



HUMBERSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

People and Culture

Professional Standards Personal Relationships at Work Policy

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1. INTRODUCTION

This policy provides information, advice and guidance to managers and employees regarding acceptable professional and personal boundaries involving personal relationships between individuals who work together. This is to avoid actual or potential conflicts of interest, misuse of authority or more or less favourable treatment.

Core Code of Ethics

HFRS has adopted the Core Code of Ethics for Fire and Rescue Services. The Service is committed to the ethical principles of the Code and strives to apply them in all we do; therefore, those principles are reflected in this Policy.

National Guidance

Any National Guidance which has been adopted by HFRS, will be reflected in this Policy.

2. EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

HFRS has a legal responsibility under the Equality Act 2010, and a commitment, to ensure it does not discriminate either directly or indirectly in any of its functions and services or in its treatment of staff, in relation to race, sex, disability, sexual orientation, age, pregnancy and maternity, religion and belief, gender reassignment or marriage and civil partnership. It also has a duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled applicants, employees and service users.

3. AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this policy is to provide clear guidance to employees and managers as to their responsibilities to ensure that issues arising from or involving personal relationships at work are dealt with promptly, sensitively, and effectively. By adhering to this policy, employees with personal relationships at work are more able to protect themselves from potential criticism.

4. ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS

- [Equality Impact Assessment](#)
- Legislative References
There are no specific legislative requirements relevant to this policy.
- National Guidance
There is no specific National Guidance relevant to this policy.

5. POLICY STATEMENT

Employees must not allow a personal relationship with a colleague to influence their conduct at work. Employees are expected to declare any personal relationships at work which may fall under this policy. This policy sets out the Service's expectations

concerning personal and professional boundaries and the management of personal relationships at work.

The Service does not take a wholly prohibitive approach to personal relationships at work as it is recognised that these are sometimes inevitable, given that the Service is a large, local employer. However, this policy seeks to ensure that such relationships are declared, are transparent and do not give rise to more or less favourable treatment.

6. DEFINITIONS/ ABBREVIATIONS

Personal relationships for the purpose of this policy are deemed to include:

- Family relationships e.g. brother, sister, daughter, son, mother, father, guardian and also being related by marriage or civil partnership e.g., brother-in law, sister-in-law, son-in-law, daughter-in-law, mother-in-law, father-in law, stepchildren or parents etc.
- Married partners, co-habiting partners and civil union partnerships.
- A business/commercial/financial relationship.
- Sexual/intimate relationships.
- A close friend.

A personal relationship can be with an existing or prospective employee, a volunteer, a contractor or supplier, a member of the Fire Authority, or an employee of a related organisation with whom an employee interacts regularly as a result of their employment. A personal relationship can also be where an employee is employed by another employee in outside employment as defined by the Service's Secondary Employment Policy. The above definitions are examples of personal relationships which may give rise to conflicts of interest in the workplace. However, personal relationships are not restricted to these examples.

7. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Managers:

- Will be responsible for ensuring that they are familiar with this policy and the procedures contained within it.
- Are responsible for promoting a culture of openness and transparency regarding personal relationships at work.

Employees:

- Will be individually responsible for ensuring that any personal relationship at work does not interfere with their duties and responsibilities and does not give rise to a conflict of interest, abuse of power or more or less favourable treatment.
- Will be asked to work positively with the Service to accommodate any reasonable changes to their work arrangements that are required in order to avoid potential conflicts of interest through personal relationships at work.

8. DOCUMENT REQUIREMENTS

This policy applies to all employees of the Service and, in addition, agency staff, volunteers, apprentices, contractors and employees of other organisations which provide amenities to the Service.

It also applies to job applicants in the recruitment process. Job applicants will be required to declare on their application any personal relationships which may cause a conflict of interest.

9. THE SERVICE'S APPROACH TO PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AT WORK

In any large organisation it is likely that some employees will be related to one another or develop a personal relationship and, if they are in a close working relationship in the same workplace, the potential for conflict between personal/family loyalty and work responsibilities may arise.

Most social and personal relationships at work need not present a difficulty and may be beneficial in that they promote good working relationships. However, it is recognised that there will be particular circumstances where the employees concerned will need to withdraw from certain decisions or from undertaking certain roles, in order to protect themselves and the Service from any possible criticism of unfair bias.

Whilst it is not the Service's intention to infringe upon the private lives of its employees, it does expect that all employees (and others within the scope of this policy) should conduct themselves at all times in ways that are consistent with Service values, its Core Code of Ethics and with fairness and impartiality. In particular, the recruitment, selection, treatment, rostering, development and promotion of staff should be based solely on evidence and should not be in any way be affected by personal relationships at work.

Where personal relationships occur between employees, it is the responsibility of both individuals to avoid any actual or potential conflicts of interest or favouritism.

10. IDENTIFYING AND DECLARING A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP AT WORK

Employees should declare to their line manager any existing or new personal relationship they have which could fall within this policy, i.e., one which may give rise to an actual or potential conflict of interest, potential misuse of power or more or less favourable treatment. Should the employee not feel comfortable declaring the relationship to their line manager, discussions can take place with HR or with the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian.

The line manager will treat these matters in confidence and, in consultation with the employees, will look to try and find ways in which these potential conflicts can be avoided. It is recommended that discussions with Human Resources (HR) take place to establish that an appropriate and fair approach is adopted.

In the interests of transparency, consideration should be given as to whether or not it would be beneficial to inform colleagues of the existence of the personal relationship. However, as a general rule, all declarations of personal relationships should be treated in confidence, unless all the individuals involved in the personal relationship agree to make it public.

If it is agreed that the personal relationship will be made public, the best way of doing this should be discussed with the individuals involved prior to any disclosure being made. The disclosure of the relationship may involve the line manager or simply see those in the personal relationship informing others.

Declarations of personal relationships should be recorded in writing and placed on the employees Personal Record File. It is recommended that any declaration is reviewed annually or sooner if circumstances change.

Employees who declare a personal relationship at work, should be treated fairly and not suffer any detriment. Employees who are uncertain about whether they need to declare a personal relationship may discuss the matter in confidence with their line manager or HR. Generally, they will be advised to declare the relationship where there is likely to be any risk of a potential conflict of interest, misuse of power or more or less favourable treatment.

Where a personal relationship and/or failure to comply with this policy (following investigation), results in an unfair advantage or disadvantage to either of the parties to the relationship, favouritism or bias, the matter will be considered seriously by the Service.

It would be any negative impact on work, resulting favouritism or the failure to declare a personal relationship that would cause the Service's Disciplinary Policy to be applied, not the personal relationship itself.

11. PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN EMPLOYEES WHERE THERE IS NO LINE MANAGEMENT RELATIONSHIP

This type of personal relationship at work does not of itself constitute a difficulty. However, employees are expected to conduct themselves in a professional manner.

A personal relationship, particularly between two employees working in the same team or in close contact, may have an adverse effect on their own and/or their colleagues' work. This could include parties communicating confidential information to each other which is not a necessary part of their work, behaving in a way which may cause difficulty or embarrassment to others, e.g., arguing in the workplace, ignoring, excluding or isolating colleagues, not communicating with each other as the result of a disagreement or the break-up of a relationship and inflexibility in working arrangements. (This is not an exhaustive list).

In establishing whether there is a potential conflict of interest, managers may wish to consider the following:

- Are any employees likely to be made uncomfortable in their dealings with either employee because of the existence of a known personal relationship?
- Is a personal relationship seen to offer advantage to an employee and disadvantage to another by them feeling excluded from the relationship?
- Is the relationship potentially interfering with the Service's professional provision of services?
- Is the relationship potentially having a negative effect on the workings of a team?

Where there is evidence that a conflict of interest, breach of confidentiality, potential health and safety risk, or unfair advantage/disadvantage may occur as a result of employees with personal relationships working within the same area, the manager to whom the personal relationship has been disclosed may, wish to consider with the support of the HR Service Partner, an alternative arrangement, e.g., a change in reporting arrangements, duties within a team, or one party being moved to another area of work or work location.

All such matters should be considered in confidence, in discussion with the employees in the personal relationship. Managers are recommended to speak with HR prior to any discussion taking place. In all instances, any changes should be of equal status and have been discussed with the individuals beforehand.

12. PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AT WORK INVOLVING LINE MANAGEMENT, A SUPERVISORY ROLE OR A MORE SENIOR POSITION WITH DIRECT INFLUENCE ON THAT WORK AREA

In order to avoid any actual or potential conflict of interest, abuse of power or favouritism, employees who are in a line management or supervisory role, or in a more senior position with direct influence on that work area, should not be involved in:

- the appraisal, promotion, discipline or any other management activity or process (such as rostering or approval of time off) involving an employee with whom they have a personal relationship (whether declared or not).
- the authorisation of any financial payments/decisions relating to financial matters e.g., timesheets, fees payments, expense claims, salary changes or allocation of external funding for an employee with whom they have a personal relationship (whether declared or not). However, if the person is the budget holder, then they should see the financial transaction but have additional independent authorisation.

Where agreement to alterations that would mitigate the risk of a conflict of interest, favouritism or an abuse of power cannot be reached, the employees involved in the personal relationship will be advised in writing that should any proven favouritism, disadvantage, abuse of power or bias result from the personal relationship, either between the two parties or with other staff, the matter will be considered to be very serious by the Service and the disciplinary procedure may be invoked.

Employees who are in a line management or supervisory role, or in a more senior position with direct influence on that work area, should not normally be involved in

any way in the recruitment, selection or appointment of any applicant with whom they have a personal relationship (whether declared or not).

Where it is not practical to remove a member of staff from the recruitment process, all panel members should be made aware of the personal relationship and every panel decision should be justified as fair and equitable, without bias or conflict of interest. On such occasions, HR should be approached to find a neutral, alternative panel member for the selection process.

13. PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH CONTRACTORS

No special favour should be shown in the tendering process to businesses run by or employing friends, partners or relatives. If an employee is involved in the tendering process, for example, by providing expert advice, they should declare any such relationships, and they will not form part of the tendering process or decision making.

A personal relationship between an employee and a contractor is not acceptable if it involves an abuse of the employee's position of service, a breach of the standards of propriety expected in the post, a compromise of professional standards or a conflict of interest.

14. JOB EVALUATION/PROMOTION/PAY

Employees must not be involved in the authorisation or evaluation of any job description for another employee with whom they have a personal relationship and are expected to declare any such interest immediately if they are approached to participate in the job evaluation process. They should not be involved in any decisions relating to the promotion or pay of another employee with whom they have a personal relationship.

At the commencement of each job evaluation/banding panel, a "declaration of interest" will be taken and recorded.

15. DISCIPLINARY/GRIEVANCE ISSUES

Employees should declare a potential conflict of interest as soon as they are approached to participate in such proceedings as either a witness, investigating officer or hearing manager.

Employees must not be (save potentially as a witness with the caveat of impartiality) involved in any investigation, hearing or other disciplinary or grievance related decisions involving another employee with whom they have a personal relationship.

In situations when one employee in a personal relationship is subject to investigation under Service procedures such as disciplinary or grievance, consideration should be given, where necessary, to the temporary redeployment of the other party in the personal relationship whilst the investigation takes place. This is both to ensure that a thorough and fair investigation is possible and also to protect that employee from false accusations that they might be impeding the investigation.

Where issues arise that involve one employee in a personal relationship, any discussions will remain confidential to that employee. The other employee in the personal relationship may attend any meetings to provide support but may not intervene, speak on behalf of or represent the other party.

At the commencement of formal hearings/appeals, a “declaration of interest” will be taken and recorded. Each witness will also be asked for such a declaration.

16. RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

Job applicants, including internal applicants, are required to declare any relationships with Service employees on their job application form.

If an employee is involved in a recruitment and selection process and realises that there is an application from someone with whom they have a personal relationship, they must declare an interest to their line manager and withdraw from the process immediately. They must not be involved in any aspect of the recruitment process including shortlisting or selection.

At the commencement of every selection interview, a “declaration of interest” from the panel regarding the candidate should be taken and recorded.

An employee who has a personal relationship with another should not act as a Service referee for that person for both internal and external positions. However, they may act as a referee in a personal capacity, providing the reference makes it clear that it is not a Service reference.

17. PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWNS

If the personal relationship breaks down, all involved employees should ensure that no acts that could be interpreted as arguments or disagreements occur at work.

The employees should ensure that their personal relationship breakdown does not bring the reputation of the Service into disrepute.

Employees are reminded that if they are suffering from emotional stress from a personal relationship breakdown (regardless of whether it was a personal relationship at work) they may access the Service’s Occupational Health/Employee Assistance Programme for support.

18. RAISING CONCERNS ABOUT PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AT WORK

Any employee who feels that the personal relationship of other team members or colleagues is adversely affecting their employment, the functioning of the team or the provision of services, is encouraged to share their concerns with their line manager or a more senior manager. Where an employee is not comfortable with these options, they may consider raising their concerns with HR Section or with the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian.

Alternatively, they may formally raise matters under the Service's policies, such as Grievance and Whistleblowing. This also applies to employees in a personal relationship who feel they are being disadvantaged because of that relationship.

19. CONFIDENTIALITY AND TRANSPARENCY

The Service wishes to encourage transparency with regard to personal relationships at work in order to protect those involved, other colleagues and the Service. Therefore, employees are asked to carefully consider the option of making such personal relationships public.

However, it is accepted that this is not always the preference of the parties involved. In those instances, wherever possible, confidentiality regarding the existence of the personal relationship will be maintained. However, should disclosure to other parties prove necessary then a disclosure will be made following consultation with the line manager, the employees concerned and the Assistant Director of People & Culture.

If alternative working practices or patterns are to be implemented, then it may be necessary to inform other members of the team about these arrangements and the reasons for them.

20. PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH SERVICE USERS

The Service has a duty of care to all Service users. Employees must not engage in personal relationships with Service users that they have met as a result of their employment. It is the responsibility of the employee to maintain each relationship within its own appropriate boundary. If an employee becomes subject to inappropriate comments or behaviours from a Service user, they must inform their line manager immediately.

**If you require any further guidance in relation to this policy,
please contact Human Resources**