

Professional Boundaries

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1. **Introduction**

- 1.1. This document sets out Keystage Housing policy principles and good practice guidelines on professional boundaries with individuals.
- 1.2. Friendships may develop between individuals and employees. Any relationship between a service user and an employee should be limited to a professional relationship. In other words, any relationship between a service user and an employee which is likely to jeopardise business relations in Keystage Housing is not acceptable. Employees must use their common sense to avoid any actual relationships.
- 1.3. It is recognised that staff must establish a rapport with individuals and provide support that optimises the potential for individuals to meet their basic human needs and rights. However, staff are responsible for ensuring that they establish and maintain appropriate professional boundaries between themselves and individuals.
- 1.4. This guidance applies to all contact with individuals, families and colleagues and should be incorporated into day-to-day support practices.
- 1.5. The Company therefore recognises this policy as an expectation of 'Reasonable Management Instruction' and expects all staff to abide by its contents.

2. **Responsibilities**

- 2.1. Managing Directors:
 - 2.1.1. For overseeing the implementation of this policy across its services.
- 2.2. Locality Managers, Deputy Managers, Service Managers and Senior Workers
 - 2.2.1. For ensuring all staff members are aware of this policy and procedure.
 - 2.2.2. For ensuring any breaches of the policy are reported and responded to appropriately.
- 2.3. Employees:
 - 2.3.1. All staff are individually responsible for applying and maintaining appropriate professional boundaries in their day-to-day work and for raising any associated issues or training needs with their line manager.

3. **Definitions**

- 3.1. Our intention is to achieve a shared understanding of acceptable and unacceptable practice, enabling us to apply clear and consistent standards across Keystage Housing service.

4. **Relationships with Individuals Inside of Work**

- 4.1. Befriending:
 - 4.1.1. Staff must never overstep professional boundaries and confuse befriending with friendship. All workers must be aware of the difference between:
 - 4.1.1.1. Befriending an individual – which is a professional relationship, made to meet individual's needs; and

- 4.1.1.2. Becoming an individual's friend – which is a relationship that focuses on the needs of both people. A professional relationship focuses solely on the needs of the individual we support.
- 4.1.2. Befriending is an appropriate relationship for staff, and part of building the necessary trust to work with individuals. Becoming a friend is inappropriate.
- 4.1.3. Staff are employed by Keystage Housing to work with individuals as part of the contract of employment and it is potentially an abuse of power to represent the relationship as a friendship.
- 4.1.4. Within the context of a befriending relationship, it is recognised that individuals with support may represent the relationship as a friendship; this should be monitored and reviewed to safeguard both parties by the Service Senior and Locality Management team.
- 4.2. Counselling:
 - 4.2.1. Similarly, staff must be aware of the difference between being a counsellor and using counselling skills (such as active listening with a non-judgmental approach) that are appropriate for the delivery of care and support. Counselling is not an appropriate role for staff unless you have been employed specifically to counsel, and your job description outlines the areas of work for you to cover as a professional counsellor.
 - 4.2.2. Where it is appropriate that a service user may be in need of counselling, they should be given advice and support on accessing other appropriate agencies.
- 4.3. Providing Advice:
 - 4.3.1. In general, advice should normally only be offered to individuals when they request it, unless there are good reasons to be more directive. Where you do offer more directive advice, for example in a situation where there is a potential for physical harm or danger, you should aim to do this in a non-judgmental manner. When you offer advice to individuals you should ensure that you provide sufficient information for individuals to make an informed choice.
 - 4.3.2. You should be aware of the areas in which you are not qualified to give advice and/or feel it is not appropriate for you to offer advice. You should seek advice from your manager to confirm the areas in which it would be appropriate for you to provide advice on.
 - 4.3.3. In these instances, you should inform the service user of this, making every effort to assist them in accessing appropriate and/or qualified advice.
- 4.4. Influence:
 - 4.4.1. Staff must be careful not to influence individuals with their own beliefs and personal values. Staff should also be aware of their potential to influence vulnerable and/or impressionable individuals.
 - 4.4.2. Although morality, religion and politics are common areas of conversation and individuals may wish to discuss their views with staff, staff should never promote or impose their own views.
- 4.5. Approachability:
 - 4.5.1. Staff should be seen as approachable, open to fair challenge and criticism, and available to engage in meaningful dialogue. They should not be seen as intimidating or inaccessible people. Individuals must not be discouraged from accessing support within agreed boundaries or from making complaints.
- 4.6. Privacy:

- 4.6.1. Staff must respect individuals' rights to privacy and be sensitive and responsive to any different personal and cultural needs for privacy that may arise.
- 4.7. Inappropriate Personal Disclosure:
 - 4.7.1. Staff must not divulge any personal information about themselves or other staff members. Staff need to ensure that they only disclose information that the service user has given permission to do so. Family members do not have an automatic right to information about their relatives, be aware and think before you speak.
 - 4.7.2. How would you feel if someone was talking about you without your permission! (Refer to the confidentiality policy for further clarity.) If in doubt, refer to your line manager.
- 4.8. Concealing Information:
 - 4.8.1. Staff must not conceal any information about individuals that could result in inconsistent practice or harm. This might include:
 - 4.8.1.1. personal information
 - 4.8.1.2. the intention of the service user to self-harm or harm others
 - 4.8.1.3. not reporting violent or critical incident/issues
 - 4.8.1.4. child protection issues
 - 4.8.1.5. not completing full records of service user interactions
 - 4.8.2. Keystage Housing operates organisation confidentiality; any information relating to service users is required to be recorded on the appropriate systems and service managers are required to lead on this and review regularly.
- 4.9. Touch:
 - 4.9.1. Keystage Housing staff should approach touching with great care and caution.
 - 4.9.2. Where touching does occur, it must take place within the specific local work instructions or professional boundaries within the service.
 - 4.9.3. Some individuals may misinterpret physical contact as affection outside the professional relationship. Individuals may also see physical contact as expressions or favouritism, for example where a staff member hugs one service user and not another. All staff should therefore be aware that physical contact risks being misunderstood, and it may result in staff being vulnerable to allegations of inappropriate professional behaviour.
 - 4.9.4. In all service contexts where touching occurs it must only take place within the context of a professional relationship and with the service user's agreement. The limits and boundaries for touch between staff and individuals should be fully described and documented.
 - 4.9.5. In those service contexts where touching is an integral part of service delivery, staff should discuss the subject regularly at staff meetings so as to ensure consistency and clarity of approach.
- 4.10. Communication:
 - 4.10.1. Staff must be conscious of the appropriate language and wording used during conversation; especially when using terms of endearment to avoid the context in which an individual may misinterpret it as affection outside of the professional relationship, expressions, or favouritism.

- 4.10.2. Staff must consider, before sharing personal experiences in order to build rapport, if this is of absolute necessity to do so; being that it may re-traumatise the individual and is not appropriate in the context of a professional relationship.
- 4.10.3. Staff must refrain from using profanity or aggressive language with or in front of service users; considering that they work within a professional setting and are representing the wider business.

4.11. Finances:

- 4.11.1. Staff must not enter into any financial transactions with individuals including buying, selling, exchanging or bartering goods or services.
- 4.11.2. Staff must not lend their personal money or possessions to individuals.
- 4.11.3. Staff must not borrow money or possessions from individuals.
- 4.11.4. Staff should not give or accept gifts from individuals.
- 4.11.5. Staff should not accept monetary charitable donations to the service without the prior agreement of line managers.
- 4.11.6. Staff should not normally handle money on behalf of individuals except in clearly defined work instructions. This information should be written into the individual's support plan/risk management plan; alongside a signed consent or agreement.
- 4.11.7. Staff should not agree to become trustees, beneficiaries or executors in relation to the wills of individuals.
- 4.11.8. Staff should not accept the service user paying for their meals unless management has been notified and agrees to this practice (time specific).
- 4.11.9. In supported living where a service user requests going for a meal or a staff member must support a service user going for a meal, in certain circumstances the service user may be allowed to pay for the staff members meal, however great care must be taken to ensure that this is the cheapest main meal on the menu, and only 1 drink is accepted. Prior to carrying out this practice staff must seek permission from their line manager.
- 4.11.10. Staff should, when supporting service users to travel should support service user's to look for the cheapest mode of transport. Use of employees' vehicles is not automatically endorsed and should be monitored by the Service Manager for compliance and appropriateness.

5. **Relationships with Individuals Outside of Work**

5.1. General:

- 5.1.1. Staff must not give individuals their personal contact details, for example postal address, telephone number, fax number, email address, etc.
- 5.1.2. Staff must not give individuals the personal contact details of any colleague.
- 5.1.3. Where members of staff know individuals prior to entering the service, the staff member must inform their line manager.
- 5.1.4. The staff member should not be given the role of the key worker. New members of staff starting work may find that they know existing individuals.
- 5.1.5. This should be brought to the attention of their line manager. The line manager will explore with the member of staff issues around confidentiality and risk assessment.

5.1.6. Staff who encounter individuals out of hours should be pleasant and civil if approached by the service user but should generally discourage prolonged social contact. Staff should not approach individuals in any social setting if the contact is not instigated by the service user, especially where the service user's behaviour indicates that they do not want to be recognised or indeed identified as a user of the service.

5.1.7. Staff must endeavour not to arrange out-of-hours contact with individuals.

5.2. Social Media

5.2.1. Staff must never seek out or accept a friend request from an individual whom uses our service.

5.2.2. Staff must report any attempts of individuals trying to befriend them on social media sites. If deemed appropriate, staff may need to block certain individuals.

5.3. Visiting Homes:

5.3.1. Staff must not allow individuals to visit their homes.

5.3.2. Staff must not encourage individuals to develop relationships with the staff member's relatives or friends.

6. Use of Social Media

6.1. Staff must never discuss company business, individuals or other staff members through private email or Instant messaging programs such as Messenger.

6.2. Staff must never discuss company business, individuals or other staff members using computers programs, such as Facebook.

6.3. Staff must never discuss company business, individuals or other staff members using text messaging on personal mobile phones.

6.4. Where any of the above does occur, the incident must be brought to the attention of the relevant line manager as soon as possible.

7. Discussing Others

7.1. Staff must not partake in 'Gossip' or hearsay; this should not feature as an aspect of service culture. Staff need to be aware that if people are taking part in gossip or hearsay then this should be actively discouraged among both staff and individuals. Staff need to be aware that this behaviour is likely to result in a disciplinary, it is also worth mentioning that management are often informed of the Gossip or hearsay and people involved.

7.2. Staff must never share personal details about other staff with individuals.

7.3. Staff must never discuss other staff members with individuals except on issues relating to housing management and/or care and support work.

7.4. Staff must never discuss individuals with other individuals and other third parties.

7.5. Where any of the above does occur, the incident must be brought to the attention of the relevant line manager as soon as possible.

8. Relationships between Staff Members

8.1. Keystage Housing recognises that employees who work together may form personal friendships and, in some cases, close personal relationships. Keystage Housing does not, as a general rule; wish to interfere with such personal friendships and relationships. However, it must also ensure that employees continue to behave in an



appropriate, professional and responsible manner at work and that they continue to fulfil their job duties both diligently and effectively. These rules are therefore aimed at striking a balance between your right to a private life and Keystage Housing's right to protect its business interests.

- 8.2. The following rules apply to employees embarking on close personal relationships at work, whether the relationship is with a fellow worker, stakeholder, supplier or contractor:
- 8.3. You must not allow your relationship to influence your conduct at work. Intimate behaviour during normal working hours or on Keystage Housing or stakeholder premises are prohibited. This includes holding hands, other close physical contact, discussions of a sexual nature or kissing.
- 8.4. If you embark on a relationship with another employee, you should declare this to your line manager as soon as reasonably practicable.
- 8.5. If you are a manager and you embark on a relationship with a more junior member of staff, you should declare this to the Operations Manager as soon as reasonably practicable. This is particularly important if you are the line manager of the employee because of the risk of the junior employee being afforded more favourable treatment, or less favourable treatment if the relationship subsequently breaks down. In order to avoid a situation where you have managerial authority over a junior member of staff with whom you are having a relationship, Keystage Housing reserves the right to elect to transfer one or both of you to a job on different shifts, either on a temporary basis or permanently. Keystage Housing will first consult with both of you to try and reach an amicable agreement on transfer.
- 8.6. If you begin a relationship with a stakeholder, supplier or contractor and allows the potential for you to abuse your level of authority, you must declare the relationship to your line manager or the Service Manager as soon as reasonably practicable. In these circumstances, Keystage Housing reserves the right to elect to transfer you to a job on a different shift where you will not be able to exert undue influence over the other party, either on a temporary basis or permanently. Keystage Housing will first consult with you to try and reach an amicable agreement on transfer.
- 8.7. If a personal relationship (or the breakdown of a personal relationship) starts to affect your performance or conduct at work, then your line manager will speak to you with a view to your previous level of performance or conduct being restored. However, if your performance or conduct fails to improve or it reverts to a problem level, the matter will become a disciplinary one.
- 8.8. If you are having or have had a personal relationship and you are found to have afforded either more or less favourable treatment to the other employee because of this relationship or you have exercised undue influence over a stakeholder, supplier or contractor, this is a disciplinary matter.

9. **Managing Boundary Issues**

- 9.1. Staff may unwittingly be put in a position where their relationship with individuals is compromised, or to be drawn into conversations or situations where their boundaries are being stretched or crossed. In some situations, the fine line between good and bad practice may not always be obvious or clear.



- 9.2. A staff member should seek the guidance of their line manager if they are unsure about the nature of a relationship developing with a service user, or if they need advice on how they intend to deal with a situation.
- 9.3. Similarly, if the immediate line manager requires advice, they must consult their line manager.
- 9.4. In situations where it has not been possible to access support in this way, any action which has been taken must be discussed with the line manager as soon as possible.
- 9.5. Other people in your team, particularly those who are likely to work with the service user must also be aware of where a boundary has been blurred or crossed. This is for two reasons:
 - 9.5.1. So, they can maintain consistent practice with that service user (and a consistent explanation with other individuals); and
 - 9.5.2. To ensure that the action taken does not look like a 'guilty secret.'
- 9.6. Boundary issues should be discussed with the line manager and within each team on a regular basis, and on occasions specific team training or facilitated discussion may be appropriate.
- 9.7. There are some events and arrangements planned with individuals that are highly valued by them but may present potential boundary issues. In these instances, there may at times be a need to exercise flexibility and discretion in the interpretation of this policy. Such instances where there are clear potential benefits to individuals should be brought to the attention of the manager. The situation will then be 'risk assessed,' any necessary safeguards agreed with the line manager and a record kept.
- 9.8. This approach should ensure that transparency is maintained in agreeing variations and that positive risk taking is managed.

10. Monitoring and Review

- 10.1. The Service/Department Management Team will be responsible for general monitoring of these guidelines. Transgression will be reviewed with individual staff members, but in some cases, it may be appropriate to record examples for discussion as part of staff training or discussion at team meetings.
- 10.2. Significant and/or repeated breaches of this policy will lead to disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.
- 10.3. This policy will be reviewed at least every 2 years or if there is a change/amendment required.