

Relationships at Work Policy

Introduction

At Elizabeth Finn Homes, we value a professional work environment that fosters collaboration, respect, and fairness among all employees. This Relationships at Work Policy does not prohibit employees from having a personal relationship with a work colleague, but instead sets out guidelines and expectations for employees regarding workplace relationships to ensure a productive and comfortable workplace for all. This policy applies to all employees, officers, consultants, self-employed contractors, casual workers, agency workers and volunteers.

This policy does not apply to relationships between Elizabeth Finn Homes staff members and customers and their families. The Relationships at Work policy should be reviewed carefully for the guidance and expectations of Elizabeth Finn Homes in relation to these relationships.

This policy does not form part of any contract of employment or other contract to provide services, and we may amend it at any time. Any questions you may have about the day-to-day application of this policy should be referred to your line manager or the HR Department in the first instance.

Consensual Personal Relationships

Elizabeth Finn Homes recognises that employees may develop personal relationships with their colleagues. When we use the phrase "personal relationship" in this policy we mean any emotional or romantic relationship which goes beyond the normally accepted boundaries of the professional sphere between colleagues. This will include formal, family relationships (for example, where people are married or living together). It will also include fewer formal situations (for example, where the parties consider that they are "seeing each other" or "going out together").

This definition is not intended to be exhaustive. Given the sensitive nature of personal relationships, all employees are required to use common sense in assessing whether or not this policy is relevant to them. If any person is unsure whether this policy applies to their circumstances, they should speak to their line manager or the HR Department in confidence about their situation.

This definition includes all personal relationships between any member of staff, regardless of whether those involved work in the same team, department, division or office, or at the same site.

Consensual personal relationships between employees are allowed, provided they do not create conflicts of interest or interfere with the workplace environment. Employees involved in a consensual personal relationship must act professionally and responsibly, maintaining the highest standards of conduct.

Reporting Personal Relationships

Employees must disclose any personal relationships that involve a direct or indirect reporting relationship to their immediate line manager or the Human Resources department, in confidence, as soon as reasonably practicable. In addition, employees involved in a relationship that may create a conflict of interest (see below) must report it to their line manager or the Human Resources department, as soon as reasonably practicable. Employees should also consider whether it may be appropriate to inform their line manager or the Human Resources department of a personal relationship, even if there is no formal requirement to do so. For example, it may be sensible to report if there is a risk of a perceived conflict of interest.

If an employee is unsure about whether or not they should report a personal relationship because they are unsure as to whether it falls within the scope of this policy, it is recommended that the safest thing to do is for the employee to report the relationship to their immediate line manager or the Human Resources department, in any event. It is better to err on the side of caution rather than inadvertently breach this policy.

In many cases a personal relationship between employees will not interfere with work. However, sometimes a personal relationship will be or become problematic because it adversely impacts on other colleagues or negatively affects business efficiency. Personal relationships can be particularly problematic where they involve members of the same team or are between a supervisor or manager and subordinate.

This means that personal relationships are potentially a legitimate management concern. In issuing this policy, we seek to address the following, non-exhaustive, issues which may arise where there is a personal relationship:

- Lack of transparency in relation to workplace matters.
- Risks to the confidentiality of business information.
- Legal risks regarding discrimination and harassment.
- Potential conflicts of interest of those involved in personal relationships.
- Actual or perceived bias regarding recruitment, promotion, rostering, annual leave allocation, appraisals, discipline and grievance and other operational matters where staff in a personal relationship are also in a direct reporting or subordinate relationship.
- Potential for negative effect on general public perception of fairness, objectivity and impartiality.
- Embarrassment of other employees.
- Fear of favouritism by other employees.
- General adverse impact on team dynamics and reduction in team morale.
- Outputs may be disrupted in the event of relationship breakdown.
- Impact on the Human Resources Department or management resources and increased legal risks in the event of relationship breakdown.

Disclosures of personal relationships will help to prevent, identify and address the above issues. Failure to disclose a personal relationship as required by this policy will be treated as a disciplinary matter and, subject to investigation, could result in disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.

Conflicts of Interest

Employees involved in a relationship that may create a conflict of interest must immediately report it to their line manager or the Human Resources department. A conflict of interest arises when a personal relationship interferes with an employee's ability to make impartial and fair decisions that may affect the workplace or other employees. The company will evaluate each situation on a case-by-case basis and take appropriate action to minimize or eliminate conflicts of interest.

As a matter of policy, employees who are in a personal relationship should not also be in manager/subordinate roles in the workplace. Where such a personal relationship arises, the company will liaise with those involved to agree a plan to minimise the impact of the personal relationship on the business. This may involve transferring one or both of the partners from their current role. If this is not possible for operational reasons, then we will consider putting in place appropriate safeguards to ensure transparency and fairness.

Where a manager becomes aware that a member of their team is in a personal relationship with a colleague, they are required to treat this sensitively and, as far as possible, in confidence.

No action should be taken simply because an employee is in a personal relationship with a colleague. Only if there is an issue or risk as outlined above should action be considered.

Harassment and Discrimination

Elizabeth Finn Homes has a zero-tolerance policy for harassment and discrimination. Employees must treat one another with respect and dignity, ensuring a harassment-free workplace. Personal relationships should never be used as a basis for harassing, discriminatory, or retaliatory behaviour. Any complaints or concerns regarding harassment or discrimination should be promptly reported to the Human Resources department in accordance with the Bullying and Harassment policy.

Managers will know that they must not discriminate against staff on various protected grounds. They should particularly consider the characteristics of sex, sexual orientation and age before taking any action as a result of a personal relationship. For example, it should not be assumed that the more junior person in a couple will be transferred out of a team, as this could be indirectly discriminatory.

Managers should be aware that conduct directed towards a colleague for personal reasons may be unwanted and that, in some circumstances, this could amount to unlawful harassment for which the employer could be liable. We will take any grievances (formal or informal) very seriously and investigate these without delay. Managers should escalate any complaints of this nature to the Human Resources Department as soon as possible.

Any information regarding personal relationships is confidential and likely to be protected under data protection laws. Managers are reminded about their data protection obligations under the law and our Data Protection Policy, including ensuring the security of such information.

Managers are also reminded that we have a duty to protect the health and safety of our employee and that this includes mental health. If a manager has concerns regarding the health impact of a personal relationship on an employee, they should bring this to the attention of the Human Resources Department without delay.

Given the highly sensitive nature of personal relationships, managers should seek the assistance of the Human Resources Department before dealing with any issues which may arise. They should also ensure that a formal note is taken of any meetings to discuss personal relationships.

Public Display of Affection

Elizabeth Finn Homes maintains a professional work environment and public displays of affection are inappropriate in the workplace. While the company respects employees' personal lives, it is important to maintain professionalism while at work. Employees are expected to exercise discretion and avoid behaviour that may make others uncomfortable.

Our equipment and resources are provided for work purposes only. Any inappropriate use in furtherance of a personal relationship will be treated as a disciplinary matter.

Consistency and Fairness

Elizabeth Finn Homes is committed to applying this Relationships at Work Policy consistently and fairly. All employees will be treated equally regardless of their position, seniority, or other factors. The company will take appropriate action when it determines that violations of this policy have occurred.

Consequences of Policy Breaches

Breaches of this Relationships at Work Policy may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment. The severity of the consequences will depend on the nature and circumstances of the breaches. Elizabeth Finn Homes encourages open communication and urges employees to report any concerns or policy violations without fear of retaliation.

Amendments to the Policy

Elizabeth Finn Homes reserves the right to modify or amend this Relationships at Work Policy at any time. Any changes will be communicated to employees and will become effective immediately.

By adhering to this policy, employees contribute to maintaining a positive work environment that respects the rights and well-being of all individuals. It is the responsibility of every employee to understand and comply with this policy.

Review date	Next Review Date
July 2024	July 2027