



Housing Association Ltd
more than just a roof

Staff Code of Conduct Generic Policy

KARIN HOUSING ASSOCIATION

Staff Code of Conduct

1) INTRODUCTION

This code is designed to assist all staff in establishing and maintaining professional practice and boundaries primarily with customers/users (section 2), but also with colleagues (section 3) other professionals (section 4) and Relationships with Suppliers and Financial Conduct (Section 5).

Because all work with customers/users involves human interaction, the code makes no attempt to be an exhaustive prescription list of behaviour but underlines the values and principles that all staff will need to use to guide their day to day professional decisions. Your Housing will provide regular training opportunities linked to this code.

The code overlaps with many existing practice guides and procedures, but in particular:

- Confidentiality policy
- Supervision policy
- Equal Opportunities policy and harassment procedure
- Drugs guidelines
- Customer/Users involvement policy
- Disciplinary policy

The code of conduct is intended to act as guidance with some room for flexible interpretation in the light of a professional view of specific local or individual circumstances. Items that may lead to disciplinary conduct are listed in that policy appendix and with the exception of inappropriate sexual relationships or persistent flouting of advice from a line manager that may bring the organisation into disrepute, this is not intended to be a prescriptive policy or a list of 'rules'.

Definition: The term "customers or users" is used throughout this document. This is meant to apply to anyone referred to the project during assessment, those receiving a service and those who have received a service within the time scale.

2) WORKING WITH CUSTOMERS/USERS

It is the purpose of this section to establish a professional context for working with customers by describing basic values and principles which should govern professional practice. These should inform work with customers/users and inform all aspects of individual and team practice. These principles are as follows:

- 2.1: Favouritism: There should be no favouritism, or the appearance of favouritism shown between customers. Whilst support workers will find different customers more easy or difficult to work with, this should not be reflected in the amount or quality of attention a customer is offered.
- 2.2: Flexibility: Support workers should strive to offer a flexible approach and not just one way of working with customers. A regimental approach can lead to institutionalisation of both customers and staff and different approaches can work with different people.
- 2.3: Choice: Throughout the support process, customers should be offered choice, and expressions of individual culture and personal preference should be encouraged and respected. This should be part of a general empowering approach that encourages personal development.
- 2.4: Influence: Support workers should be careful not to influence customers with their own beliefs and personal values where these may be at variance with the organisation's.
- 2.5: Privacy: Support workers must respect customer's right to privacy, and be sensitive to different personal and cultural needs for privacy.

These principles should only be breached where issues of risk override them. This should only be done following discussion with line management.

- 2.6: Unconditional Positive Regard: Staff should not comment or criticise the values of customers as human beings. Actions or behaviours can and should be challenged, but the person is always regarded as a good and worthwhile one. To this end workers should always be careful not to prejudge, label or stereotype individual customers/ groups of customers.
- 2.7: Elitism: Workers should be careful not to present themselves as superior in any way, including morally. To this end, they should always be prepared to admit error, or lack of knowledge.
- 2.8: Professionalism: At all times a professional relationship should be stressed and maintained: customers should not feel in any way indebted to support workers, or that they are recipients of charity. It should be always appreciated that workers are paid to carry out their duties and overt gratitude from customers should be discouraged and the reasons for this explained

This should be achieved while recognising that good support delivery is based on the development of working relationships with customers not a cold mechanical approach.

If colleagues find themselves in difficulty because of their own or the customer's feelings, these should be discussed at the earliest opportunity with the line manager.

- 2.9: Personal Disclosure: Personal disclosure can be a powerful and appropriate tool in supporting our customers. However there are some pitfalls to be aware of; Staff should only disclose information that they are comfortable with, there is absolutely no expectation for a member of staff to have to disclose any personal information to a customer. Staff should consider for who's benefit a personal disclosure is taking place the customer or their own. Staff are reminded not to breach the Association confidentiality policy.

3) RELATIONSHIP WITH COLLEAGUES/ TEAM WORKING

In order to enable the delivery of high quality and effective services the establishment and maintenance of professional, co-operative and open relationships with colleagues is essential. Likewise, an individual worker's responsibility to contribute constructively to effective team practices and procedures is paramount.

It should be noted that a failure to communicate with and support co-workers is a major contributory factor in many instances of risk and dangerous/violent behaviours at work.

The following values and principles should underpin all aspects of practice in relation to boundaries and professional practice with individual colleagues and the team.

- 3.1: Teamwork: Every staff member should actively try to maximise team performance and contribute positively to team performance. It is their responsibility to make their individual contributions to the general well being of the team. If they are unhappy they have a responsibility to deal with this in a professional manner employing if necessary appropriate organisational procedures.
- 3.2: Honest and Open Approach: Teamwork involves learning how to communicate with one another and to resolve any difference, difficulties and grievances in an open and constructive way. In any team there are inevitably differences of attitude, view, personality and competencies, which need to be addressed openly and honestly. If this isn't achieved appropriately, there is a risk of team members feeling put down or bullied by a colleagues or factions in a team. This division can only damage the work that is carried out by the team and could lead to action under the disciplinary, grievance or harassment procedures.
- 3.3 Managing Personal Conflict: From time to time personal conflict will occur within the workplace. This inevitable fact requires all staff and managers to respond in a professional and constructive way. It is not acceptable for any party to 'blow up', to shout, intimidate, or abuse each other in public or in private. Your expects its staff and managers to resolve conflict in a way which is constructive and enabling.

In seeking to resolve conflict staff and managers should employ the recognised principles of giving and receiving constructive feedback. Where this is not possible or such an approach has failed, staff or managers should use the Grievance or Harassment Procedures. Failure to adopt a constructive and professional approach to conflict may result in disciplinary action. Guidelines on giving and receiving feedback are appended to this document as appendix 3.

3.4 Specific Examples of Acceptable and Unacceptable practice:

Staff should aim to:

- Stick to what you have agreed to do, inform colleagues or your manager if unable to complete any agreed task – don't leave others to pick up the pieces.
- Recognise that it is legitimate to report unacceptable conduct and practice to the line manager, especially if there are suspected breaches of Health & Safety or Equal Opportunities policies.
- Be open and honest when difficulties arise. Do not sit on grievances, leave issues un-addressed or gossip about other staff members or customers with others.
- Never 'blow up', shout or abuse a colleague in public or in private.
- Respect a colleague's knowledge and expertise within their field.
- Never isolate, marginalise or otherwise bully a colleague.
- Raise any issues where there are differences of opinion with colleagues in an appropriate manner e.g. privately and in confidence.
- Keep relationships within the working environment strictly professional.
- Never intentionally withhold information from a colleague, which they need to know or which would assist them in the efficient, productive and safe running of the service.

3.4 Working For External Organisations

It is important that all Your staff are able to carryout their duties without conflict or confusion and in a manner that is healthy and sustainable for themselves and the organisation.

Therefore all staff must declare all additional paid and voluntary activity that they undertake in addition to their work at Your Housing on the organisations Declaration of Interests Form (Appendix 4).

The purpose of the declaration of interest is to:

- Protect the integrity of Your Housing
- The interests of the employee
- Ensure that Your Housing complies with employment law such as The European Working Time Directive

Your housing will seek to formally agree secondary activities with its staff, but can not guarantee to do so in all cases and will if necessary review its agreements with individuals in the light of experience.

4) RELATIONSHIPS/CONDUCT WITH OTHER AGENCIES AND PROFESSIONALS

The establishment and maintenance of professional relationships with partner agencies and individuals is essential to ensure that our customers obtain the best possible range of services. In their dealings with other agencies staff are representing both the organisation and customers.

Staff should:

- Always remember that they are representing the reputation of Your Housing when working with partner agencies and professionals and therefore should conduct themselves in a professional manner.
- Discuss only relevant information keeping this concise and accurate, avoiding anecdote and gossip.
- Dress appropriately for the working environment e.g. smart casual appearance and ensure a good standard of personal hygiene.
- Ensure any issues that may impact on confidentiality are discussed with their line manager prior to meetings/events.
- Never represent the service or organisation or its customers in a negative light.
- Staff will have personal views which may differ from the approach Your Housing takes on specific issues, however, staff are expected to present and support the organisation's viewpoint, and not present personal views under Your's name. Staff are required to seek clarification from their line manager if they're unclear about our position on a particular issue and use supervision to explore complicated issues they may be expected to respond to.
- Conflicts of interest arising between staff, customers and other professionals are expected to be addressed openly and professionally.

5) RELATIONSHIPS WITH SUPPLIERS AND FINANCIAL CONDUCT

Your Housing, its staff and managers are privileged to enjoy the trust of the public (through our funding) and the trust of our customers (through our work). It is therefore important that we act at all times with probity, and openness in our dealings with suppliers and the conduct of financial affairs. To achieve a consistent level of probity and openness procedures will be defined covering:

- The association's financial regulations.
- A process of audit and review
- A process for approving external suppliers
- A method for staff to declare secondary employment or interests (Appendix 4)
- Guidance on unacceptable financial transactions with customers

All of these procedures and regulations will be subject to continuous review and staff are expected to be active in ensuring that up to date procedures are

followed, and that they behave in a way that upholds the spirit as well as the letter of the procedures and regulations.

This policy was adopted by Karin in October 2006.

Where staff are unsure how a procedure or regulation should be applied, or whether an action or request is permissible should seek guidance through their line management.

Appendix 1: Examples of acceptable and unacceptable practice

Appendix 2: A simple model relating to professional boundaries

Appendix 3: Guidelines for giving and receiving constructive criticism

Appendix 4: Declaration of interests

(Attached)

Appendix 1

SPECIFIC EXAMPLES OF ACCEPTABLE AND UNACCEPTABLE PRACTICE:

How the values referred to in section 2 translate into practice is illustrated by the following examples of acceptable and unacceptable conduct. This list is intended as guidance and is not exhaustive.

1) **Financial Transactions etc.:**

- No financial transactions, buying, selling, exchanging or bartering, should take place between workers and customers, e.g. – agreeing to put a customer's personal cheques/giros through your account.
- Staff would not normally lend their personal money or possessions to customers
- Staff must not borrow personal money or possessions from customers
- Staff would not usually give or accept personal presents or offers of labour from customers. Where it would offend to refuse, a small gift may be accepted on behalf of the team and shared with colleagues.
- Staff should not mix their personal finances with the finances of Your Housing, examples would be:
 - Purchasing goods through the Association's purchasing process.
 - Borrowing the Association's money
 - Claiming expenses not due, or in a way that is not defined by the financial regulations
 - Promise to put in a good word for an external supplier.
 - Contract an external supplier to carry out work privately with prior discussion with their line manager.

2) **Relationship/Contact with Customers Outside of Work:**

- Staff would not normally allow customers to visit their homes or encourage customers to develop relationships with their) friends or family members.
- There will be occasions when staff know someone who is referred socially, or in some other connection – in these circumstances, it would be necessary to always inform the line manager.
- Out of hours social contacts should be kept to minimum. Staff who bump into customers out of hours should be pleasant and civil, if approached, but should generally discourage prolonged social contact. Where this does occur, a note of the encounter should be entered into the case file.
- Staff should never enter into anything but a professional relationship with customers. The development of a sexual relationship will be treated as gross misconduct and is likely to be grounds for dismissal.
- Staff should not use inappropriate language with customers e.g. referring to them by pet names, in terms of endearment, or in ways which are demeaning.

- Staff should never overstep professional boundaries and confuse befriending with friendship. All workers should be aware of the difference between befriending a customer (which is a professional relationship, which is made to meet the customer's needs), and becoming a customer's friend (which is a relationship which meets the needs of both parties). Befriending is an appropriate relationship for workers, and part of building the necessary trust to work with customers. Becoming a friend is inappropriate for a worker/customer relationship as this may lead to favouritism or the customer trying to meet the support worker's emotional needs.
- It should be noted that the blurring of these boundaries can potentially lead to the development of negative relationships which can put staff at risk of allegations of improper conduct even if this was not intended.

3) **Respect**

- Staff should address or refer to customers by the names they wish to be called.
- Patronising behaviour or remarks that consciously or unwittingly demean other people should be challenged.
- Labelling or stereotyping of customers/ groups should not occur.
- Racist or discriminatory remarks or behaviour from whatever source must be challenged.
- Staff should respect everyone as individuals and for their differences.
- "Gossip" or hearsay should not feature as an aspect of service culture and should be actively discouraged among both staff and customers.
- Staff should be extremely cautious about physical contact (e.g. comforting a person when they're distressed).
- Staff should never share personal details about other staff or customers with other customers.

4) **Illegal Activities/ Collusion (at work)**

- Staff should not participate in any illegal activities e.g. buying stolen goods or allowing them to be kept on the premises or smoking a joint, etc.
- Staff should not collude with customers by deliberately ignoring illegal activities or breaches in their tenancy agreements. Your Housing does operate a harm reduction approach in relation or drugs use but this complies with the legal situation and training opportunities are provided on this area.

5) Providing Advice

- All advice offered by workers should be as non-directive as possible and should provide options to enable the customer to reach their own informed choices.
- Workers should maintain an awareness of areas where they are not qualified to give advice or they feel it is not appropriate to offer advice. In these instances they should inform the customer of this, making every effort to assist them in accessing appropriate/qualified advice e.g. referring them or accompanying them to another agency.
- Generally advice should be only given at the request of the customer. If the support worker is concerned about some behaviour or activity of the customer on which advice has not been sought (e.g. a potentially exploitative relationship), they should offer their concerns and advice in a non-judgemental way.

6) Confidentiality

- Workers should maintain customers' confidentiality: information confided should not be made available to other customers or to individuals outside the organisation. The information can, and sometimes should, be shared within the organisation, however, and the customer should be made aware of this. Limits on confidentiality should be explained to customers on their introduction to the Service.
- Customers should be aware that all workers cannot keep knowledge of suspected illegal activity confidential.
- Workers should not disclose customer's names, whereabouts or occupancy to outside callers without their permission to do so. This includes previous customers, family, friends etc.
(Please refer to the Confidentiality Policy for further guidance.)

7) Staff Relationships

- Work is a large part of our lives, and it is accepted that close friendships and relationship will be formed, and broken. Staff should conduct their inter-relationships at work on a friendly but professional basis. Displays of animosity, personal affection or privilege, sexualised behaviour or banter is not appropriate.
- The requirement for staff to behave in a friendly professional way extends to all cases of Association business including away days, training or conferences. This does not mean that staff at an appropriate point cannot 'let their hair down' or relax and enjoy themselves, but such activity should be appropriate to the context of the occasion.
- Care should be taken in carrying out extra circula activities, particularly where they might directly or indirectly effect or involve a customer. Examples of such activities are the promotion of political

or campaigning events, the running of lottery syndicates, book clubs or charitable fund raising activities. Permission should be obtained from you line manager, and the association can and will withdraw permission if it considers it to be in the best interest of the customer or the association.

Appendix 3

Guidelines for Delivering Constructive Criticism

Sometimes we need to criticise an individual at work or socially. Being a constructive critic is a key workplace skill. It enables us to take responsibility for dealing with difficult problems within a team or with individuals.

The following guidelines for the critic and the criticize will help.

Guidelines for the Critic

- Criticise the act, not the person.
- First empathise, then criticise as you develop a criticism strategy or response, try to understand the perspective of the person being criticised.
- Think it through. Don't just shoot from the lip. This may mean not saying anything at all until you have mentally rehearsed your delivery and envisioned the receiver's response.
- Keep your comments at a professional and intellectual level, not at an emotional level.
- Concentrate on the solution, not placing blame.
- Criticise in private. Make sure you are not overheard.
- Get the facts straight. Make sure the criticism is warranted.
- Direct your criticism to the present ("here and now") rather than the past ("there and then").
- Make sure your criticism is specific, focus on behaviours - Inaccurate, lateness, missing a deadline, or the absence of a behaviour - didn't communicate changes, didn't let managers know of a problem.
- Criticise without comparison. Broad, unfavourable comparisons are unfair and avoid the real problem. The receiver will correctly ignore your inaccurate and unfair criticism and an issue will be made worse rather than be resolved.
- Emphasise in your criticism your perceptions and feelings. Indicate what you think and feel about the other's behaviour that you have described. Use "I" statements.
- Invite a collaborative discussion of consequences rather than offering advice. Form a partnership to deal with problems. Do not compete with the other party; compete with the other person against the problem.
- Avoid critical overload. Give the other an amount of critical feedback that she or he can handle or understand at that time.
- Invite the other person to present criticism of you.

Guidelines for the Criticised

- Recognise the value of constructive criticism. Such criticism can improve relationships and productivity.
 - Engage in perspective taking or role reversal. Try to understand the perspective of the person offering criticism.
 - Acknowledge criticism that focuses on your behaviour. Attempt to transform criticism that seems directed at your "person" to specific behavioural issues.
 - Listen actively. Even though criticism may hurt, seek to understand accurately the criticism being presented.
- a. Paraphrase what the other is saying.
- b. Ask questions to increase understanding.
- c. Check out nonverbal displays (check your perceptions).
- Work hard to avoid becoming defensive. Resist any tendency to want to dismiss criticism or retaliate.
 - Welcome criticism; use the criticism appropriate to improve.
 - Maintain your interpersonal power and authority to make your own decisions. Criticism, when directed at one's "person," may weaken one's resolve. Focus the other's criticism on your actions. Seek ownership of solutions.
 - Insist on valid criticism. Valid criticism: (a) addresses behaviours, (b) is timely, and (c) is specific.
 - Communicate clearly how you feel and think about the criticism and receiving criticism. Use "I" messages.
 - If you can thank someone for good accurate criticism, it is a difficult thing to do. Good criticism helps us all to solve issues, learn and develop such action deserves thanks.

This policy was adopted by Karim in October 2006.

Person Responsible for the review of this policy:
Date of this review:
Date Board approved:
Date next review is due:

Ibrahim Ali
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