

# **Managing Personal Relationships at Work**

## **Guidance**

## **GUIDANCE ON MANAGING PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AT WORK**

### **1. PURPOSE**

- 1.1 It is acknowledged that a significant proportion of close personal relationships are formed at work. In the majority of cases, this is unlikely to give rise to any issues for the council. However, the council recognises that in some cases the potential for conflict of interest can arise or be perceived by others to arise.
- 1.2 For the purposes of this guidance, a close personal relationship is defined as a:
- close personal friendship (ie a relationship going beyond that normally found between work colleagues)
  - family relationship
  - romantic/sexual relationship
- 1.3 This guidance will assist managers to deal effectively with situations where employees have, or form, close personal relationships with colleagues. It also provides guidance to employees on their conduct and seeks to protect employees against the potential problems which can arise from close personal relationships at work, which might include:
- actual or perceived breaches of confidentiality
  - accusations or perceptions of bias, favouritism, prejudice, unprofessionalism or unfairness
  - lack of trust and confidence in relation to discussions within a team or with a line manager

### **2. LINKS TO OTHER COUNCIL POLICIES**

#### Code of Conduct

- 2.1 Employees engaged in a close personal relationship with a colleague must ensure that their actions are not in breach of the council's [Code of Conduct](#) for employees which states:
- 'As an employee of West Lothian Council, you must not allow any private interest to influence your decisions'.
  - 'You must not use your position to further your own interests or the interests of others who do not have a right to benefit under the council's policies'.
  - 'If you are involved in the recruitment and selection process, and have any kind of relationship which might affect your ability to be impartial, that relationship must be declared to your line manager. Your line manager will decide whether you can participate in the recruitment and selection process. The same procedure must be followed in matters relating to discipline, grievance, job evaluation and appraisal development reviews'.

2.2 The Nominated Officer's Disciplinary Guidance is aligned with the Code of Conduct for employees and states:

- 'In the interest of a fair and transparent process, the officer appointed to investigate a complaint must have the scope and authority to act independently of the Nominated Officer and should not be directly line managed by that person nor compromised through personal friendship'.

### Bullying & Harassment

2.2 This guidance has been prepared in accordance with the council's [Code of Practice on Promoting Appropriate Working Relationships and Behaviour](#) which reinforces the obligations that all employees have to their fellow employees in promoting a working environment that is supportive, equitable and free from discrimination.

## **3. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

3.1 Conflicts of interest are of particular concern where an employee has authority to exert power or influence over matters in relation to a colleague with whom they have a close personal relationship.

3.2 An employee who is potentially in that position and who is engaged in a close personal relationship with a colleague (in the same team or within a related area) should advise his/her line manager. Where the personal relationship is with an employee's line manager, the declaration should be made to their line manager's superior.

3.3 The line manager will consider any resulting risks or conflicts of interest and advise the relevant parties of any action to be taken as appropriate.

3.4 Employees uncertain about whether they are required to declare a close personal relationship should seek advice in confidence from Human Resources.

3.5 To ensure impartiality and fairness, another member of line management should be appointed to make decisions and grant authorisation in relation to:

- any **recruitment, selection or appointment** process where a close personal relationship exists with an applicant
- **appraisal development reviews** where a close personal relationship exists with the subject of the review
- any **disciplinary process** where a close personal relationship exists with the subject of a disciplinary investigation/hearing
- any **grievance process** where a close personal relationship exists with the employee raising the grievance
- any **job evaluation process or other pay related decision** where a close personal relationship exists with an employee likely to benefit financially
- **approval of annual leave, flexi-time, mileage and other expenses** for an individual with whom a personal relationship exists

3.6 Other conflicts of interest which may arise and require consideration include:

- where employees in a close personal relationship are involved in the financial transactions of the council, arrangements should be made to ensure appropriate separation of duties and other financial safeguards
- potential confidentiality issues and the impact on the perceptions and employee relations within the team
- impact on service users or the public, including issues relating to trust and confidence and the public image of the council

This is not an exhaustive list. The line manager will consider the circumstances and appropriate action in each case.

#### **4 GENERAL CONDUCT**

4.1 Employees engaged in a close personal relationship with a colleague must conduct themselves professionally at all times while at work. Overt displays of affection or disputes which might cause others discomfort or embarrassment must be avoided.

4.2 Where a personal relationship breaks down, employees may have to continue working together and professional conduct must be maintained even where tensions exist out with the workplace.

#### **5. CONFIDENTIALITY**

5.1 Employees engaged in a close personal relationship with a colleague are reminded of their obligations to the council, its clients/customers and other colleagues regarding confidentiality.

5.2 Managers privy to information about a close personal relationship amongst members of staff should respect the privacy of those individuals and maintain confidentiality where possible. However, disclosure of the close personal relationship, to team members or other employees affected, may be necessary to avoid any perception of unfair treatment and to explain any alternative working arrangements.