

# Maintaining Professional Boundaries Policy

<b>Originator:</b>	Brand and Excellence Team
<b>Executive Management Team Approval Date:</b>	16 October 2015
<b>Review date:</b>	October 2018

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>
1.1	The purpose of the Maintaining Professional Boundaries Policy is to ensure employees of One Vision Housing (OVH) establish and maintain professional practice and boundaries with customers, colleagues and other professional agencies.
1.2	The application of this Policy ensures compliance with the outcomes of the Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England as outlined below:
1.2.1	Registered providers shall ensure effective governance arrangements that deliver their aims, objectives and intended outcomes for tenants and potential tenants in an effective, transparent and accountable manner. Governance arrangements shall ensure they: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adhere to all relevant legislation</li> <li>• Comply with their governing documents and all regulatory requirements</li> <li>• Are accountable to tenants, the regulator and relevant stakeholders</li> <li>• Safeguard taxpayers' interests and the reputation of the sector</li> <li>• Have an effective risk management and internal controls assurance framework</li> </ul>
1.2.2	Registered providers shall: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide choices, information and communication that is appropriate to the diverse needs of their tenants in the delivery of all standards</li> <li>• Have an approach to complaints that is clear, simple and accessible that ensures that complaints are resolved promptly, politely and fairly</li> <li>• Treat all tenants with fairness and respect</li> <li>• Demonstrate that they understand the different needs of their tenants, including in relation to the equality strands and tenants with additional support needs</li> <li>• Co-operate with relevant partners to help promote social, environmental and economic wellbeing in the areas where they own properties</li> <li>• Keep the neighbourhood and communal areas associated with the homes that they own clean and safe. They shall work in partnership with their tenants and other providers and public bodies where it is effective to do so</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work in partnership with other agencies to prevent and tackle anti-social behaviour in the neighbourhoods where they own homes</li> </ul>
<b>1.3</b>	<b>Access and Communication</b>
1.3.1	OVH is committed to ensuring that our services are accessible to everyone. We will seek alternative methods of access and service delivery where barriers, perceived or real may exist, that may make it difficult for people to work for us or use our services.
<b>1.4</b>	<b>Equality, Diversity and Human Rights</b>
1.4.1	OVH is committed to ensuring that no person or group of persons will be treated less favourably than another person or group of persons and will carry out our duty with positive regard for the following core strands of equality; Age, Disability, Gender, Race, Transgender, Sexual Orientation, Civil Partnership and Marriage, Pregnancy and Maternity, Religion and/or Belief.
1.4.2	OVH also recognise that some people experience disadvantage due to their socio economic circumstances, employment status, class, appearance, responsibility for dependants, unrelated criminal activities, being HIV positive or with AIDS, or any other matter which causes a person to be treated with injustice.
1.4.3	OVH will also ensure that all services and actions are delivered within the context of current Human Rights legislation. Staff and others with whom we work, will adhere to the central principles of the Human Rights Act (1998).
1.5	<p>The Policy should be read in conjunction with the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• OVH Fair Access and Exit Policy</li> <li>• OVH Safeguarding Adults Policy</li> <li>• OVH Safeguarding Children Policy</li> <li>• OVH Gifts, Hospitality and Charitable Giving Policy</li> <li>• OVH Disciplinary Policy</li> </ul>
<b>2</b>	<b>Statement of Intent</b>
2.1	The Policy and procedures apply to all OVH employees including all permanent, temporary, part-time, agency employees and others in the employment of One Vision Housing, including volunteers. Contractors and sub contractors employed by OVH will have Policies or guidelines that compliment this document.
2.2	<p>For the purpose of this Policy a customer is defined as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A current tenant living in One Vision Housings stock;</li> <li>• A tenant who has previously lived in One Vision Housings stock;</li> <li>• Anyone receiving a service from One Vision Housing</li> </ul>
<b>3</b>	<b>Policy</b>
3.1	OVH is committed to ensuring that professional boundaries are maintained across the organisation at all times.

3.1.1	A 'boundary' is a guideline or rule about how staff work with customers.
3.1.2	It is vitally important that the service OVH offers is professional and that staff do not offer a more favourable service to some customers than to others. For example staff should not handle customers money, staff should not do 'favours' for customers and they should not accept hospitality or gifts in line with OVH Staff handbook. Also see the OVH Gifts, Hospitality and Charitable Giving Policy.
3.2	Breaching boundaries may result in a service that is discriminatory, inequitable and unprofessional.
3.3	Employees should strive to offer a flexible approach and not just one way of working with customers. A regimental approach can lead to institutionalisation of both customers and employees. Flexible ways of working should still be within a framework of professional boundaries and the range of flexibility should be discussed at team level to ensure consistency as far as possible.
3.4	Where Independent Living housing services are delivered, customers should be offered choice and expressions of individual culture or choice should be encouraged and respected. This should be part of a general empowering approach that encourages personal development. Employees should be careful not to influence customers with their own beliefs. They should also be aware that their position has the potential to have a powerful influence when working with vulnerable and/or impressionable customers.
3.5	Employees should be approachable, open to fair challenge or criticism and not intimidating or inaccessible. Customers must not be discouraged from appropriately accessing support within agreed boundaries.
3.6	Employees must respect customers' right to privacy and confidentiality, and be sensitive to different personal and cultural needs for privacy.
3.7	Employees should not comment on or criticise the values of customers. Actions or behaviours can and should be praised or challenged, but the person must always be regarded as worthwhile. To this end employees should always be careful not to prejudge, label or stereotype individual customers or customers with a particular need or range of needs.
3.8	All work with customers, encouraging or challenging, must be carried out with tact, empathy and diplomacy and with due consideration for customers' feelings and dignity.
3.9	Employees should be careful not to present themselves as superior in any way, including morally. To this end they should always be prepared to admit error or lack of knowledge. Employees should be aware that their personal circumstances may mean they have a fuller lifestyle than customers. It is important customers are not made to feel that they are inferior to staff or other customers because of their lifestyle, life quality, choices or support needs.
3.10	At all times professional relationships should be stressed and maintained. Customers should not feel in any way indebted to staff, or that they are recipients of charity. It should always be appreciated that employees are paid to carry out their duties and overt gratitude from customers should be discouraged and the reasons for this explained.

3.11	Customers who are living in an independent Living property must, wherever possible, be involved in all decisions which impact on them directly. Each customer must be fully involved in writing and reviewing their housing action plan.
3.12	<p>Employees should endeavour to keep relationships with customers professional at all times. All staff should make their line manager aware of any personal relationships that may already exist or develop with customers at the earliest opportunity. Examples include, but are not exhaustive of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff who are customers themselves and receive services from OVH</li> <li>• Staff who may have relatives that are OVH customers</li> <li>• Staff with an existing relationship with an OVH customer</li> </ul>
3.13	Where this occurs the line manager will inform the Personal Assistant to the Group Executive Director (Finances and Resources) and the employees probity declaration will be updated (any subsequent changes will be picked up on the annual review of the probity statement)
3.14	All advice offered by employees should be as non-directive as possible and should provide options to enable the customer to reach their own informed choice. Employees should maintain an awareness of areas where they are not qualified to give advice or they feel it is not appropriate to offer advice. In these instances they should inform the customer of this, making every effort to assist them in accessing appropriate/qualified advice (e.g. accompanying them to seek financial advice, advice from a solicitor etc.).
3.15	Generally advice should only be given at the request of the customer. If the employee is concerned about some behaviour or activity of the customer on which advice has not been sought (e.g. a potentially exploitative relationship, or situation where there is the potential for physical danger) they should offer their concerns and advice in a non-judgemental way. In such cases employees should advise their line manager if there are concerns of this nature as this may involve safeguarding issues (see OVH Safeguarding Policies for further details).
3.16	Customers also have a right to refuse support, or not to take advice, provided that the customers stays within the bounds of their tenancy and any rules, which have been agreed with employees about customers. Where an independent living customer wishes to come off the service, OVH will follow its procedures as stated in the OVH Fair Access and Exit Policy.
3.17	Employees should respect everyone as individuals and for their differences.
3.18	The establishment and maintenance of professional relationships with colleagues and other agencies and individuals is essential to ensure that customers obtain the best possible range of services. Quality services can only be delivered effectively by cohesive teamwork based on a shared understanding and application of values and principles. It is important that all employees work constructively with one another to enable the delivery of quality services. In dealing with other agencies, staff are representing both the service and the customers.

<b>4</b>	<b>Implementation</b>
4.1	One to one and group meetings between employees and customers including staff meetings and supervision should emphasise the importance of working to the values and boundaries contained in this document and the attitudes and behaviours needed to apply them.
4.2	Certain behaviour or actions may be acceptable to one individual while unacceptable to another. It is the deed and the impact on the recipient, which constitutes inappropriate behaviour. The recipient has a responsibility to make the customer aware that they find it unacceptable and ideally to explain why.
4.3	It is the responsibility of all employees to strive to apply the general principals outlined in this Policy in their day to day work and to support their maintenance. It is also their responsibility to raise with their line manager any training needs they may have. Where teams highlight further information to be included in the Policy this should be noted and included in the next Policy review. Specific examples providing extra guidance can be found in the Document Management System.
4.4	It is the line managers' responsibility to monitor implementation of and adherence to the Policy and where deficiencies occur, or difficulties arise, to provide supervision, support and guidance. Professional boundaries should be discussed during the induction process to ensure employees are fully aware of the implications of failing to meet these standards. It is also the responsibility of line managers to bring to the attention of individuals and teams any areas where standards defined in related Policies and procedures are deficient. This could be in either one to one supervision where individual practice is at issue or a group/ team meeting setting where overall practice is a concern.
4.5	It is the responsibility of the employee in circumstances, where they have doubts as to the appropriateness of an intended action, to access line management for support and guidance. It is the responsibility of line managers to offer guidance to employees on these issues therefore line managers should always respond supportively. If the employee's direct line manager is not available then the next tier of line management should be contacted.
4.6	An employee found to be breaching this Policy, further to guidance training and supervision, may be subject to the disciplinary procedures as outlined in the Disciplinary Policy.
4.7	If the employee feels a breach of a professional boundary has occurred and they feel able to, then often the quickest and most effective means of dealing with an issue is to raise the matter informally with the person or persons concerned, explaining that their behaviour is offensive or unacceptable.
4.8	The employee should feel free to ask for support from their line manager or a member of Human Resources at any time. Such requests will be dealt with confidentially and staff will be supported with any requests for referral to Occupational Health or Counselling.
4.9	The Grievance procedure should be used to bring a complaint against another employee where the informal procedure has been ineffective.

4.10	An employee should keep a written record of any incidents, such as what happened, when and where it occurred, whether there were any witnesses or names of others who have been treated in a similar way. It is also helpful to consider how the situation may be resolved.	
<b>5</b>	<b>Performance</b>	
5.1	There are no additional performance measures as a result of the operation of this Policy.	
<b>6</b>	<b>Consultation</b>	
6.1	All Staff have been consulted on the contents of the Policy.	
<b>7</b>	<b>Review</b>	
7.1	The Policy will be reviewed every three years from the date of Executive Management Team approval to ensure its continued suitability, adequacy and effectiveness, or as required by the introduction of new legislation or regulation.	
<b>8</b>	<b>Equality Impact Assessment</b>	
8.1	<b>Was a full Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) required?</b> No	
8.2	<b>When was EIA conducted and by who?</b> An Equality Impact Assessment Relevance test was completed by the Policy Writer and Policy and Strategy Manager in October 2014	
8.3	<b>Results of EIA</b> The Policy did not reveal any differential impact on any of the protected characteristics. However, it was noted that service managers are required to ensure consistent delivery of the provisions of the Policy across all service areas	
<b>9</b>	<b>Scheme of Delegation</b>	
9.1	Responsible committee for approving and monitoring implementation of the Policy and any amendments to it	OVH Executive Management Team
9.2	Responsible officer for formulating Policy and reporting to committee on its effective implementation	Policy and Strategy Team
9.3	Responsible officer for formulating, reviewing and monitoring implementation of procedures	Policy and Strategy Team

Date of revision:	Reason for revision:	Consultation record:	Record of amendments:
December 2011	Annual review and scope of Policy changed to incorporate all OVH staff and not just those delivering supported housing services	All staff	OVHPS included in scope
15-10-2013	In line with review schedule	See section 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scope of Policy redefined to just incorporate OVH</li> </ul>
16 October 2015	In Line with the review schedule	See section 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job titles have been changed from 'Supported Housing' to 'Independent Living' Officer</li> <li>• 'Supported plans' has been changed to 'housing action plan'</li> <li>• A reference to Fair Access and Exit Policy has been made in regard to customers who wish to leave the service.</li> </ul>