplinary procedures.

7. CONFIDENTIALITY AND DATA PROTECTION

- 7.1 All information provided to us by individuals will be treated in strict confidence and will only be discussed with other parties with the individual’s (or their appointed representative’s) prior consent. We will comply with the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation 2016 when holding personal information in our files and on our computer systems.

8. DIVERSITY AND EQUALITY

- 8.1 We are committed to Equality and Diversity and will not discriminate in the operation of this policy on the basis of age, sex, race, colour, ethnic or national origin, religion, marital status, family circumstances, political or sexual orientation, medical condition or disability. We aim to promote equal opportunities and comply with all current legal requirements relating to equal opportunities and the Equality Act 2010.

9. REVIEW OF THIS POLICY

- 9.1 This policy will be reviewed at least every 3 years or sooner if any significant changes are needed.