

***Policies & Procedures***

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Policy No. 104 **Professional Boundaries**

**[June 2005] [Reviewed Nov 2006] (June 2008) April 2009 April 2010 April 2011**

*Policies & Procedures are to be read and signed in the central policy file every six months*

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**Policy Document attached**

Dated 1<sup>st</sup> April 2011

*Business Improvement Manager*

Sheltered Housing Services

Review April 2012

**Wiltshire Council**  
**Sheltered Housing**  
**PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES POLICY**

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

1.1 Professional Boundaries serve to protect the health, safety and welfare of clients, many of whom may be vulnerable.

1.2 However, boundaries are also necessary

- To protect staff from undue pressure or allegations from clients
- To enable staff to better undertake their role by finding the right balance between compassion and professionalism
- To enable staff to deliver a fair service to all clients without accusations of favouritism
- To provide consistency across all activities

1.3 Setting and maintaining boundaries should also be seen as part of the standard expectation of partner agencies as well as upholding Wiltshire Council's own values.

## **2.0 SCOPE**

2.1 This policy applies to all staff (full-time, part-time and temporary)

2.2 For the purpose of this policy a client is someone for whom we are providing support or a service and includes:

- Any tenant or resident in accommodation owned or managed by Wiltshire Council
- Any person receiving outreach support
- Someone enquiring about or applying for our services

## **3.0 GENERAL BOUNDARIES**

3.1 In order to maintain professional working relationships, you must adhere to the following guidelines. You must:

- Never ask clients for personal information unrelated to your work
- Never disclose inappropriate personal information about yourself (such as your home address, personal telephone numbers)
- Never take clients to your home
- Never disclose personal information about other clients or third parties.
- Never be complicit in or engage in illegal activities nor encourage clients to do so.

## **4.0 FINANCIAL BOUNDARIES AND GIFTS**

4.1 Where money or gifts are concerned the following guidelines apply:

- Never buy items from clients or sell items to them unless this is on behalf of Wiltshire Council, or sell items on behalf of clients.
- Never make personal gifts or donations to clients unless they are on behalf of Wiltshire Council.
- Never accept or solicit personal gifts or rewards from clients. However, where refusal is likely to offend, all accepted gifts over the value of £5.00 must be declared to your Line Manager.
- Never lend money or personal property to clients.
- Always provide a receipt for any payments received from clients

4.2 Cash gifts from clients must never be accepted. Where clients propose to make other types of gifts, these should be politely declined. However, if refusal is likely to offend, personal gifts may be accepted but must be declared to your Line Manager.

4.3 All gifts over £5.00 in value should be declared to your Line Manager who may direct the return of any valuable gift or require its use for the benefit of a scheme rather than the individual to whom it was given.

4.4 Staff must never engage in conversation with a resident about the contents of their Will, other than to advise that they should have one and to seek independent advice from a relative or friend, a solicitor, or an appropriate agency such as the CAB, or on the DirectGov website which includes advice on issues such as Living Wills.

([http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Governmentcitizensandrights/Death/Preparation/DG\\_10029429](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Governmentcitizensandrights/Death/Preparation/DG_10029429)) To avoid any involvement with wills at all, staff should politely decline to even act as a witness to a will, while explaining the reason.

## **5.0 VERBAL BOUNDARIES**

5.1 Staff must always treat clients fairly, courteously and with respect in line with Wiltshire Council's values and policies. Language which is discriminatory, demeaning, sexually suggestive or insulting, must never be used.

5.2 In order not to risk eroding the professional staff-client relationship, staff should also be careful not to use overly familiar language, endearments or nicknames with clients nor must they encourage clients to address them or other colleagues using such language.

## **6.0 PHYSICAL BOUNDARIES**

6.1 Offering someone physical support through touch, such as a hug, is often seen as a humane or sympathetic way of dealing with someone's joy or distress.

6.2 Staff need to be aware that allegations could be made of inappropriate or misconstrued physical contact. Hence, it is recommended that all staff:

- Avoid invading someone's personal space if this could be misunderstood by the client or seen by them as threatening.
- Physical contact should only be used for defensive purposes – to break free of a problem situation. An exception to this may be when someone is very upset, for example over a bereavement, when natural human sympathy may make a hug appropriate, however even here caution should be exercised.
- Retaliation, physical punishment or physical restraint must be avoided. Unreasonable physical responses by a staff member who is obviously stronger than a client may lead to injury.
- Never administer first aid even if you have attended a recognised training course– refer to policy 113.
- Never give medical advice but always refer medical problems to qualified health professionals.
  - Where staff experience difficulty in following the guidelines or they feel a situation is developing with a client, which could lead to a boundaries problem, they must discuss their concerns with their Line Manager as soon as possible.
  - Where staff feel that they have breached boundaries guidelines, they must report the matter to their Line Manager or personnel without delay.

6.3 Where clients initiate contact, for example by putting their arms around you, staff must slowly and politely break free. Whilst doing so it is recommended that eye contact and supportive conversation should be maintained. Gently holding the person's hand in front of you until it is appropriate to let go completely is also considered to be good practice.

## **7.0 SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS**

7.1 Staff should never respond to or engage in flirting with clients – whether innocent or otherwise.

7.2 Staff must never knowingly enter into intimate relationships with clients, whether you work directly with them or not.

7.3 It is unacceptable for staff to engage in improper behaviour that could lead to a sexual relationship developing.

## **8.0 ABUSE AND NEGLECT**

8.1 It is unacceptable for staff to mistreat or abuse any client, specifically:

- Physical abuse (hitting, kicking, burning, physical chastisement, inappropriate restraint).
- Emotional abuse (intimidation, humiliation, denying dignity, coercion threats, verbal abuse, racial abuse, discriminatory behaviour or harassment).

- Sexual abuse (sexual assault, rape, inappropriate physical contact, sexual innuendo).
- Neglect / Deprivation (deliberate withholding of services, avoidable exposure to risk of harm).
- Imposed isolation or confinement.
- Financial abuse (fraud, theft, unwarranted confiscation or misuse of clients goods or monies, blackmail, extortion or coercion).

8.2 It is the duty and responsibility of every staff member to safeguard all of our clients and to prevent any form of abuse or neglect of those they come into contact with. Staff must report any concerns in line with set policies.

## **9.0 OUTSIDE WORK**

9.1 Off duty staff should, wherever practicable, avoid situations where their responsibilities to the Council and its clients conflict with their private interests.

9.2 Staff should not knowingly arrange to meet clients off-duty or to take them home. Where you do meet clients outside of work in a social situation, please remember the general advice given above. Where you find yourself in a situation where you see clients outside work on a frequent basis, you should declare this to your Line Manager or Personnel. They will discuss with you any potential conflict of interest and any other implications for the Council.

## **10.0 TRAINING AND AWARENESS**

10.1 Training will be provided for existing staff to introduce / reinforce these guidelines. Training for new staff will be provided through induction and by their Line Managers.

10.2 Managers should also promote a culture of professional boundaries within their teams by including the subject as a regular item for discussion in one to one and team meetings.

## **11.0 BREACHING PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES**

11.1 Where staff have witnessed a colleague breaching boundaries guidelines in a minor way, they should point this out to their colleague informally. **However, where the breach is more serious you should report the matter to your Line Manager, head of department or personnel without delay**

11.2 Failure to follow this policy (including failure to make a declaration of interest) may result in disciplinary procedures being instituted. In serious cases, staff could be found guilty of gross misconduct and will be liable for dismissal.

11.3 The Council is obliged to notify Social Services and / or the police where there is reasonable suspicion of the abuse or neglect of individual service users, or other members of their household.