**Ability Shetland Personal Relationships Policy**

**1. Scope and Purpose**

**Ability Shetland** seeks to meet the highest standards of integrity and professionalism. We recognise that personal relationships may exist within the organisation and we seek to ensure that the behaviour of all those involved remains appropriate and that the relationship does not interfere with work. This policy applies to all members of the **Ability Shetland** team and is intended to protect the interests of all parties by providing guidance in areas where personal and professional relationships overlap. It aims to make sure that members do not behave improperly, that they do not commit acts of bias, abuse their authority, find themselves in a situation where there could be a conflict of interest, or find that they are open to allegations of such.

**2. Aims of this policy**

This policy aims to:

* assist **Ability Shetland** in dealing promptly and effectively with issues involving close personal relationships.
* inform employees, self-employed staff and Volunteers of the standards **Ability Shetland** expects, and of the likely consequences of any failure to meet these;
* deal with issues arising from close personal relationships in a fair and consistent way, maintaining confidentiality where possible.

**3. Definition of Personal Relationship**

Personal relationships include immediate family relationships, sexual relationships, very close personal friendships and close business, commercial and financial relationships. In particular, any romantic or sexual relationship between staff members and Trustees raises serious questions of conflict of interest, trust, confidence and dependency, and of equal treatment. Problems may arise in the case of a romantic or sexual relationship between a member of staff and a line manager.

**4. Conflicts of Interest**

All staff members should avoid any actions which may lead to a potential or actual conflict of interest or breach of confidentiality. **Ability Shetland** does not seek to discourage personal relationships, but it does require that such relationships are declared immediately where a relationship may have an impact on the organisation, or where a conflict of interest or breach of confidentiality may arise.

Examples of such relationships include:

* those between an employee in a position of authority and another employee.
* between a recruiting officer and a job applicant;
* between an employee and anyone who is either a supplier (or potential supplier) of goods and services to **Ability Shetland** or a client (or potential client).

Close personal relationships are of concern to **Ability Shetland** only where there is an abuse of the member’s position of trust, a breach of the required standards of propriety, a compromise of professional standards, a conflict of interests or a potential breach of confidentiality.

**5. Declaration of Relationship**

Any member who has a close personal relationship as described above should declare the relationship to their line manager. A declaration will be treated in confidence.

Job applicants will be asked to declare any personal or family relationship with existing staff on their application form, although this will not necessarily constitute a bar to employment.

**6. Recruitment and selection**

If any employee involved in any recruitment activity has a close personal relationship with a candidate, they should declare this to the Team Leader as soon as they are aware of the candidate's application.

In such situations, it would normally be appropriate for the employee to have no further involvement in the selection process.

This is to ensure that all decisions are made on an objective and fair basis. When making the recruitment/selection decision, consideration will be given to the impact the relationship may cause within the working environment, any resulting risks or conflicts of interests and any steps which could be taken to resolve these factors.

It is acknowledged that employees sometimes recommend suitable candidates for existing vacancies. All job applicants must follow **Ability Shetland**’s standard recruitment process and submit an application form which will be considered on the basis of the set criteria, along with all other candidates. It is emphasised that the best candidate for the role should be selected, in line with the Equal Opportunities policy.

**7. Supervision/Management Issues**

Where a member of staff declares a close personal relationship with a colleague at the same level, the Field Worker or Team Leaderwill meet with the employees individually to consider the impact that the relationship may cause within the working environment and any resulting risks or conflicts of interest (such as potential breaches of confidentiality) which may be caused by the relationship.

If two employees work within the same department, the Field Worker or Team Leader will need to consider the impact, or perceived impact, the relationship will have on other colleagues and the steps that need to be put in place to address any resulting issues.

Where a close personal relationship exists between the Field Worker or Team Leader and an employee reporting directly to them, consultation should take place with Trustees on any steps to be taken. Where no suitable alternative report or role exists, additional measures may need to be put in place following consultation with those affected (in particular, responsibility for certain procedures such as performance reviews, grievance or disciplinary issues may need to be reallocated).

Normally, the Field Worker or Team Leader should not be involved in the promotion, performance review or any other management activity which

could advantage or disadvantage the other party or leave them open to allegations of favouritism or bias. Additionally, staff members in a close personal relationship should not work together in any circumstance where a conflict of interest, breach of confidentiality or unfair advantage may be perceived to be gained from the overlap of personal and professional relationships. In such circumstances, it may be necessary to inform other staff members about the relationship in order to explain a change of management arrangements. This will be discussed with the individuals concerned before a relationship is disclosed.

In all such cases, and in line with standard accounting practice, the Field Worker or Team Leader should not in any circumstances be responsible for any financial process which could benefit the other party, including authorising timesheets, overtime or expense claims.

It should be emphasised that meetings with staff members who declare a relationship will focus on determining whether there is a potential or actual conflict of interest and if so, to determine what, if any, steps may need to be taken. **Ability Shetland** respects an individual's right to privacy in such situations and will not seek to discuss details of the relationship itself. Brief written notes of the meetings should be made and a copy given to each individual as a record of any agreed actions. These notes will be held securely in an individual’s file.

**8. Behaviour While at Work**

All members of **Ability Shetland** are expected to conduct themselves in a professional manner and to deal sensitively with any confidential information to which they may have access. A close personal relationship, particularly between two employees working in the same department, may have an adverse effect on their own and/or their colleagues' work. Examples of this include spending work time discussing personal matters, communicating confidential information to which the other would not normally have access, publicly displaying affection, causing difficulty or embarrassment to colleagues by arguing in the workplace, and not communicating with each other as the result of a disagreement or the break-up of a relationship.

Should such types of behaviour, which have a negative impact on work, start to occur, the individuals concerned would normally be invited to a meeting with their line manger to discuss this, and informed of the impact their behaviour is having on their colleagues and/or performance of their work generally. If the behaviour continues, action under the Disciplinary policy would result. This is not because of the existence of the relationship, but because of any impact it is having on other employees, or the performance of their work or on **Ability Shetland’s** reputation.

**9. Client/Supplier Relationships**

Where proposals for work are being sought from potential clients, employees are required to declare any close personal relationships which could jeopardise **Ability Shetland**’s impartiality. If the organisation is in a position of applying for external funding or grants, it is essential that any personal relationship to the grant holder is declared.

**10. Breach of this Policy**

Any employee who feels they have been treated in a way which is contrary to this policy should raise this formally through the grievance procedure. Any breaches of this policy will be fully investigated and may lead to disciplinary action.