

Conflicts of Interest Policy

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Version Control:

Version	Date	Author	Details of review
1.1	01/05/18	BF	Review cycle extended to 3 years and amended to include Panel members
2.0	17/02/22	MdB	New template, formatting changes, changes to job titles and requirement at shortlisting stage
3.0	13/09/22	TH	Updated to include recommendations from HR

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1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to protect the integrity of THO's decision-making process, to enable our stakeholders to have confidence in our integrity, and to protect the reputation of staff and non-executive members. The policy also provides a framework for dealing with any actual or potential conflicts of interest.

2. Scope

The policy covers HOS employees, both permanent and fixed term, non-executives, agency workers, bank workers, secondees, contractors and consultants. All are required to declare any actual or perceived conflict of interest regarding the work they undertake.

Senior leaders disclosures are reported to the ARAC and published in a 'Register of Interests' on our website.

When a risk has been identified it must be reported to the appropriate director, who will provide guidance in terms of what actions are required to mitigate or manage the conflict.

It is the responsibility of the employee to identify and declare an actual or potential conflict of interest and the responsibility of their line Manager to put appropriate measures in place to manage the conflict of interest in the workplace.

3. Policy Statement

HOS is committed to the fair treatment of all our employees and customers. Maintaining integrity, exercising good judgement and demonstrating good governance and risk management over situations of conflict are key.

HOS reserves the right to withdraw a job offer if a conflict of interest is identified that cannot be resolved.

Employees should behave in accordance with the Code of Conduct policy and in line with our vision and values. Our values are Fairness, Learning, Openness and Excellence.

The conflict of interest policy will be covered as part of the induction of all employees and non-executive members.

4. Responsibility

All staff and non-executive members of The Housing Ombudsman (THO) should declare immediately and take actions to avoid any conflict of interest between the interests of THO on the one hand, and personal, professional, and business interests on the other. This applies where a conflict may be perceived as well as where one definitively exists and all such instances must be recorded for transparency.

Examples of conflict of interests include:

- A colleague or non-executive member who holds a public office elsewhere in an organisation that may interact with THO.

- A colleague has secondary employment with a member landlord or an organisation that may interact with the HOS
- A colleague who is dealing with a complaint about their current landlord, a previous landlord from within the last three years, a landlord they have worked for in the last three years or from an individual personally known to them.
- A colleague who is participating in a decision to award a contract and has shares in one or more of the businesses under consideration, or is a director, partner or employee or related to someone who is*.

We do not expect that non-executive members will have conflicts due to their employment by a Scheme member / customer representative group, or by being a resident of a Scheme member, as non-executives will not consider individual complaints and their role is purely advisory. However, to support transparency, all such interests must be recorded and must be declared at the start of each meeting.

HOS Managers are responsible for ensuring completion of, and reviewing, the annual declarations of interest from their direct reports. Where a declaration has been made, the Manager is responsible for ensuring appropriate restrictions are put in place to avoid any conflict of interest in the workplace. Details of the agreed restrictions should be recorded on the declaration form before sign-off and after a discussion with the employee to make clear their responsibilities. Manager should complete the [online form](#) to the Workpro support team to action system case restrictions.

A common example would be placing a restriction within the HOS case management system to ensure that an employee raising a personal complaint about their own member landlord does not personally handle, or have access to, that case. Where an employee has declared they are, or have been in the last 3 years, a tenant or employee of a member landlord this does not warrant a system restriction. However, conflicted employees should not be assigned any casework relating to that Member landlord. This restriction should be managed locally by the employees line manager when allocating casework.

5. Identification, recording and reviewing

At recruitment stage for all shortlisted applicants (confirmed on appointment*) and whenever there is a change, each colleague or non-executive member will make a full, written disclosure of their interests, including all private, personal (such as relationships, and posts held, that could potentially result in a conflict of interest) and financial interests relevant to decision-making, the management of contracts, complaint handling and giving policy advice.

An annual reconfirmation of officers interests will be led by the Human Resources (HR) team to ensure these remain up to date and to identify areas of potential conflict for management. This will be an online exercise through the People HR system.

The Governance team will ensure that an annual confirmation of interests of Non-Executive Members is undertaken and that the 'Register of Interests' for the Senior Leadership Team and Non-Executive Members, which is published on the HOS website, is updated.

Declarations of gifts, hospitality and other benefits should be notified to an employees line managers following protocols set out in the Anti-Bribery Policy and separately recorded as

and when received. Gifts and hospitality related to the Senior Leadership Team (Directors and above) are published on the HOS website and subject to quarterly updates

**Directors, non-execs and bank workers are required to declare any possible conflicts of interest prior to making an application to HOS.*

6. Conflict management

During all meetings or activities, colleagues and non-executive members will disclose any interests in a transaction or decision. After disclosure, the colleague or non-executive member may be asked to leave the room for the discussion by the Chair and, if so, will not be able to take part in the decision or any further discussions related to the matter. Any such disclosure and the subsequent actions taken will be noted in the minutes.

Any colleague looking to undertake secondary employment, paid or unpaid, that may constitute a conflict of interest should bring this to the attention of their line manager prior to accepting any offer. HOS will not unreasonably withhold permission for secondary employment.

Colleagues who are tenants of member landlords, or have been in the last three years, should declare this and bring to the attention of their line manager to ensure they are not allocated cases from these members. The line manager should counter-sign the declaration to confirm they are aware of the declaration and add appropriate comments to the form stating the required restrictions.

Where colleagues have a personal relationship with a complainant who has raised a complaint that is allocated to them, they should inform their line manager immediately, who will reallocate the case.

Guidance on how to manage 'personal complaints' by employees (as a tenant) to the Ombudsman about a member landlord, is included in the [Employee Handbook](#) 'code of conduct'.

Additional mechanisms may be put in place to ensure possible conflicts are appropriately managed. These will be overseen by the Director of Finance and Corporate Services.

Whistleblowing arrangements are in place to address concerns where an activity that is deemed illegal or unethical exists.

This policy is meant to supplement good judgment; colleagues and non-executive members should respect its spirit as well as its wording.

** A relative may be a child, parent, grandchild, grandparent, brother, sister, spouse or civil partner of the committee member or any person living with the committee member as his or her partner.*

Housing

Ombudsman Service

Annex A

Register of Non-Executive Members' Interests

Name	Role	Details of interest	Details of any action taken	Follow up action required (Y/N)

Signed:	
Dated:	