

Policy

Professional Conduct and Boundaries

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Important notice:
Printed paper copies of this procedure are **uncontrolled**.
The current version of this procedure is available on the SHG Intranet site

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2	July 2009	Replaces Statement of Professional Conduct and Boundaries (SCP) Feb 05 (346) and Professional Boundaries Statement (Independent Living) April 08 (283)	8.9.09 14.9.09	P Watts	C. Sledge (SHA) A Murphy (SCP)

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1. Purpose

This policy applies to Signpost Housing Association and Signpost Care Partnerships' (the Associations) staff and the professional conduct which is required in undertaking their duties.

This policy underpins the Spectrum Housing Group Code of Conduct and provides guidance in relation to the discharge of the Associations' professional responsibilities and applies to situations where a position of responsibility may be open to conflicts of interest, rules, values and principles.

This policy has been developed to ensure the Associations comply with current legislation, Tenant Services Authority Standards, Housing Corporation guidance and good practice.

The Associations strive to achieve the Spectrum Group mission:

'To be recognised and respected for providing quality homes and services. Empowering people, supporting active communities and building better futures'.

This policy supports the Associations' overarching plans and strategies to deliver quality services and ensure accessibility to these services for all the Association's customers.

2. Definitions

2.1 Legislation, Regulatory and Good Practice Requirements

- Department of Health, 'No Secrets' guidance
- Housing Act 1996, Schedule 1
- Housing Corporation Regulatory Code
- Housing Corporation Good Practice Note, May 2007: Maintaining Standards of Probity
- Human Rights Act 1998
- National Housing Federation Code of Conduct
- Protection from Harassment Act 1997

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- Supporting People Quality Assessment Framework.

2.2 Relationship with other Strategies, Polices and Procedures

- Access and Customer Care Strategy (SHA/SCP)
- Confidentiality, Privacy and Data Protection Policy (SHG)
- Customer Feedback Policy and Procedure (SHA/SCP)
- Health and Safety Policy (SHG)
- Hospitality and Gifts Policy (SHG)
- Housing Support Services Policy (SHA/SCP)
- Lone Worker Policy (SHG)
- Safeguarding and Protection from Abuse, Vulnerable Adults and Children Policy and procedure (SHA/SCP)
- Support Needs and Risk Assessment Procedure
- Staff Handbook, Code of Conduct (SHG)
- Whistle Blowing Policy (SHG).

3. Statement of Professional Conduct and Boundaries

3.1 Professional conduct

Staff are expected to conduct themselves in a professional manner at all times. The relationship between a member of staff and residents/clients must be based on respect, mutual trust and confidence.

Staff are expected to protect the interests of the organisation, residents and clients at all times.

Personal relationships between staff and residents/clients should not be allowed to present real problems in observing and maintaining the boundaries of a staff member's professional and personal life. The effect of such relationships can undermine the provision of a safe and supportive environment in which residents/clients and other staff feel empowered.

All staff are responsible for their own behaviour and for ensuring that they respect the resident/clients diverse needs and the right to be treated with respect and dignity.

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All staff have an absolute responsibility to recognise and respect the boundaries and moral obligations of their roles.

Staff need to be aware there is a potential for an unequal balance of power in the relationship staff have with residents/clients which can lead to an abuse of that power by a member of staff.

3.2 Responsibility for professional conduct

All staff must recognise their personal, professional and ethical responsibility to protect the interests of residents or clients, to respect the trust involved in this relationship and to accept the constraints and obligations inherent in that responsibility. Staff must observe the Spectrum Housing Group Code of Conduct which details the responsibilities of staff during the course of their employment and includes:

- having regard to the reputation and interest of the Group
- conducting their personal and professional life in a way which does not risk adversely affecting the Group's standing and reputation
- striving for the highest standards of care and attention in their work
- complying with all statutory requirements and at all times work within the law
- bringing to the attention of the Group any departure from legal and statutory requirements which may be encountered in the course of their duties
- respecting the confidentiality of any information acquired during the course of their employment
- never abusing their position by accepting inducements or bribe
- working within the terms and conditions of their employment.

3.3 Communication

To ensure information/communication is clear and not misunderstood, and all residents or clients have equal access to the information available. All staff have a responsibility to ensure that any specific communication needs are identified and appropriate communication methods are agreed with the resident or client.

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3.4 Relationships with residents/clients

To embark on a romantic, physical or sexual relationship with a resident or client can present serious risks and conflicts of interest, particularly for members of staff who are involved in the direct provision of support or other housing related services. The risks to the member of staff may include:

- allegations of sexual harassment
- accusations of favouritism from other residents/clients
- conflict of interests.

3.5 Reporting relationships with residents or clients

A member of staff who has a direct involvement in the provision of support or other housing-related services may have, or become, involved in a personal relationship with a resident or client. This may be of a romantic, physical or sexual nature, or may be a relationship that is such that it may potentially impact on the service to the resident or client. In these circumstances the member of staff must, in the first instance, disclose this to their line manager. Following any such disclosure the line manager will consider what action should be taken which may include:

- actions to prevent any further conflict of interest
- actions to reduce risk to the resident/client
- actions to reduce risk to the member of staff.

3.6 Conflicts of interest

Staff must not put themselves in a position where their duty to Spectrum Housing Group and their personal interest's conflict and they must not benefit in any way from their connection with the Spectrum Housing Group outside of their contract of employment.

Schedule 1 of the Housing Act 1996 contains legal measures to prevent the Associations' board members, officials and staff from abusing their authority. The effect is to limit the payments made/benefits granted to members, officials, employees and their close relatives or businesses that they own or manage.

All staff are responsible for reporting any conflicts of interest in accordance with the Spectrum Housing Group Schedule 1 Policy and Procedure and Staff

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Code of Conduct.

3.6.1 Failure to disclose information

If a member of staff does not disclose a romantic, sexual or other relationship which may impact on the service to the resident or client, the Associations will initiate action in accordance with the Spectrum Housing Group Disciplinary Policy and Procedure.

3.7 Reporting of staff

Residents or clients who are, or have been, involved in a romantic, physical or sexual relationship, or other relationship with a member of staff, which may impact on the integrity of the service received have the right to, and are encouraged to, report this through the Safeguarding and Protection from Abuse, Vulnerable Adults and Children Policy and Procedure, and the Customer Feedback Policy and Procedure.

3.8 Professional boundaries

As frontline service provider's, staff must achieve and maintain effective professional working relationships with residents or clients, their families and other support networks. Integrity, objectivity, equality and professionalism are the key watchwords that provide a framework for professional conduct.

Staff have a responsibility to be fully aware of the Code of Conduct detailed within the Spectrum Housing Group staff handbook.

3.8.1 Maintaining professional boundaries

The Associations are aware that professional boundaries may not always be easy to maintain, however staff are required to act appropriately at all times when undertaking their employment duties which include:

- maintaining the Associations' responsibilities to the residents, clients and families
- maintaining the Associations' responsibilities towards the communities within which the Associations work
- being courteous, efficient and impartial to provide equality of service delivery all groups and individuals
- not to allowing any personal relationship with a resident or client to conflict with the required duties of employment or the best interests of the resident or client

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- being aware of their actions and considering if others could misinterpret any actions or innocent intentions.

Examples of instances where professional boundaries may be breached include:

- where a relationship with a resident or client may compromise, or take advantage of the staff member's position
- the staff member invites or influences a resident or client to make a will or trust under which the staff member is named as executor, trustee or beneficiary
- the staff member holds a Power of Attorney, or is the personal representative of a resident or client
- handling or managing a residents or clients finances or valuables, including the collection of pensions/benefits and advice on, or maintenance of financial accounts. Contact details of appropriate advisory agencies such as Citizens Advice Bureau or Age Concern should be provided to the resident/client.
- accepting gifts of money or personal valuables which must only be accepted in accordance with the Spectrum Housing Group Hospitality and Gifts Policy and Procedure
- administering any medication at any time to a resident or client
- collection of prescriptions, which should only be undertaken in an emergency situation, and where no other alternative is available, following authorisation from the line manager
- acting in any way which could result in personal benefit, either financially or materially.

3.9 Training

The Associations will ensure staff have ongoing training with regard to professional boundaries and associated policies and procedures. Training will include:

- issuing the Spectrum Housing Group Code of Conduct to all members of staff
- ensuring specific training on the Professional Conduct and Boundaries Policy is undertaken as part of the planned induction programme for new staff

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- ensuring best practice, new legislation and case law is disseminated to relevant staff and is communicated effectively by either service area team meetings, Operational Management Team briefings, legal briefings or the internal intranet
- identifying on-going training needs and arranging appropriate training for staff, residents and Board members.

3.10 Monitoring and Control

Professional conduct of staff will be reviewed on a regular basis by the Housing Services Managers and Housing Support Services Managers as part of regular staff performance reviews.

3.11 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

This policy has been developed to ensure the Associations provide equality of access and service delivery and includes:

- ensuring that no customer is disadvantaged irrespective of their race, gender (including gender reassignment), religion or belief, colour, ethnic or national origin, sexual orientation, marital status, age, disability, or social position in accordance with Spectrum Housing Group Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy
- ensuring specific communication or support requirements and equal access to the service is available.

3.12 Equality Impact Assessment

This policy has had an equality impact assessment that has identified that this policy does not discriminate either directly or indirectly and does not disadvantage any individual or group.

3.13 Responsible Officers

The Divisional Director Housing Services, Signpost Housing Association, and the Divisional Director Support Services, Signpost Care Partnerships will be responsible for monitoring and implementing this statement.

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