



*together women*

**Employee Handbook**

## **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION**

Welcome to Together Women. Our strength lies in the skills and abilities of colleagues like you. We look forward to a long and successful working relationship with you and sincerely hope that your time with us is enjoyable and rewarding.

### **This Handbook**

This handbook is designed to explain the way in which we work and to set out the key procedures, rules and policies designed to ensure an efficient workplace and a safe and supportive environment for all employees. The contents of this handbook do not form part of the terms of your contract of employment unless otherwise stated. Together Women may need to alter or amend any policy or procedure contained in this handbook to ensure that it remains relevant and consistent with the needs of the business. Any such change will be notified to all employees.

We do expect you to comply with the requirements set out in this handbook and failure to do so may lead to disciplinary action; in appropriate cases, up to and including dismissal.

### **About Us**

Empowered women build and shape strong communities.

Together Women work with women and girls with multiple and complex needs across the North of England. We pride ourselves on our person-centred approach, putting our customers at the heart of the support they receive and working to better empower women by providing them with the tools and confidence to lead healthier and happier lives

Together Women is **a national trailblazer** in developing gender-specific, trauma-informed services for women involved in the Criminal Justice System and support for other vulnerable women and girls. **Our service model is flexible, responsive and dynamic**, underpinned by the five principles of Trauma-Informed Care:

- Safety ● Choice ● Collaboration ● Trustworthiness ● Empowerment ●

### **Our ethos is to build on strengths rather than focusing on deficits**

**Our Women's Centres** in Leeds, Bradford, Sheffield and Hull are at the heart of our services, providing a range of group programmes, training, workshops, self-help groups, counselling, and hosting co-located staff from other agencies including probation, alcohol/drug treatment, housing and Women's Aid. We also provide extensive out-reach from premises all over West Yorkshire and Humberside, undertaking a range of innovative projects funded from different sources and working within our local communities.

**We are experts in providing centres that are safe, comfortable and for women only.** We aim to convey respect and compassion, honour self-determination, and enable the rebuilding of healthy interpersonal skills and coping strategies. Trauma-

Informed, trained, expert staff provide holistic needs assessments, action-planning, and case management for women referred by numerous different agencies. Our staff team's expertise is enhanced by the presence of seconded workers from trusted partner organisations, enhancing our service delivery in mental health, accommodation and peer mentoring and enhancing the support we can offer to women from marginalised communities.

**Service User Involvement** is an essential part of the design, delivery and evaluation of our services. Service Users are involved in reviewing policies, staff recruitment, volunteer training and organising events and they are also offered opportunities to train as volunteers and mentors. Together Women works pro-actively to remove barriers, ensuring that our services are inclusive and underpinned by a strong commitment to diversity practice. We have an excellent track record of engaging women who have not successfully accessed other services.

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# 1

## **KEY PRINCIPLES**

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*This section sets out some of the key commitments made by Together Women to its employees – and the key commitments expected from employees in return.*

### **1.1 Together Women Code of Conduct**

The behaviour of employees is central to the continued success of Together Women. This handbook sets out a number of requirements aimed at ensuring the smooth running of Together Women and the fair treatment of all employees. A number of these are so important that any breach of them will amount to gross misconduct and these are clearly identified throughout the handbook. Your attention is drawn in particular to the following:

- The rules on gifts and hospitality;
- The policy on smoking;
- The policy on alcohol and drugs;
- The policy regarding social media; and
- The rules concerning the use of computers, the internet and email;

#### **Dishonesty**

It is important to stress that any form of dishonesty, however minor, will be regarded as gross misconduct. This includes theft of property, whether belonging to Together Women, colleagues or any third party. However it also includes an employee seeking to gain any advantage through deception - such as making a false claim for expenses or overtime, falsely claiming to be sick or falsely claiming to have completed a particular task.

It does not matter if any amount of money at issue is small. Together Women regards any dishonesty by employees as gross misconduct which will usually result in dismissal.

#### **Refusal to carry out instructions**

Together Women expects employees to work in a spirit of cooperation with their colleagues and managers for the good of the organisation as a whole. Employees are required to carry out their managers' request and a deliberate and wilful refusal to do so will be gross misconduct.

If you believe that you have been requested to do something that does not fall within your duties or which is in some other way unreasonable then the appropriate way of dealing with this is to raise a grievance under the grievance procedure (see Section 4). However doing so will not prevent a refusal to carry out a request from amounting to gross misconduct if it is found to have been a reasonable one in all the circumstances.

## 1.2 Staff Code of Conduct

### Introduction

This code is designed to assist all staff in establishing and maintaining professional practice and boundaries primarily with:

**Customers**

**Colleagues**

**Other professionals**

**Suppliers**

All work with customers involves human interaction, and this code makes no claim to being an exhaustive list of behaviours but instead underlines the values and principles that all staff will need to use to guide their day to day professional decisions. Together Women will provide regular training opportunities linked to this code.

The code of conduct is intended to act as guidance with some room for flexible interpretation in the light of a professional view of specific local or individual circumstances. Behaviours that may lead to disciplinary conduct are listed in the policy appendix and, with the exception of inappropriate sexual relationships or persistent flouting of advice from a line manager that may bring the organisation into disrepute, this is not intended to be a proscriptive policy or list of rules.

Definitions: The term “customers” is used throughout this policy and applies to anyone referred to Together Women during assessment, those receiving a service and those who have received a service within the previous 6 months.

### Working with Customers

It is the purpose of this section to establish a professional context for working with customers by describing basic values and principles which should govern professional practice. These should inform work with customers and inform all aspects of individual and team practice. These principles are as follows:

**Favouritism:** There should be no favouritism, or the appearance of favouritism, shown to customers. Whilst Key Workers will find different customers easier or more difficult to work with, this should not be reflected in the amount or quality of attention a customer is offered.

**Flexibility:** Key Workers should strive to offer a flexible approach, with more than one way of working with customers. A regimental approach can lead to institutionalisation of both customers and staff and staff should bear in mind that different approaches will work with different people.

**Choice:** Throughout the support process, customers should be offered choice, and expressions of individual culture and personal preference should be encouraged and respected. This should be part of a general empowering approach that encourages personal development.



**Influence:** Key Workers should be careful not to influence customers with their own beliefs and personal values where these may be at variance with those of the organisation.

**Privacy:** Key Workers must respect Customers' right to privacy, and be sensitive to different personal and cultural needs for privacy.

These principles should only be breached where issues of risk override them and only following discussion with line management.

**Unconditional Positive Regard:** Staff should not comment or criticise the values of customers as human beings. Actions or behaviours can and should be challenged, but each person is always regarded as a good and worthwhile individual. To this end, workers should always be careful not to prejudge, label or stereotype individual customers/ groups of customers.

**Elitism:** Workers 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.

**Professionalism:** At all times a professional relationship should be stressed and maintained: customers should not feel in any way indebted to Key Workers, or that they are recipients of charity. It should be always appreciated that workers are paid to carry out their duties and overt gratitude from customers should be discouraged and the reasons for this explained

This should be achieved while recognising that good support delivery is based on the development of working relationships with customers not a cold mechanical approach.

If colleagues find themselves in difficulty because of their own or the customer's feelings, these should be discussed at the earliest opportunity with the line manager.

**Personal Disclosure:** Personal disclosure can be a powerful and appropriate tool in supporting our customers. However there are some pitfalls to be aware of. Staff should only disclose information that they are comfortable with, and there is absolutely no expectation for a member of staff to have to disclose any personal information to a customer. Staff should consider for whose benefit a personal disclosure is taking place - the customer's or their own? Staff are reminded not to breach the Association confidentiality policy.

### **Relationships with Colleagues / Team Working**

In order to enable the delivery of high quality and effective services the establishment and maintenance of professional, co-operative and open relationships with colleagues is essential. Likewise, an individual worker's responsibility to contribute constructively to effective team practices and procedures is paramount.

It should be noted that a failure to communicate with and support co-workers is a major contributory factor in many instances of risk and dangerous/violent behaviours at work.

The following values and principles should underpin all aspects of practice in relation to boundaries and professional practice with individual colleagues and the team.

**Teamwork:** Every staff member should actively try to maximise and contribute positively to team performance. It is each member of staff's responsibility to make their individual contributions to the general well-being of the team. If a member of staff is unhappy they have a responsibility to deal with this in a professional manner, employing if necessary the appropriate organisational procedures.

**Honest and Open Approach:** Teamwork involves learning how to communicate with one another and to resolve any difference, difficulties and grievances in an open and constructive way. In any team there are inevitably differences of attitude, view, personality and competencies, which need to be addressed openly and honestly. If this isn't achieved appropriately, there is a risk of team members feeling put down or bullied by a colleagues or factions in a team. This division can only damage the work that is carried out by the team and could lead to action under the disciplinary, grievance or harassment procedures.

**Managing Personal Conflict:** From time to time personal conflict will occur within the workplace. This inevitable fact requires all staff and managers to respond in a professional and constructive way. It is not acceptable for any party to 'blow up', to shout, intimidate, or abuse each other in public or in private. Together Women expects its staff and managers to resolve conflict in a way which is constructive and enabling.

In seeking to resolve conflict staff and managers should employ the recognised principles of giving and receiving constructive feedback. Where this is not possible or such an approach has failed, staff or managers should use the Grievance or Dignity at Work Procedures. Failure to adopt a constructive and professional approach to conflict may result in disciplinary action. Guidelines on giving and receiving feedback are appended to this document as appendix 3.

Specific Examples of Acceptable and Unacceptable practice:

Staff should aim to:

- Stick to what you have agreed to do, inform colleagues or your manager if unable to complete any agreed task – don't leave others to pick up the pieces.
- Recognise that it is legitimate to report unacceptable conduct and practice to the line manager, especially if there are suspected breaches of Health & Safety or Equal Opportunities/Diversity policies.
- Be open and honest when difficulties arise. Do not sit on grievances, leave issues un-addressed or gossip about other staff members or customers with others.
- Never 'blow up', shout or abuse a colleague in public or in private.

- Respect a colleague's knowledge and expertise within their field.
- Never isolate, marginalise or otherwise bully a colleague.
- Raise any issues where there are differences of opinion with colleagues in an appropriate manner e.g. privately and in confidence.
- Keep relationships within the working environment strictly professional.
- Never intentionally withhold information from a colleague, which they need to know or which would assist them in the efficient, productive and safe running of the service.

### **Working for External Organisations**

It is important that all Together Women staff are able to carry out their duties without conflict or confusion and in a manner that is healthy and sustainable for themselves and the organisation.

Therefore all staff must declare all additional paid and voluntary activity that they undertake in addition to their work at Together Women on the organisations Declaration of Interests Form (Appendix 4).

The purpose of the declaration of interest is to:

- Protect the integrity of Together Women
- The interests of the employee
- Ensure that Together Women complies with employment law such as The European Working Time Directive

Together Women will seek to formally agree secondary activities with its staff, but cannot guarantee to do so in all cases and will if necessary review its agreements with individuals in the light of experience.

### **Relationships/conduct with other Agencies and Professionals**

The establishment and maintenance of professional relationships with partner agencies and individuals is essential to ensure that our customers obtain the best possible range of services. In their dealings with other agencies staff are representing both the organisation and customers.

Staff should:

- Maintain the reputation of Together Women when working with partner agencies and professionals, by conducting themselves in a professional manner.
- Discuss only relevant information, keeping this concise and accurate and avoiding anecdote and gossip.

- Dress appropriately for the working environment e.g. smart casual appearance and ensure a good standard of personal hygiene.
- Ensure any issues that may impact on confidentiality are discussed with their line manager prior to meetings/events.
- Never represent the service or organisation or its customers in a negative light.
- Staff will have personal views which may differ from the approach Together Women takes on specific issues, however, staff are expected to present and support the organisation's viewpoint, and not present personal views under Together Women's name. Staff are required to seek clarification from their line manager if they're unclear about our position on a particular issue and use supervision to explore complicated issues they may be expected to respond to.
- Conflicts of interest arising between staff, customers and other professionals are expected to be addressed openly and professionally.

### **Relationships with suppliers and financial conduct**

Together Women, its staff and managers are privileged to enjoy the trust of the public (through our funding) and the trust of our customers (through our work). It is therefore important that we act at all times with probity, and openness in our dealings with suppliers and the conduct of financial affairs. To achieve a consistent level of probity and openness procedures will be defined covering:

- The association's financial regulations.
- A process of audit and review
- A process for approving external suppliers
- A method for staff to declare secondary employment or interests (Appendix 4)
- Guidance on unacceptable financial transactions with customers

All of these procedures and regulations will be subject to continuous review and staff are expected to be active in ensuring that up to date procedures are followed, and that they behave in a way that upholds the spirit as well as the letter of the procedures and regulations.

Where staff are unsure how a procedure or regulation should be applied, or whether an action or request is permissible should seek guidance through their line management.

Appendix 1: Examples of acceptable and unacceptable practice

Appendix 2: A simple model relating to professional boundaries

## 1.3 Aims and Objectives

### Our Vision and Mission Statement

#### What We Stand For

We believe that vulnerable women can best be supported through empowerment and self-directed change models. We try to identify strengths and build resilience, and believe that this can best be done in a warm, gender-responsive, women-only environment. We have a strong ethic of customer service and believe that all customers who use our services have something positive to contribute.

We seek to influence policy and practice within the criminal and social justice arenas by evaluating our services and using evidence to demonstrate what works in helping women to turn their lives around. We believe in the power of gender specific approaches and want to promote these widely.

#### Our Vision, Mission and Values

**VISION:** A society where women and girls are treated fairly within criminal justice and social care systems, their gendered roles within families and communities are recognised and they are offered empowerment based support to achieve positive change.

**MISSION:** We positively change women's lives, strengthen families and communities, enhance equality and social inclusion, improve safety, reduce crime and build aspirations. We want to reduce the use of custody for women by pioneering new approaches that are adopted more widely.

**VALUES:** We are **customer-driven**, **customer-led** and **innovative**. We are **courageous**, with bold aims and a willingness to test new ideas. We are **inspiring**, motivating vulnerable women and girls to fulfil their potential. We believe in **making an impact** and developing **evidence** that shows how this is done.

## 1.4 Health and Safety

Together Women has a responsibility to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that it provides for the health, safety and welfare of its employees, customers, visitors and others who may be affected by the way in which it carries out its work and to provide such information, instruction and training as they need for this purpose.

Together Women attaches the greatest importance to Health and Safety matters and endeavours to conduct its operations in such a way as to ensure it complies with current legislation.

Safe systems of work and control measures continue to be implemented following the identification of work related hazards and assessment of the risks related to them.

Full details of the Health and Safety Policy can be found in the Health and Safety Manual. All employees are advised to read the policy and understand their responsibilities and obligations in relation to health and safety.

Every employee is responsible for:

Ensuring any health and safety risks are dealt with immediately or where the risk is out of their control for reporting it immediately to their line manager noting what action has been taken.

- \* Taking reasonable care for the health, safety and welfare of themselves and others.
- \* Reporting all accidents and incidents no matter how minor they may appear.
- \* Complying with and implementing training received.
- \* Complying with implementation of the Health and Safety Policy.
- \* Assisting in the execution of risk assessments.

Not interfering with any equipment or system of work provided for health, safety and welfare.

## **1.5 Ethical Conduct**

Together Women aims for the highest possible standards of ethical conduct in all of its activities and expects the conduct of individual employees to reflect this. Dishonesty of any kind will be treated as a serious matter, which may amount to gross misconduct and therefore to dismissal without notice.

### **Gifts and Hospitality**

The acceptance of gifts and hospitality from customers, suppliers and potential suppliers must not give the appearance that employees or Together Women may be unduly influenced in the decisions that they make in respect of customers, suppliers or in any other aspect of their work.

All gifts and hospitality given or received, of whatever value, must be entered in the Register kept by the management team.

No personal gifts should be accepted from a customer, supplier or potential supplier without express permission from your line manager.

Acceptance of hospitality, such as lunch or drinks receptions, should be kept within common sense limits and should always be authorised by your manager. Offers of hospitality must always be authorised by your manager.

You may also be instructed to return any gifts which your manager considers to be inappropriate, or to refuse to accept hospitality from a particular supplier or potential supplier. Failing to obey such an instruction will be treated as misconduct.

Allowing gifts or hospitality to influence any purchasing/business decisions that you may make on behalf of Together Women or to otherwise influence the way in which you perform your duties is an act of gross misconduct which will usually result in dismissal.

It is also an act of gross misconduct to seek to influence any other person to behave in an improper way or to confer a business advantage on you or Together Women through the giving of any gift or hospitality.

## 1.6 Whistleblowing

Together Women encourages employees to raise any concerns that they may have about any wrongdoing at any level within the business. Wrongdoing in this context means any breach of a legal obligation, risk to health and safety, a criminal offence being committed, a miscarriage of justice occurring or likely to occur or damage to the environment, a relevant failure relating to the proper administration of charities and funds given, or held, for charitable purposes, or an attempt to conceal any of the above.

Employees who raise a concern are entitled not to be subjected to any detriment as a result, provided that the employee –

- reasonably believes that the subject of the disclosure is in the public interest; and
- reasonably believes that the information disclosed and any allegation contained in it are substantially true

Any initial concern should be raised with your line manager. However, if this is not appropriate then you should contact another member of the management team who will ensure that your concern is properly addressed.

Even if your concern proves to be unfounded you will be protected against any reprisals from your manager, colleagues or any other employee of the business. Making a deliberately false allegation, however, against Together Women, a fellow employee or any other person will be treated as an act of gross misconduct which will usually result in dismissal.

If you are the subject of an allegation of wrongdoing then you will be informed of the allegation and given every opportunity to explain the situation and put your side of the story. Disciplinary action will only be taken following a full investigation in accordance with the disciplinary procedure.

If you are unhappy with the way in which we handle your complaint you may report your concerns direct to the Charity Commission in writing via the following email address -

[whistleblowing@charitycommission.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:whistleblowing@charitycommission.gsi.gov.uk)

Together Women [Public Concern at Work](#) provides free confidential advice to employees who have concerns about wrongdoing in the workplace. Contact the Charity on 020 7404 6609.

Employees who raise a concern which is in the public interest under this policy are entitled not to be subjected to any detriment as a result, however the employee must reasonably believe that the disclosure they are making is true.

Even if your concern proves to be unfounded you will be protected against any reprisals from your manager, colleagues or any other employee of the business. Making a deliberately false allegation, however, against Together Women, a fellow employee or any other person will be treated as an act of gross misconduct which will usually result in dismissal.

If you are the subject of an allegation of wrongdoing then you will be informed of the allegation and given every opportunity to explain the situation and put your side of the story. Disciplinary action will only be taken following a full investigation in accordance with the disciplinary procedure.

## **1.7 Good Faith and Loyalty**

The employment relationship is one built on trust and we all have a mutual interest in making the relationship a success. Together Women has a duty to provide reasonable support to employees and employees have a duty of good faith towards Together Women.

In practice this means not doing anything that undermines Together Women's position by acting in competition with it, providing information to competitors or undermining Together Women's standing with clients, customers and fellow employees.

## **1.8 Data Protection**

We will process personal data and sensitive personal data (also known as 'special categories of personal data') relating to you in accordance with our Data Protection Policy and our Data Protection Privacy Notice (provided to you separately), as well as in accordance with the relevant data protection legislation.

We may monitor staff in accordance with our policies relating to email, internet and communications systems and monitoring at work, as detailed in this Employee Handbook and in accordance with the relevant data protection legislation.

You will comply with your obligations under our Data Protection Policy and other relevant policies as directed.

## **1.9 Environmental Statement**

In the undertaking of their daily duties, we accept that all staff associated with Together Women will have an influence on the environment. We will commit to adopting working practices that will help to have a positive effect, assist towards continued environmental improvement, prevent pollution and reduce unavoidable negative influences caused by our working practices.

Together Women therefore maintains a policy of 'minimum waste' which is essential to the cost effective and efficient running of all our operations. Every employee has a responsibility to promote this policy by taking extra care when carrying out normal



duties to avoid unnecessary or extravagant use of services, materials, lights, heating, water etc.

# 2

## HOW WE DO THINGS

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*This section deals with some important administrative requirements to do with your employment and sets out the standards Together Women expects of employees in various situations.*

### 2.1 Proof of Identity

Together Women is legally obliged to ensure that all employees are permitted to work in the UK. It is a condition of your employment that you comply with all reasonable requests to provide details of your identity, right to work in the UK and place of residence. This will include allowing Together Women to take copies of your passport or other appropriate documents and to check their authenticity. Copies of any such documents will be kept in your personnel file for such a period as is deemed necessary in compliance with current data protection laws.

Together Women may dismiss any employee who cannot demonstrate that they are legally entitled to work in the United Kingdom.

### 2.2 Dress Code

All employees should dress in a manner appropriate to the work that they do. Key factors include whether or not the employee meets customers and whether the requirements of health and safety require particular clothing. How you dress is largely a matter of common sense. If your manager feels that you are dressing in an inappropriate way they may ask you to dress differently the next time you come into work. A persistent refusal to comply with a reasonable standard set by a manager will amount to misconduct.

Where an employee dresses in a completely inappropriate way, for example by wearing clothing with offensive images or slogans, then they may be sent home to change. Any time taken to go home and change will be unpaid.

#### **Personal Protective Equipment**

If you are provided with any Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) you must ensure you wear this at all times, especially in any designated area which may pose additional risk. Failure to do so is likely to result in disciplinary action.

### 2.3 Timekeeping

Good timekeeping is essential in any team; however we recognise the commitment that staff dedicate to their duties and therefore are happy to show some flexibility in terms of time keeping. This having been said, any employee who is seen to abuse this goodwill, will be spoken to. Persistent abuse of this goodwill will likely result in disciplinary action.

Where it is clear that you are going to be late for work you must contact your line manager as soon as possible to explain the situation and give an estimate of your arrival time. You must make every effort to talk to your manager directly rather than leave a message with colleagues or send an email or text message.

If personal or domestic circumstances make it difficult for you to attend work on time then you should discuss this with your line manager. In some cases, Together Women may be able to accommodate a reasonable need for flexibility, but this will be subject to the needs of the business and the need to avoid placing an unfair burden on your colleagues (see Section 4).

## **2.4 Adverse Weather and Traffic Disruption**

Together Women's primary duty is to provide a safe place of work. If adverse weather means that this cannot be achieved and the workplace needs to close then all employees will be sent home or told not to come in. In these circumstances employees will be paid in full for any working time that they have lost.

If the need to close the workplace persists, Together Women may invoke the lay-off clause in employees' contracts.

If the workplace remains open, it is the responsibility of employees to attend work if they possibly can. While Together Women understands that this is not always possible, additional paid leave will not be provided for employees who are unable, for whatever reason, to travel into work.

Where it is clear that you are not going to be able to get to work you must contact your line manager as soon as possible to explain the situation. You must make every effort to talk to your manager directly rather than leave a message with colleagues or send an email or text message.

If you are unable to attend work due to severe weather or other travel difficulties then you will be required to take time from your annual leave allowance to cover any absence or to take unpaid time off by agreement with your manager. There may be circumstances in which employees are able to work at home, but this will be entirely at the discretion your manager.

## **2.5 Rest Breaks**

Together Women encourages all employees to take full advantage of scheduled rest breaks. These are provided not only for comfort, but also to protect the health of employees and prevent excessive fatigue from causing accidents.

A rest break should be taken away from your workstation wherever possible. If you leave the premises you should bear in mind the time that it will take you to return from the break so that you can ensure that you begin work again on time.

Different areas of the business may have different arrangements for ad hoc breaks such as to make a cup of tea or coffee. These arrangements are in place to ensure the smooth running of the business and to prevent putting unfair pressure on colleagues.

You are required to comply with any requirements relating to such breaks as may be in place from time to time.

## **2.6 Smoking**

Together Women operates a smoke-free workplace. Smoking (which includes the use of e-cigarettes and personal vaporisers) is therefore strictly prohibited throughout all Together Women premises.

Smoking is only permitted during designated break times and in the designated outside areas.

## **2.7 Computer Use - Including the use of email/Internet**

It is very important that Together Women is able to keep its data secure. To assist with this, all employees are required to comply with instructions that may be issued from time to time regarding the use of Together Women-owned computers or systems.

You should ensure that when leaving your workstation for any lengthy period, that you lock your terminal, or log off if appropriate.

You must not attach any device to Together Women IT equipment without authorisation from your line manager and you must not open attachments or click on links unless you know you can trust the source. Together Women portable IT devices must be kept secure and password protected at all times.

Your computer password is an important piece of confidential information and you should treat it that way. Do not share it with others, and make sure that it is not written down anywhere where an unauthorised person can find it.

Unauthorised access to any of Together Women's systems will amount to gross misconduct.

### **Internet Use**

Employees with access to the internet on Together Women-owned devices should use that access responsibly.

Personal use during working hours will be treated as misconduct. Use of the internet is permitted for personal use over lunchtime so long as the rest of the rules in this policy are adhered to.

From time to time Together Women may block access to sites which it considers inappropriate but whether or not a specific site has been blocked, employees must not use the internet to view or download offensive or sexually explicit material. Any attempt to do so may, depending on the circumstances, amount to gross misconduct leading to dismissal.

Employees must not download any software, plugins or extensions on to Together Women-owned devices unless this is first cleared by an appropriate manager. Employees should also refrain from downloading music, video or any other entertainment content on any Together Women-owned device.

Firewalls and anti-virus software may be used to protect Together Women's systems. These must not be disabled or switched off without express permission from management.

## **Email**

All email correspondence should be dealt with in the same professional and diligent manner as any other form of correspondence.

If you have a Together Women email account you should be mindful of the fact that any email that you send will be identifiable as coming from Together Women. You should therefore take care not to send anything via email that may reflect badly on Together Women. In particular, you must not send content of a sexual, racist or discriminatory nature, junk mail, chain letters, cartoons or jokes from any email address associated with work.

Using a Together Women/work email address to send inappropriate material, including content of a sexual, racist or discriminatory nature, is strictly prohibited and may amount to gross misconduct. Should you receive any offensive or inappropriate content via email you should inform a member of management of this as soon as possible so that they can ensure that it is removed from the system.

You should also take care that emails will be seen only by the person intended. Particular care should be taken when sending confidential information that the email has been correctly addressed, marked 'private' / 'confidential' and not copied in to those not authorised to see the information. Sending confidential information via email without proper authorisation or without taking sufficient care to ensure that it is properly protected will be treated as misconduct.

## **Privacy**

Monitoring of email usage takes place without notice. You should have no expectation of privacy in respect of personal and business use of email and the internet whilst at work.

Your email remains the property of Together Women and therefore you should not use your Together Women email to send or receive any information that you regard as private. Together Women may, in the course of its business, read emails that you have sent or received - although in the absence of evidence of wrongdoing Together Women will try to avoid reading personal emails if possible.

## **2.8 Social Media**

An employee's behaviour on any social networking or other internet site must be consistent with the behaviour required of employees generally. Where it is possible for users of a social media site to ascertain who you work for, then you should take particular care not to behave in a way which reflects badly on Together Women.

Inappropriate or disparaging comments about Together Women, colleagues or clients will be treated as misconduct. Because social media interactions can be copied and widely disseminated in a way that you may not be able to control, Together Women

will take a particularly serious view of any misconduct that occurs through the use of social media.

You must not operate a social media account or profile that purports to be operated on or on behalf of Together Women without express permission to do so from your manager.

You should not attempt to access social networking sites, such as Facebook/Twitter or similar on Together Women computers. This includes during break times.

## **2.9 Telephones**

Reasonable personal use of Together Women telephones is permitted with prior permission from management, however calls should be kept short and no calls should be made to premium rate numbers or abroad.

Calls and texts on personal mobile phones should wherever possible be restricted to formal rest breaks.

## **2.10 Alcohol and Drugs**

Together Women's approach to the consumption of alcohol, drugs and other substances (including new psychoactive substances) that have intoxicating and/or behaviour-altering effects or impair judgement (referred to in this policy as "other substances") is based on the need to ensure a safe and productive working environment. Because of the serious nature of the risks posed by the abuse of alcohol, drugs and other substances in the workplace, any breach of the rules in this area will be treated as gross misconduct which will usually result in dismissal.

An employee will be regarded as 'under the influence' of alcohol, drugs or other substances if their behaviour, speech, ability to concentrate or otherwise perform their duties is in any way affected. An employee will also be regarded as under the influence if they fail a drug, other substance or alcohol test.

### **Dependency**

Employees who have a dependency on alcohol, drugs or other substances may be offered support and encouraged to seek appropriate counselling or medical help. Absence arising from treatment or counselling related to drug, alcohol or other substance abuse will be treated as sickness absence under Together Women's absence management policy. However, while Together Women will always try to be supportive toward employees with a drug, alcohol or other substance problem, this will not prevent disciplinary action being taken when employees act in breach of the rules laid out in this policy.

Wherever an employee informs Together Women that they have a drug, alcohol or other substance problem this will, as far as possible, be treated in the utmost confidence. However Together Women may need to disclose particular circumstances to managers, regulatory authorities or others should this be necessary to ensure safety or compliance with legal requirements.

## **Drugs**

The consumption, storage, distribution or sale of illegal drugs or any other behaviour-altering and/or intoxicating substance, including new psychoactive substances, on Together Women premises or during working time is strictly prohibited. Together Women will report any illegal activities to the police or other relevant authorities.

You must not present yourself for work under the influence of illegal drugs or any other substance taken for non-medical purposes.

## **Medicines and Prescription Drugs**

If you are taking prescription drugs or any other medicine that may affect your performance at work or your ability to carry out any of your duties, then you must inform your line manager of this so that steps can be taken to ensure that the work can be done safely. It is your responsibility, when beginning any course of medication, to check whether it may adversely affect your ability to work.

## **Alcohol**

Consumption of even a small amount of alcohol may be sufficient to adversely affect the work of an employee and could pose a risk to health and safety. Remember that alcohol remains in the bloodstream for up to 24 hours following consumption and that the consumption of a significant amount of alcohol in the evening may leave you unfit to work in the morning.

You must not present yourself for work under the influence of alcohol.

You must not consume any alcohol during working time, lunchtime or during any break unless this has been specifically authorised by your manager.

Where alcohol is available at Together Women organised events or occasions when you are representing Together Women – even outside working hours - it is important to behave responsibly and not drink to excess. Behaviour that reflects badly on Together Women will be a disciplinary matter and in serious cases may amount to gross misconduct.

## **Drug, alcohol and other substance testing**

Together Women may require you to submit to drug, alcohol and/or other substance testing where there is reason to believe that you may have acted in breach of this policy.

This may include a standard breathalyser test administered by your manager. Arrangements for blood or urine testing may vary from time to time, but such tests will always be carried out by suitably qualified, independent professionals or specially trained staff.

An employee will be treated as having failed a drug or alcohol test if the test shows the presence of illegal drugs or a level of alcohol in excess of the drink driving limit applicable in England & Wales (**80** mg of alcohol per 100 ml of blood, **35** mcg per 100 ml of breath or **107** mg per 100 ml of urine).

An employee who refuses, without proper excuse, to undergo a test required under this policy will be treated as having failed the test. This failure will be treated as gross misconduct.

Whether a test needs to be conducted is a matter for Together Women to decide. In cases where an employee is clearly under the influence of alcohol, drugs or other substances there is other clear evidence of a breach of this policy then disciplinary action may still be taken even if no test is carried out.

## 2.11 Driving

Where driving is required as part of your job, it is your responsibility to ensure that you are legally qualified to drive.

Licences will go through Together Women inspection procedure which requires us to check individual licences once a year with the DVLA, or as otherwise requested. Together Women will require you to share your driving licence information by supplying it with your driving licence number and a check code provided by the DVLA. If you receive any points on your licence you must inform Together Women of this immediately.

If you use your own vehicle to drive on Together Women/work-related business, it is your responsibility to arrange to be insured for that business use. Together Women may require you at any time/annually to allow a copy of your insurance and any MOT test certificate to be made and kept in our records.

You are responsible for any driving offences committed while driving as part of your duties, including any parking fines. Dangerous, careless, inconsiderate or aggressive driving as well as causing a risk to others can be damaging to Together Women's reputation and can amount to gross misconduct. If you are banned from driving for any reason, Together Women is not obliged to find alternative work for you and may choose to dismiss you if the ban renders you incapable of performing your duties as required.

**It is illegal to use your mobile phone whilst driving. This includes texting etc.**

Employees should **never** use their mobile phone whilst driving on Together Women business unless they do so on a properly installed hands-free system and traffic conditions mean that it is safe to do so. In most cases, it would be preferable to make any calls when the vehicle is stationary.

Any journey carried out on Together Women business must be scheduled in such a way as to allow adequate rest breaks – usually one break of 15 minutes for two hours of driving. Where possible, driving on Together Women business should be avoided either late at night or very early in the morning.

Safety is Together Women's prime responsibility and you should not be required to compromise safety in any way when driving on Together Women business. If you are concerned about any driving requirements you may have, then you should discuss these with your line manager and appropriate arrangements will be made to ensure that any work-related journey can be completed safely.



## 2.12 Expenses

You will be reimbursed for authorised and legitimate expenditure reasonably incurred in the course of the proper performance of your duties, i.e. travel, accommodation, agreed out-of-pocket expenditure.

In order to claim expenses you must complete an expense claim form and support the claim by submitting valid receipts.

All travel expenses should be claimed monthly. They will be paid via payroll and therefore claims need to be submitted to meet the payroll processing deadline. The deadline dates for receipt of documentation are published by the Payroll Team each year.

Only in exceptional circumstances, and with the approval of the appropriate manager, can expenses be paid beyond the month after the month in which the expenses were incurred.

All claims will be submitted to the line manager for approval. Claims must include receipts for car parking etc as required.

## 2.13 Travel Allowances

### Casual User

All employees who are required to use their car on official business are designated as Casual Users. Where this is the case the employee may claim the Casual User mileage rate for business journeys. This is currently 45p a mile.

### Longer journeys

Any planned journey by car in excess of 50 miles total must have the prior approval of the employee's Line Manager. Normally, these journeys should be made by public transport, or the individual may choose to travel by car and claim the equivalent public transport cost. The only exceptions are:

Where it is cheaper to travel by car

The journey is impracticable by public transport

Where possible, any other member of staff attending the same location (e.g. training, meeting, conference etc.) should make arrangements to travel together in the same car to minimise cost.

### Travel starting or finishing at home

The following is only applicable to those employees who are office based:

Where a single journey starts or finishes at home, staff should deduct the normal home to office mileage for that journey and claim the balance. In rare instances where staff might start and finish at home, the usual return journey from home to office and back

will need to be deducted from that day's claim. This is not relevant if you are home based.

## **2.14 Together Women Property**

You are not permitted to use Together Women property for any purpose other than its intended use. Together Women property must not be removed from the premises unless with prior approval.

### **Damage to Together Women Property**

Any damage to or loss of Together Women property must be immediately reported to your manager.

If, following an investigation, it is found that as a result of your carelessness, negligence or failure to comply with Together Women procedures, or by wilful act, Together Women suffers loss or damage of cash, stock, fixtures and fittings or property, this will be construed as serious breach of the rules, which could result in your summary dismissal on grounds of gross misconduct.

You may also be liable to pay the full, or part, cost of making good Together Women's loss in respect of cash, stock, fixtures and fittings, or property.

In the event that Together Women makes a claim to its insurers, for repair or replacement, or other losses incurred, it reserves the right to require you to pay any insurance excess that may accrue.

It is an express term of your contract of employment that if Together Women property is damaged, lost or stolen through your negligence or fault, then Together Women may deduct the cost of repair or replacement from your salary.

Before any decision is made to deduct, the matter will be fully investigated and you will be given an opportunity to state your case and appeal any decision.

### **Return of Together Women Property**

Upon termination of employment for whatever reason, you must return to Together Women all property belonging to Together Women including Together Women vehicle, computer, equipment, keys, records and documents within your possession or control belonging or relating to the affairs and business of Together Women and its customers.

Together Women may deduct the cost of replacement of any items not returned, or repair of items that are returned damaged, on termination of your employment from your salary or any monies owed to you.

### **Employees' Property**

Together Women does not accept liability for any loss of, or damage to, property that you bring onto the premises. You are requested not to bring personal items of value onto the premises, and in particular, not to leave any items overnight.

Any loss or theft of items must be reported to your manager.

## **Lost Property**

If you find any items of lost property they should be handed to your immediate Manager, who will retain the items for three weeks. The property will either be handed over to the police or disposed of accordingly.

## **2.15 Salary**

The Organisation no longer awards annual incremental salary increases automatically. Rather, the Organisation will consider discretionary increases when the Organisation believes this is justified based on high quality performance and/or taking an increased level of responsibility at work. Any incremental salary increase in one year should not give rise to any expectation of such an increase in subsequent years.

Annual “cost of living” pay awards will be retained in accordance with the agreements of the National Joint Council (**NJC**) for Local Authority Services. As is currently the case; where funding allows, the Board will consider paying a cost of living increase that is at a higher rate than that prescribed by the NJC. However, such an enhanced cost of living increase is entirely at the discretion of the Board and such an increase in one year should not give rise to any expectation of an equivalent increase in subsequent years.

## **2.16 Overpayments**

Any employee who believes that they have been overpaid must point this out to their line manager. Failure to declare an overpayment that an employee could reasonably have been aware of may lead to disciplinary action.

Together Women reserves the right to deduct from an employee’s salary any overpayments made in error.

Similarly any loans or bills for services unpaid on the last day of employment may also be deducted from final salary or otherwise recovered.

## **2.17 Working Beyond Contracted Hours**

Together Women does not operate flexitime or overtime.

Where it is necessary for a person to work earlier or later than their normal hours, then an arrangement must be reached, where possible in advance of the working, with their Line Manager. In exceptional circumstances, where additional hours are worked without the knowledge of the line manager, the hours must be agreed and recorded as soon as possible after the event. Any time off in lieu (TOIL) accrued must be agreed and recorded. TOIL must be taken within one month of the date it was accrued. In the event that an employee owes time back then it should be done by arrangement with the line manager but within one month of the event.

## **2.18 Pension**

If you are eligible, Together Women will automatically enrol you into our Pension Scheme. Within a month of being enrolled in the Scheme, you can send an opt-out form if you do not wish to be in the Scheme. If you do not opt out, we will deduct your contributions to the pension scheme from what we pay you. Current details of the Scheme and your rights relating to it, and of your and our contributions, will be provided to you separately.

## **2.19 Learning and Development**

### **Induction and Confirmation**

#### **Induction Policy**

Together Women realises that the appointment of a staff member is only the start of the employment relationship, and that the future of this relationship depends to a considerable extent on how the new employee is settled in the job. In a context of continual learning and development, we aim to support our staff from their appointment, and right through their period of employment. And at no time is the organisation's input more important than in an individual's first few months of employment – their induction period.

The main body of the new starter's induction programme should last six months, in line with the probationary period, so that new employees are continually developed and any issues can be addressed prior to the individual's probationary review meeting and them hopefully being confirmed in post.

**Full details of Together Women's Induction Policy are on the Intranet site.**

#### **Confirmation Procedure**

Employment at Together Women is offered subject to the completion of a satisfactory probationary period. The probationary period is usually six months, but temporary staff may have a probationary period appropriate to the length of their contract.

#### **Learning and Development Policy**

Together Women is committed to providing sufficient resources for learning so that employees are not only suitably skilled to undertake their current post but that they are sufficiently skilled to meet future challenges. Together Women will also ensure that staff are aware of the opportunities for their learning and development and will encourage self-development as appropriate.

Individual learning needs are identified through Personal Development Reviews (see below).

Together Women has a Learning and Development Policy. All employees are should read this Policy.

#### **Personal Development Review**

The purpose of the Personal Development Review is to enable employees to carry out their duties effectively, understand the part they play in the team achieving its targets, to give them the opportunity to discuss with their line manager how they feel they are progressing, and to identify development needs to help them grow.

All employees must attend an annual Personal Development Review meeting with their line manager. This is an important opportunity for the employee and their line manager to:

Discuss their past year's performance

Set goals and objectives in relation to their role, the Delivery Centre Action Plan and Together Women's Strategic Business Plan.

Discuss how their development needs may be met.

This is a two way process between the employee and their line manager.

### **Supervision Policy**

Together Women has a Supervision Policy that enables regular meetings between an employee and their manager to take place to provide guidance, support and feedback on performance, and to review and update goals.

There will be formal supervision for all main grade and managerial employees and supervision meetings should normally be held every 6 to 8 weeks.

A record of supervision sheet will be created for each staff member supervised. Both parties should sign this after each session. All staff will have the opportunity to complete a feedback sheet on the effectiveness of their supervision as part of the Personal Development Review process.

**Full details of the Supervision Policy are on the Intranet site.**

## **2.20 Mobility Policy**

### **Staff Transfers**

Transfers of staff from one work location to another can occur in a number of circumstances. The main ones are as follows:

**Voluntary Mobility:** This is where there is an agreement between an employee and their manager that the employee should move to another work location. This could occur for career development purposes, for example, or where management wish to draw in experienced staff into a developing team. It may also occur where an employee requests a transfer for personal reasons.

**Directed transfer:** This is where management wish to move an employee to another work location and no voluntary solution can be found. It could also occur where an office relocates. Such a transfer would normally only happen after consultation and

account taken of personal preferences. A directed transfer may also occur as a result of a disciplinary decision under the Disciplinary Procedure.

Redundancy: Where there is a redundancy situation, Together Women's Redundancy Policy will apply. Within this policy employees may be offered alternative employment, but at a different location.

### **Reimbursement of Additional Costs/Time**

Employees who move to another work location (strictly on a temporary basis) will be entitled to claim any extra expense involved in travelling to their temporary work location, and may come to an agreement with their line manager that any additional time involved in travel to the new place of work be taken as work time (see below).

### **Travel Time**

An employee may make a case to their line manager for any extra travel time to be taken as work time. If this is approved, it will usually be granted for a short period to allow for settling in to the temporary work location.

## **2.21 Employment of Household Members**

Together Women cannot accept applications for vacant posts in a team where a partner or a member of that person's household already works.

When two members of the same team become long-term partners, Together Women would use re-deployment to offer one of the parties a similar post elsewhere. This would be carried out via negotiations with post holders and relevant centre Managers over a reasonable period of time, but usually not more than 12 months.

## **2.22 General**

### **Statements to the Media**

Any statements to reporters from newspapers, radio, television etc. in relation to our business will be given only by Management.

### **Parking**

If parking is provided by Together Women, all cars parked in such parking areas are parked at the owner's risk and must be parked so as not to obstruct access. It is your responsibility to ensure that your vehicle is parked in a safe area.

### **CCTV/Security Cameras**

Together Women reserves the right to use closed circuit television (CCTV) systems throughout its premises as deemed necessary and employees should expect all areas (other than those where use would contravene common decency) to be visible on a television monitoring system. Information obtained from systems will only be used in

appropriate circumstances and with strict adherence to Data Protection Laws. This may include using recorded images as evidence in disciplinary proceedings.

# 3

## **ABSENCE**

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*This section sets out the approach Together Women takes when you are unable to attend work, are taking annual leave or need time off.*

### **3.1 Unauthorised Absence**

If you fail to report for work without prior permission or without notifying Together Women and you do not have a legitimate reason for your absence, such as sickness absence (in which case, you need to comply with Together Women's sickness absence reporting procedures and you must provide the required evidence of your incapacity), this constitutes unauthorised absence. Unauthorised absence also includes cases of failing to return to work on time from a period of annual leave or other approved leave of absence without reasonable excuse and cases where you purport to take a period of annual leave that has not been approved in advance by your line manager.

Unauthorised absence without good cause is a serious disciplinary matter and will be dealt with in accordance with Together Women's disciplinary procedure. Depending on the circumstances of the case, it may amount to potential gross misconduct rendering you liable to summary dismissal.

In addition, you will not be paid for any period or periods of unauthorised absence as you will have failed to report for work. Together Women reserves the right to withhold payment or deduct from salary a day's pay for each day of unauthorised absence. Any decision concerning this matter will be made by your line manager or a senior manager.

#### **Procedure**

On the first day of your unauthorised absence, your line manager will attempt to contact you and will keep a record of this. If you do not answer the telephone, your line manager will leave a voicemail message, if possible, asking you to return the call. If your line manager is unable to make contact with you, they may attempt to contact your listed emergency contact or next of kin.

On the second day of your unauthorised absence, and assuming nothing has been heard from you and Together Women has been unable to make satisfactory contact with either you or your emergency contact or next of kin, your line manager will write to you setting out that you are absent from work without permission and the attempts that have been made to contact you. You will be asked to contact Together Women as a matter of urgency and you will also be warned that unauthorised absence without good reason is a serious disciplinary offence which could result in disciplinary action being taken against you.

If you continue to be absent from work without permission, disciplinary proceedings will be instituted against you and this could result in your summary dismissal from employment.



Where you do make contact with your line manager and arrangements are made for you to return to work, in the absence of either a legitimate reason for your absence and/or a satisfactory explanation for your lack of contact, you will still be subject to disciplinary action in relation to either your period of unauthorised absence and/or your failure to follow Together Women' absence reporting procedures. Depending on the seriousness of the offence, this could result in your summary dismissal from employment.

## **3.2 Medical Appointments**

In general, appointments to see a GP, dentist or optician should be made for outside working hours. Paid leave will not normally be granted for non-emergency visits.

Together Women appreciates that it is not always possible to avoid appointments during the working day and will judge each case individually in deciding whether any paid time off should be granted. In most cases, employees will be required either to use part of their annual holiday entitlement or to make up any lost time.

Employees who have a medical condition which will require regular appointments during the working day should discuss their situation with their manager so that appropriate arrangements can be made.

You may be required to provide evidence of any appointment for which time off is needed.

## **3.3 Ante-natal Care/Adoption Appointments**

### **Pregnancy Related Appointments**

Employees who are pregnant are entitled to paid-time off to attend ante-natal appointments provided that attendance is based on medical advice. For second and subsequent appointments you may be required to produce an appointment card or similar evidence of the date and time of the appointment.

While there is no limit on the number of appointments that an employee can attend, Together Women does have the right to refuse time off where it is reasonable to do so. Employees are therefore expected to take reasonable steps to arrange antenatal appointments at a time that will require the minimum amount of time off. Part-time workers should attempt to arrange appointments for days when they are not required to work and all employees should try to avoid appointments in the middle of the working day in order to minimise disruption.

If your partner is pregnant, you are entitled to unpaid time off for up to two antenatal appointments. If you wish to exercise this right you should notify your manager of the date and time of the appointment. You may be asked to provide written evidence that an appropriate appointment has in fact been made.

## **Adoption Appointments**

Employees who are adopting on their own or have elected to be the primary adopter may take paid time off to attend up to five adoption appointments in certain circumstances.

If you are the partner of the primary adopter, you may take unpaid time off on up to two occasions to attend an adoption appointment.

## **3.4 Sickness Absence**

Regular and reliable attendance at work is an important commitment that Together Women asks all employees to make. Unjustified or excessive absence can put unfair pressure on colleagues and seriously damage Together Women's business, to everybody's detriment.

Nevertheless Together Women will always try to be supportive when an employee is genuinely too ill to attend work. This policy sets out Together Women's approach and the steps that you need to take if you are off sick.

### **Reporting Sickness Absence**

If you are too ill to come into work you should personally inform your line manager of this fact as soon as possible and in any event by no later than 1 hour before your start time. When you phone in sick you must make every effort to speak to your manager directly. Do not simply leave a message with a colleague or send an email or text. If you need to leave a message for your manager then they may contact you during the day to discuss your absence with you.

It is important that you keep in touch with your manager about the likely length of your absence so that appropriate arrangements can be made for cover and you should phone in sick on every day of your absence unless either you have previously informed your manager that you will be off sick for a particular period of time or your absence is certified by a GP 'Fit Note' (Form Med 3).

When Employees contact their Manager to report their sickness absence they are expected to disclose the following information:

- (a) The nature of your illness or injury.
- (b) The expected length of your absence from work.
- (c) Contact details

Hangovers are not regarded as legitimate reasons to take sickness absence. Absence by reason of hangovers will be regarded as a disciplinary offence which may result in dismissal without notice or payment in lieu. You should also be aware of the rules governing the consumption of alcohol set out in the Alcohol and Drugs Policy.

Together Women requires any absence to be certified by a 'self-certification form' (Form SC2). Any absence of more than a week must be certified by a 'Fit Note' (Forms

Med 3 or Med 10). Uncertified absence may be treated as misconduct and will not be paid.

Where any period of sickness absence occurs immediately before or immediately after a period of annual leave then Together Women may require such absence to be certified by a GP at your own expense.

Where you are absent for an extended period of time (three weeks or more) Together Women may refer you to an occupational health professional or seek a medical report from your GP. The purpose of this will be to ascertain when you are likely to be able to return to work and to identify any measures that can be taken to help you return as soon as possible.

Employees who are off sick should not undertake any activities likely to be detrimental to their recovery and should cooperate with the appropriate medical professionals in taking steps to ensure that their recovery is as swift as possible.

Together Women will maintain regular contact with employees who are off sick for an extended period.

Employees will be required to attend a return to work meeting after any period of sickness absence. The purpose of the meeting is to check on the employee's general health and wellbeing, to catch up with regards to anything that the employee may have missed, and to discuss whether there are any concerns in respect of absence levels.

### **Annual Leave and Sickness Absence**

Employees may request annual leave during any period of sickness absence in the normal way. If you intend to spend any time away from home during your sickness absence you should inform your manager of this fact in advance and provide contact details. Together Women does not expect employees to take holidays while off sick. In exceptional cases only, where this may assist in an employee's recovery, Together Women may agree to holidays being taken during sick leave. It is essential however that any such holidays are agreed in advance with Together Women following the normal holiday request procedure.

### **Phased Return to Work**

As an employee recovers from illness or injury it may be possible for them to undertake a limited range of duties as a preparation for returning to normal work. Together Women will try whenever appropriate in light of medical advice to allow for a phased return to work from any long-term illness. This may involve reducing the employee's hours, or the scope of their duties or both. The purpose of a phased return, however, is to provide a bridge between sickness absence and normal working and so any such arrangements will be time-limited and will not normally extend over more than three months.

### **Alternative Work**

Together Women may consider agreeing changes to an employee's duties or other working arrangements when it becomes clear that due to sickness or injury they will not be able to return to normal working. Any such changes will be subject to the needs

of the business and there is no guarantee that permanent arrangements of this sort will be possible.

Where duties or working hours are varied in this way then the job being done by the employee will need to be reassessed to determine the appropriate level of remuneration. This will then need to be agreed with the employee. If an agreement is not reached then Together Women may proceed to dismiss the employee in accordance with the procedure for long-term sickness absence.

### **Disability and Reasonable Adjustments**

Together Women is committed to making reasonable adjustments to an employee's duties or working arrangements where they would otherwise suffer a disadvantage arising from any disability.

In order to make appropriate adjustments Together Women needs to know about any disability the employee may have. Employees who feel that they may require an adjustment should discuss their situation with their line manager. Any such discussions will be in the strictest confidence although when an adjustment is made it may be necessary to inform other employees of the reason for this. The extent to which details of any disability will be discussed with other employees will be agreed as part of the process of making the adjustment itself.

The purpose of any adjustment will be to ensure that the employee can work effectively in an appropriate role and on appropriate terms and conditions. Together Women is not obliged to maintain an employee's level of pay if hours are reduced or the employee is moved to a less senior role as a result of any adjustment. Nor will Together Women agree to an adjustment which will not result in a commercially practicable working arrangement.

### **Contractual Sick Pay**

If you are unable to attend work because of sickness or injury Together Women offers Contractual Sick Pay linked to your length of service as detailed below:

<b>Length of Service</b>	<b>Sick Pay Entitlement</b>
The first 6 months of employment SSP only – or when confirmed in post. All new staff will be confirmed in post at 6 months. If your probationary period has been extended then SSP will apply until confirmed in post.	
6 months – Or when confirmed in post - 2 years	2 weeks full pay – 2 weeks half pay

2 years – 5 years	1 month full pay – 1 month half pay
5 years and above	3 month full pay – 3 months half pay

The above entitlement is available 12 month rolling period.

The payment of contractual sick pay is dependent on you keeping Together Women informed in relation to your absence and complying with the requirements of this policy. You will not be entitled to contractual sick pay if you refuse to cooperate with referrals to occupational health or other measures aimed at helping you to return to work. The fact that an employee has not exhausted contractual sick pay will not prevent Together Women from proceeding to dismissal under the procedure for dealing with long-term absence described in Section 5.2.

If your sickness absence is the result of reckless behaviour on your own part – such as participation in a high-risk sport or arising from disorderly conduct - then any payment of contractual sick pay will be entirely at Together Women’s discretion.

Where your sickness or injury is caused by any unlawful act (such as negligence) on the part of a third party, then any contractual sick pay paid to you will be by way of a loan refundable to Together Women and must be recovered from that third party in any claim made by you against them.

Any such loan will only be repayable in the event of damages being successfully recovered and will be limited to the amount of damages recovered.

### **3.5 Compassionate/Bereavement Leave**

In the event an employee suffers a bereavement in their family, Together Women will exercise its discretion to allow reasonable time off to attend a funeral. What is reasonable will be determined on a case by case basis and the type of leave, whether paid or unpaid, will depend on the circumstances and the relationship the employee had with the individual.

In addition, there may be occasions where it may be necessary for an employee to take compassionate leave. Again, this will be considered on a case by case basis and dependant on circumstances, may be paid or unpaid.

An employee will not be eligible to receive paid bereavement or compassionate time-off benefits while off, or absent from work because of holiday, sickness (paid or unpaid) or for any other reason.

### **3.6 Parental Bereavement Leave**

Employees are entitled to statutory parental bereavement leave (SPBL) if a child for whom they have or were due to have parental responsibility has died or been stillborn after 24 weeks of pregnancy, on or after 6 April 2020.

Leave can be taken as one week, two consecutive weeks, or two separate weeks, at any time within the first 56 weeks after the child’s death.

## **Notification**

During the first eight weeks after a child has died, you, or someone on your behalf as necessary, need only give notice to the Company to take SPBL before you are due to start work on the first day of leave. If you have already started work, then officially your SPBL period will start on the following day. If you want to cancel it at any time during the first seven weeks you can do so as long as it has not started.

After eight weeks, you need to give at least a week's notice to the Company to take SPBL. You can cancel it with a week's notice, or re-book it by giving a week's notice.

When giving notice to take SPBL, you must tell the Company: the date of the child's death; when you want your leave to begin; and whether you want to take 1 or 2 weeks leave). You can give notice by telephone or by email or by letter.

## **Parental Bereavement Pay**

To qualify for statutory parental bereavement pay (SPBP) during such leave you must have at least six months' continuous employment and normal weekly earnings of at least the lower earnings limit. It is paid at the same rate as other statutory family leave pay, which is subject to change every year. You can check the most up-to-date figure with your line manager.

To claim SPBP, you must confirm the following information in writing within 28 days of starting any period of SPBL: your name; your entitlement to SPBP; the dates of SPBL you want to claim the pay for; the date of the child's death; and your relationship to the child. You can provide this information at the same time as giving notice to take SPBL, as set out above, so long as it is in writing.

## **Other leave entitlements**

In addition to parental bereavement leave, if you qualified for:

- maternity or paternity leave and pay and your child has died or been stillborn, you are still entitled to such leave and pay.
- adoption leave and pay, then the adoption leave entitlement runs for another eight weeks from the end of the week in which the child died (unless it would already have ended sooner).

If your planned period of SPBL coincides with another statutory family leave right, your SPBL will end at the start of that other leave. If you wish to take SPBL at the end of the other statutory family leave period, then a fresh notice to take the leave will be required, as per the above notice requirements.

Compassionate or Dependants leave may be available under our Compassionate or Dependants Leave Policy at our discretion. Please speak to your manager if you require time off in addition to parental bereavement leave.

### **3.7 Emergency Time Off for Dependants**

Together Women recognises that situations arise where you need to take time off work to deal with an emergency involving someone who depends on you. Your husband, wife or partner, child or parent, or someone living with you as part of your family can all be considered as depending on you. Others who rely solely on you for help in an emergency may also qualify. For further detail as to who counts as depending on you and guidance on individual circumstances, please speak to your Manager.

Provided the reasons for such a request are genuine and you inform Together Women as soon as possible that you need this time off, you will be allowed reasonable unpaid time off work to deal with such emergencies.

The right to time off only covers emergencies. If you know in advance that you are going to need time off, you will not qualify for this type of leave and you therefore should arrange this with Together Women by taking another form of leave, such as annual leave, parental leave etc. In exceptional circumstances Together Women may allow temporary home working.

If an emergency occurs and it is not possible for you to inform your manager in advance of any absence you should contact your manager as soon as possible to inform them of the situation. Appropriate arrangements may then be put in place.

If you suffer some other personal emergency you should talk to your line manager who will discuss what arrangements can be made to grant you compassionate leave. These arrangements will always be at the discretion of Together Women and will depend on the circumstances of the case and the impact that any absence on your part may have on the business. However, Together Women will be sympathetic to your need for time off (which may be paid or unpaid at our discretion) to deal with the situation and make any arrangements that may be necessary.

### **3.8 Other Leave**

The CEO, at the request of an employee may grant leave without pay, or (except in respect of any period during which or she is medically unfit for duty) leave with pay, subject to the needs of the service.

### **3.9 Careers Breaks & Secondment**

As part of its commitment to staff development Together Women views secondment opportunities with partner and related agencies as a positive move and are receptive to requests for secondment positions.

Additionally, the organisation recognises the value of employees being able to take a career break to fulfil ambitions outside of work whilst retaining their longer-term services.

Full details of the Career Breaks and Secondments Policy, including eligibility criteria are on the intranet site.

### 3.10 Annual Leave

Your individual holiday entitlement, including the calculation of any holiday pay, is set out in your contract of employment. This section of the handbook outlines the general approach taken by Together Women to requests for annual leave.

All annual leave must be agreed in advance with your line manager. You should not make firm travel plans or commitments until a request for leave has been granted and Together Women will not take such plans into account when dealing with conflicting holiday requests.

Further, no more than two consecutive weeks' holiday can be taken at one time. In certain circumstances, and at the discretion of the business, a longer period may be permitted. If this is required, you should discuss this with your line manager, to establish whether this can be accommodated. The maximum consecutive period of leave entitlement that will normally be approved is three weeks under special circumstances. However, in exceptional circumstances, up to 12 weeks (including unpaid leave), may be granted at the discretion of the CEO. At least two months' notice should be given when seeking approval for any extended periods of leave.

#### **What notice do I need to give?**

All requests for leave should be made at least 2 weeks in advance for leave exceeding 5 days. For leave less than 5 days one weeks' notice is required.

Your manager may refuse any request for leave if it would result in the workplace being understaffed or otherwise prejudice the business. Leave is likely to be refused if it is requested for a particularly busy period or a time when other employees have already had leave approved.

Certain times of year are particularly popular times for requesting holiday. Generally, subject to the needs of the business, leave will be granted on a first come first served basis, but exceptions may be made in the interests of ensuring that holiday is spread through the year on a fair and equitable basis.

#### **Our Holiday Year**

All employees are encouraged to take their full holiday entitlement during the holiday year which runs from the anniversary of your appointment. However it is your responsibility to schedule your holiday so that it can be taken at an appropriate time.

Employees will not usually be permitted to carry over holiday entitlement into the following holiday year.

In certain circumstances, at Together Women's discretion and subject to certain rules, the carrying over of a maximum of 5 days annual leave may be allowed.

Employees who leave their employment during the course of a holiday year will be entitled to a pro-rata payment reflecting leave accrued but not taken. Where an employee has, at the time their employment ends, taken a larger proportion of their leave entitlement than the proportion of the holiday year that has expired, then a



deduction will be made from the final payment of salary to reflect the holiday which has been taken but not accrued.

Together Women may insist on annual leave being taken at particular times depending on the needs of the business and these are set out in your contract of employment. We will give reasonable notice of any such requirement (the length of the notice given will be at least twice the duration of the leave Together Women requires the employee to take).

Together Women may require annual leave to be taken during the notice period of any employee who has resigned or been dismissed.

### **Short notice annual leave (including “duvet” days)**

Together Women recognises that there may be occasions when staff need to take a day’s leave at short notice. Staff may be allowed to book short notice leave subject to the following criteria:

Staff will only be allowed to book five of their annual leave days in this way. Short notice leave can only be taken one day at a time.

The short notice leave day cannot be attached to a period of sickness or other annual leave. Employees should not assume that short notice leave will be granted. Employees must phone their line manager by 9.30am and seek permission. Permission may not be granted if other staff have leave booked or there is sickness absence in the team. Granting of leave will be subject to operational requirements.

## **3.11 How We Calculate Annual Leave**

### **How We Calculate Holiday Entitlement**

Annual leave is taken in hours and each employee’s entitlement is specified on their contract of employment, as well as their annual leave record form.

Part-time staff receive a pro-rata entitlement.

The year in which annual leave must be taken runs from the anniversary of the employee’s date of appointment.

### **Full time employees who joined before 1 January 2018**

Are entitled to 30 days annual leave plus 8 bank holidays, amounting to 38 days. This equates to 281.2 hours of annual leave or 7.6 weeks.

### **Full time employees who joined on or after 1 January 2018**

Are entitled to 25 days annual leave plus 8 bank holidays, amounting to 33 days. This equates to 244.2 hours of annual leave or 6.6 weeks.

### **Part Time Staff who joined on or Before 1 January 2018**

Part timers are entitled to the same number of weeks off as a full timer however they work less hours each week and so a part timers yearly holiday entitlement is 7.6 weeks x hours they work each week.

Example

An employee who works 30 hours per week would be entitled to 7.6 weeks x 30 hours = 228 hours holiday inclusive of bank holidays.

### **Part Time Staff who joined on or After 1 January 2018**

Part timers are entitled to the same number of weeks off as a full timer however they work less hours each week and so a part timers yearly holiday entitlement is 6.6 weeks x hours they work each week.

Example

An employee who works 30 hours per week would be entitled to 6.6 weeks x 30 hours = 198 hours holiday inclusive of bank holidays.

### **Bank Holidays**

There are 8 bank and public holidays each year:

New Year's Day

Good Friday

Easter Monday

May Day

Spring Bank Holiday Monday

Summer Bank Holiday Monday

Christmas Day

Boxing Day

Together Women does not open its centres or operate on bank holidays.

All staff must therefore record on their annual leave card, the hours for all bank holidays that fall on a day they would normally work.

## **3.12 Reserve Forces**

Together Women supports employees who are also member of the reserve forces. Such employees have specific entitlements relating to time off including arrangements for them returning to work after a period of deployment. Employees who are members of the reserve forces or who are considering joining should discuss the implications with their line manager.

# 4

## FLEXIBLE WORKING AND FAMILY RELATED LEAVE

*Together Women understands the particular issues faced by employees trying to balance their work and family life. This section sets out Together Women's policies in this area and the specific rights given to new parents.*

### 4.1 Flexible Working

Together Women prides itself on providing their employees with a good work life balance and will be keen to support any flexible working applications wherever possible.

Together Women will try, subject to the needs of the business, to accommodate requests from employees who wish to make changes to their working hours or place of work.

Requests for a change in working arrangements can be made by any employee with at least 26 weeks' continuous service with Together Women at the time the request is made. Further, only one request per employee may be made in any 12 month period. The request should:

1. be made in writing and state this is a flexible working request;
2. set out the change requested; and
3. describe the impact that the change will have on the operation of the business and how any difficulties caused by the change may be addressed.

When a request is received, the employee will be invited to a meeting to discuss the potential change.

The meeting will normally be conducted by the employee's line manager.

The employee will be entitled to be accompanied by a fellow employee to assist in making any representations that may be appropriate.

The application may be refused on one or more of several grounds, these being that the proposed changes will result in:

- a burden of additional cost;
- a detrimental effect on ability to meet customer demand;
- an inability to re-organise work among existing staff;
- an inability to recruit additional staff;
- a detrimental effect on quality;
- a detrimental effect on performance;

- an insufficiency of work during the periods you propose to work;
- a planned structural change; and
- any other ground allowed by regulations.

In refusing any request Together Women will explain the reasons for the refusal in writing and may make an offer of an alternative arrangement. Discussions may then take place to try to agree a way forward. If no agreement is reached then the employee's terms and conditions will remain unchanged, subject to the right of the employee to appeal the decision.

Any meetings should take place in a spirit of cooperation with both sides seeking to reach agreement on an appropriate way forward.

Any change in working arrangements which results from this process will be confirmed to you in writing.

This policy will not prevent managers agreeing to ad hoc arrangements from time to time. However, any such arrangement will not amount to a variation in your terms and conditions of employment unless specifically agreed to the contrary and confirmed in writing. Together Women may terminate any such ad hoc agreement at any time and require you to revert to your agreed working arrangements.

As there will inevitably be a limit to the amount of flexibility Together Women can offer without detriment to its interests, employees must accept that the fact that a particular working arrangement has been granted to one employee does not oblige Together Women to grant it to another.

## **4.2 Maternity Leave**

All employees who give birth are entitled to take maternity leave which lasts for a maximum of 52 weeks. Employees with at least six months' service immediately before the 15th week prior to the expected week of childbirth will also be entitled to be paid Statutory Maternity pay (SMP) for up to 39 weeks of their absence. Because this is a statutory payment there are a number of procedural requirements that must be met in order to make sure that an employee qualifies. The most important requirements are set out below, but if you have any doubts about the rules that apply you should speak to a member of the management team who will make sure that you have all the appropriate information.

### **Notification**

To qualify for maternity leave you must provide Together Women, no later than the end of the 15th week before your EWC (when you are approximately 6 months' pregnant) with the following information:

1. that you are pregnant;
2. the date of the week your baby is due (your expected week of childbirth or EWC);

3. when you intend your maternity leave to start (this date can be changed later – see below); and
4. you must also provide Together Women with the original Maternity Certificate (MAT B1) issued by your doctor.

In some circumstances Together Women may be able to accept other medical evidence of when your baby is due, so if there is any difficulty in providing the MATB1 certificate you should discuss this with your manager.

If you intend to take advantage of the right to shared parental leave, you should inform Together Women of this fact at the same time as you notify the intended start date of your leave.

### **Start of Maternity Leave**

Generally it is up to you to decide when to start your maternity leave. However, your leave cannot begin any earlier than the beginning of the 11th week before your EWC.

Where it is safe to do so, you may choose to continue working right up to your child's birth. However, your maternity leave will begin automatically if you are off sick for a pregnancy-related reason at any stage in the four weeks immediately before your EWC.

If your baby is born before the date that you have notified as the start date for your maternity leave then your maternity leave will begin on the day following the birth.

You may change the date on which you intend to start your maternity leave, but you must notify Together Women of your new start date at least 28 days before the original date given (or the new date, if that is sooner). If there is a reason why you cannot give this notice then you should explain the situation to an appropriate manager and Together Women will attempt to accommodate your changed circumstances. However, Together Women may need to insist on delaying the start of your leave until at least 28 days have passed since your notification of a changed date.

When your baby is born you should inform Together Women of this fact as soon as is reasonable practicable.

### **Duration of Maternity Leave**

The standard length of maternity leave is 52 weeks. Once you indicate the intended start date of your leave, Together Women will send you a written notification of your expected date of return.

Unless you give due notice to Together Women of an earlier date of return, it will be assumed that you intend to take your full 52-week entitlement and you will not be expected back at work before your leave ends. You do not then have to give any notice of your return although it would be sensible to contact your manager some time in advance to discuss any arrangements that may need to be made.

At the end of your maternity leave you are generally entitled to return to the same job as you had before your leave began. If you are away for more than 26 weeks, however,

there may be circumstances in which that is not reasonably practicable. In that case, Together Women will provide you with a suitable and appropriate role at the same level of seniority and on no-less favourable terms and conditions.

### **Dismissal or Resignation**

While on maternity leave you remain employed by Together Women and bound by your contract of employment. If you decide that you want to leave your employment you will need to submit your resignation in the normal way.

Together Women will not dismiss you for any reason related to your pregnancy or your exercise of any right which arises from it. However, if separate circumstances require your dismissal (for instance, because of redundancy) then that will bring your maternity leave to an end.

If your position becomes redundant during your maternity leave then you will be offered any suitable alternative work that is available.

Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP) is paid to employees who have at least 26 weeks' service immediately before the 15th week before the expected week of childbirth and whose pay is above the Lower Earnings Limit for paying National Insurance Contributions (this changes each year). Employees who earn below that amount may be entitled to a state benefit called Maternity Allowance. Together Women will provide you with an appropriate form to help you claim this, where appropriate.

To pay SMP, Together Women needs to be given at least 28 days' notice that you intend to claim it. This will normally be given when you inform Together Women of your intended start date for maternity leave. If it is not possible to give 28 days' notice, you should give as much notice as is reasonably practicable.

SMP is paid for a maximum total of 39 weeks. The first 6 weeks are paid at 90 per cent of your normal weekly earnings (this is based on an average of your total earnings in the eight weeks immediately preceding the 14<sup>th</sup> week before your expected week of childbirth) and the remaining 33 weeks are paid at a flat rate specified in legislation (this changes each year).

Your entitlement to SMP will be affected if you undertake any paid work (other than 'Keeping in Touch' days, described below) or are taken into legal custody at any time during your period of SMP entitlement. You should inform Together Women immediately of any such change in your circumstances.

### **Returning to Work Early**

Not every employee will want to take the full 52 weeks of maternity leave. Some may simply want to return to work early and others may wish (with their partner) to take advantage of the right to shared parental leave (see below).

In order to make arrangements to accommodate an early return Together Women is entitled to ask for 8 weeks' notice of the new date, and if that is not given may delay your return until 8 weeks have passed since your notification.

In any event the law requires that you must not be permitted to return to work during the two weeks immediately following the birth.

### **Returning to Work Late**

Following your maternity leave, you are required to return to work on the date notified to you as your expected date of return. If you are unwell on that date then you should follow the sickness absence procedure set out in Section 5.2 of this handbook.

If you are entitled to begin some other period of leave (such as annual leave or parental leave) then you should ensure that you have followed the appropriate procedure for taking such leave as set out in this handbook.

### **Maternity Suspension (Health and Safety Reasons)**

Depending on the nature of your job, there may be circumstances in which it is unsafe for you to continue working while you are pregnant. In some circumstances the law requires a pregnant employee to be suspended on full pay or transferred to alternative duties. Jobs which may come under this category are identified in the risk assessments that Together Women has carried out under its health and safety policy. If you are affected by any health and safety issues connected with your pregnancy then Together Women will discuss any detailed arrangements that need to be made until it is safe for you to return to your original duties.

## **4.3 Adoption Leave**

Employees who are matched with a child for adoption may be entitled to take up to 52 weeks' adoption leave.

Adoption leave is also available to individuals fostering a child under the "Fostering for Adoption" scheme.

Where two parents are adopting a child, only one of them may take adoption leave, and the other (regardless of gender) is entitled to take paternity leave. If both adoptive parents qualify, they may each take shared parental leave.

The arrangements for taking adoption leave are similar to the arrangements for taking maternity leave, but there are several important differences. The key ones are set out below, but if you believe you are entitled to adoption leave you should discuss the situation with an appropriate manager who will ensure that you have all the necessary information.

### **Notification**

If you intend to take adoption leave you should notify Together Women of this within seven days of being notified that you have been matched with a child for adoption (or as soon as is reasonably practicable).

Your notification should set out:

- the date when the child is expected to be placed with you; and

- the date when you want to start your adoption leave.

As with maternity leave, you can change your mind about the start date provided Together Women is given at least 28 days – or as much notice as is reasonably practicable.

Together Women is entitled to require proof of the adoption which usually takes the form of a matching certificate provided by the agency placing the child.

Adoption leave is the same in duration as that of maternity leave and will last for 52 weeks unless you choose to return early or take advantage of shared parental leave. You may choose to start the leave from the date when the child is placed with you or at any time in the preceding two weeks.

If, for any reason, the placement is brought to an end – for example because the match turns out to be unsuitable – then adoption leave will continue for 8 weeks beyond the end of the placement. After that period you will be expected to return to work as normal.

### **Adoption Pay**

The arrangements for statutory adoption pay are similar to those for SMP (set out above).

### **Returning to Work Following Adoption Leave**

Your return to work at the end of your adoption leave is on the same basis as for the end of maternity leave (set out above).

## **4.4 Paternity Leave**

Employees with 26 weeks' continuous service as at the 15<sup>th</sup> week before the expected week of childbirth will be entitled to take paternity leave if they expect to have parental responsibility for a child and they are either the mother's partner or one of the adoptive parents. The purpose of the leave must be either to care for the child or to provide support for the child's mother or adoptive parent.

There are a number of administrative requirements that must be met in relation to taking paternity leave and employees should discuss their plans with their line manager at as early a stage as possible. The following paragraphs set out the basic requirements, but there are additional requirements that must be met when adopting a child from overseas and employees in this position should talk to their manager who will make sure that full information is provided.

Employees entitled to take paternity leave are entitled to take either one or two weeks of leave. If two weeks are taken they must be consecutive and no individual days can be taken except with the agreement of Together Women.

Paternity leave cannot start before a child is born and must be taken at some stage within the first eight weeks following birth (except when the child is born prematurely in which case the leave must be taken within the eight weeks following the expected week of childbirth).



Most new parents choose to begin paternity leave on the date their child is born, but you may if you wish begin the leave at any time you choose provided that the whole of the leave is taken by the end of those eight weeks.

In order to qualify for paternity leave you must notify Together Women at least 15 weeks before the expected week of your child's birth or within 7 days of having been notified that a child will be placed for adoption. Your notification should specify how much leave you intend to take and when you intend the leave to begin. Should your plans change, you will need to give Together Women 28 days' notice of any revision.

Paternity leave is payable at the statutory rate, which is subject to change every year. You can check the most up-to-date figure with your line manager.

## **4.5 Parental Leave**

Parental leave is a flexible form of unpaid leave designed to help employees spend time caring for their children. Parental leave can be taken up until the child's 18th birthday and is available to employees who have at least one year's service and who have formal parental responsibility for a child.

The basic entitlement is to 18 weeks of unpaid leave in respect of each child.

Parental leave must usually be taken in blocks of one week or more and no more than four weeks' leave will be granted in a single year. However, more flexibility is available in respect of disabled children and you should discuss your requirements with your line manager if this applies to you.

A request to take parental leave should be submitted 21 days in advance. While Together Women will always try to accommodate requests for parental leave, it has the right to postpone any leave for up to six months in order to accommodate business need.

No postponement will be required if you choose to take your first instalment of leave immediately after the birth or adoption of your child. In such circumstances you need only inform Together Women of your intention 21 days before the expected date of birth or placement. The leave will then begin automatically when your child is born or placed with you.

Parental leave is an entitlement that can be transferred from one employment to another. You may therefore join Together Women with some outstanding parental leave attaching to a particular child. In such circumstances you should be aware that the qualifying period for taking parental leave still applies and you will need to have been employed for at least one year before you can resume taking parental leave.

## **4.6 Shared Parental Leave**

Shared parental leave is a flexible form of leave available to both parents designed to encourage shared parenting in the first year of a child's life. It allows a more flexible pattern of leave than the traditional arrangement under which the mother takes extensive maternity leave and the father takes a short period of paternity leave.

Employees who give birth or adopt remain entitled to take the full 52 weeks of leave if they choose to do so and the arrangements described above for maternity and adoption leave continue to apply. However, an employee may choose to share part of that leave with their partner provided that certain qualifying conditions are met. When leave is shared in this way, there is no need for the 'primary' leave taker to have returned to work. Both parents can be on leave at the same time, provided that the combined amount of leave taken by the parents does not exceed 52 weeks and provided that all of the leave is taken before the end of 52 weeks following the birth of the child or its placement for adoption.

Generally, parents will qualify for shared parental leave provided that both are working and that each has at least 26 weeks' service with their respective employers. To exercise the right, both parents must inform their employer that they intend to take shared parental leave – usually at the same time as the employer is notified that an employee is pregnant or plans to adopt. They must also give an indication of the pattern of leave that they propose to take.

A parent proposing to take a period of shared parental leave must give Together Women 8 weeks' notice of any such leave. Depending on the circumstances, it may be possible for the Shared Parental Leave to be taken in intermittent blocks, with one parent returning to work for a time before taking another period of shared parental leave. Such an arrangement can only be made with the agreement of Together Women. While every effort will be made to accommodate the needs of individual employees, Together Women may insist on shared parental leave being taken in a single instalment. Any decision as to whether to permit intermittent periods of leave is entirely at Together Women's discretion.

An employee absent on shared parental leave will be entitled to a weekly payment equivalent to the lower fixed rate of SMP. The number of weeks for which payment will be made will vary depending on the amount of SMP paid to the mother while on maternity leave. Essentially, if the mother ends (or proposes to end) her leave with 10 weeks of SMP entitlement remaining, the parent taking shared parental leave will be entitled to be paid for the first 10 weeks of leave.

Because of the number of options available, shared parental leave can be quite a complicated entitlement. If you want to take advantage of shared parental leave you should discuss this with your line manager who will check that you qualify and help guide you through the procedure.

## **4.7 Keeping in Touch Days**

Employees during a period of maternity, adoption or shared parental leave are entitled to 10 keeping in touch days (KIT days). These allow the employee to attend work to catch up on the latest developments, undergo training or some other development activity, or to take part in important meetings without losing their right to subsequent pay entitlements. Employees on shared parental leave are entitled to a further 20 KIT days.

These 'keeping in touch days' are entirely voluntary and employees will not be required to take part, nor is Together Women under any obligation to arrange for keeping in touch days.

Any payment for attending work on such days will be agreed between Together Women and the employee at the time the keeping in touch day is arranged.

There is no legal requirement to receive pay for these days.

#### **4.8 During Maternity/Adoption or Shared Parental Leave**

Together Women is keen to keep in touch with employees who are on extended periods of leave, to inform them of any news and consult them over any changes which may take place in the business. However, we appreciate that many employees would prefer to be left alone at this very important time in their lives. In order to get the balance right, your manager may, before your leave begins, discuss with you how best we can keep in touch while you are away.

Please be aware, however, that if an important issue arises on which you need to be consulted, Together Women may have a legal obligation to discuss the issue with you and keep you informed.

# 5

## HOW WE RESOLVE ISSUES

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*When problems arise in the employment relationship it is important that they are dealt with fairly and promptly. This section sets out the procedures that Together Women will follow in such cases.*

**Recording of meetings:** Due to the confidential nature of disciplinary and grievance proceedings you must not make electronic or audio recordings of any meetings or hearings conducted under the procedures set out in section 5. You should ensure that any companion you may bring with you to such meetings is also aware of this rule.

### 5.1 Performance Improvement Procedure

It is in everybody's interest for employees to perform well at their jobs and Together Women aims to ensure that all employees are given the support needed to ensure that they do so. Where there are issues with performance then the employee should receive feedback from their manager setting out any concerns. Discussions should take place about how that performance can be improved. This procedure is designed to be used when such informal discussions do not lead to the employee's performance improving to an acceptable level.

Where an employee's poor performance is believed to be the result of deliberate neglect, or where serious errors have been made to the detriment of Together Women then it may be more appropriate to use the disciplinary procedure. Which procedure to use shall be at the discretion of Together Women.

Together Women also reserves the right not to follow this procedure in full for employees who are within their first two years of employment with Together Women.

#### **The Right to be Accompanied**

Employees are entitled to be accompanied at any meeting held under this procedure by a fellow employee or trade union official of their choice. Together Women will provide any chosen companions with appropriate paid time off to allow them to attend the meeting. It is, however, up to the employee in question to arrange for a companion to attend the meeting.

If your chosen companion cannot attend on the day scheduled for the meeting then Together Women will agree a new date. This will usually be within 5 working days of the date originally scheduled. If your companion is not available within that timescale then you may need to find someone else to take their place.

The Companion's role is to advise you during the meeting and make representations on your behalf. However, both you and your companion are required to cooperate in ensuring a fair and efficient meeting. The companion is not entitled to answer questions on your behalf.

## Stage One

The employee's manager will inform them of the nature of the problem and confirm this in writing. The employee will be invited to a meeting to discuss the issues raised by the manager's concerns. The meeting will be conducted by the employee's line manager and will consider any representations the employee may make about their performance, whether it needs to be improved, and if so what steps can be taken to help the employee reach the appropriate level.

Following discussion of the problem, the line manager may choose to take no further action; to refer the matter for investigation under the disciplinary procedure or to issue a written warning and Performance Improvement Plan which will remain current for a period of 12 months.

### Performance Improvement Plan

A Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) is a series of measures designed to help improve the employee's performance. Each measure will ideally be agreed with the employee, though Together Women reserves the right to insist on any aspect of the PIP in the absence of such agreement.

Each PIP will be tailored to the particular situation, but will contain the following elements:

**Timescale:** the overall timescale in which the necessary improvement must be achieved will be set out, together with the timescale for reaching individual milestones where appropriate.

**Targets:** The PIP will specify the particular areas in which improvement is needed and set out how and on what criteria the employee's performance will be assessed. Where appropriate, specific targets will be set which will need to be achieved either by the end of the plan or at identifiable stages within it.

**Measures:** The PIP will specify what measures will be taken by Together Women to support the employee in improving their performance. Such measures may include training, additional supervision, the reallocation of other duties, or the provision of additional support from colleagues.

**Feedback:** As part of the PIP the employee will be given regular feedback from their line manager indicating the extent to which the employee is on track to deliver the improvements set out in the plan

If at any stage Together Women feels that the PIP is not progressing in a satisfactory way, a further meeting may be held with the employee to discuss the issue. As a result of such a meeting the employer may amend or extend any part of the plan.

### Review

At the end of the PIP the employee's performance will be reviewed. If satisfactory progress has been made the employee will be notified of this fact in writing. If the manager feels that progress has been insufficient then they may decide to extend

and/or amend the PIP to such extent as seems appropriate. Alternatively the manager may refer the matter to a meeting under Stage Two of this procedure.

Following the successful completion of a PIP the employee's performance will continue to be monitored. If at any stage in the following 12 months, the employee's performance again starts to fall short of an acceptable standard, their line manager may decide to institute stage two of this procedure.

### **Stage Two**

If a PIP has not led to sufficient improvement in the employee's performance, the employee will be invited to attend a formal performance management hearing. The invitation will set out the respects in which the line manager believes that the employee's performance still falls short of an acceptable standard.

The hearing will be conducted by a member of the senior management team.

At the hearing, the employee will be given an opportunity to respond to any criticism of their performance and to make representations about any aspect of the way in which the process has been managed.

If the hearing concludes that reasonable steps have been taken which should have allowed the employee to perform to an acceptable standard but that these measures have not worked then a **formal final warning** may be issued. The warning will explain the nature of the improvement which is required in the employee's performance and state that the improvement must be immediate and sustained. It will also explain that if this improvement does not take place then the employee may be dismissed. Where it is appropriate, the warning may be accompanied by an extended or revised PIP.

The warning will remain current for a period of 12 months, after which time it will cease to have effect.

### **Stage 3**

If an employee has been issued with a warning under Stage Two which remains current, and the appropriate manager believes that the employee's performance is still not acceptable then the matter may be referred to a further performance management hearing.

The employee will be informed in writing of the grounds of which the hearing is being convened and in particular will be told of the respects in which their performance continues to fall below an acceptable standard.

The hearing will be conducted by an appropriate manager.

At the meeting the employee will be able to respond to any criticisms made of their performance and make representations about how the situation should be treated.

The manager conducting the meeting may take such action as is judged appropriate up to and including a decision to dismiss the employee.

Any dismissal under this procedure will be with notice or payment in lieu of notice and the decision to dismiss together with the reasons for dismissal will be set out in writing and sent to the employee.

### **Appeals**

An employee may appeal against any decision taken under this procedure. The appeal should be submitted in writing within one week of the action complained of. An appeal hearing will then be convened to consider the matter. Any PIP that is in force, together with any measures or objectives included within it, will continue in place during the appeal process.

The outcome of the appeal will be confirmed to the employee in writing explaining the grounds of which the decision was reached. The outcome of the appeal will be final.

### **Redeployment**

There may be circumstances in which it becomes clear that an employee would be better suited to a different role within Together Women. However, any offer to redeploy the employee will be entirely at Together Women's discretion and will only be made when Together Women is confident that the employee will be able to perform well in the redeployed role and where there is a suitable available vacancy.

Redeployment may be offered as an alternative to dismissal where Together Women is satisfied that the employee should no longer be allowed to continue to work in their current role. While the employee is free to refuse any offer of redeployment, the only alternative available in these circumstances will usually be dismissal.

## **5.2 Sickness Absence Procedure**

Together Women may need to dismiss an employee whose attendance does not meet an acceptable standard either because of a long-term absence or because of a series of short-term absences. Such dismissals do not depend on any wrongdoing on the employee's part and do not mean that Together Women does not accept that their absences are genuinely due to illness or injury. Rather, dismissal is recognition that unfortunately the employee is no longer able to perform their role, or attend work on a sufficiently regular basis to make their continued employment a viable option.

### **Short-term Absence**

An employee who is absent on more than three occasions within a three-month period will be invited to a meeting to discuss their attendance.

The meeting will usually be conducted by the employee's line manager and the employee will have a right to be accompanied by a fellow employee or a trade union official on the same basis as set out in the performance management procedure.

At the meeting the employee will be asked to explain the level of their absence. Where there is any indication that the absences are caused by an underlying medical condition then the matter may be dealt with under the procedure for long-term absence set out below. Together Women may also seek medical evidence from either the

employee's doctor or an occupational health specialist in which case the meeting will be adjourned for a report to be obtained

Subject to any medical evidence, the manager conducting this first-stage meeting may decide to issue a warning to the employee setting out Together Women's expectations regarding attendance and indicating the level of improvement needed. A review period will normally be set which may range from one month to 12 months depending on the circumstances.

If the employee's attendance does not improve to the extent required they may at any stage in the review period be invited to attend a second-stage meeting to discuss the matter. The meeting will again be conducted by the line manager and the employee will be entitled to be accompanied by a fellow employee or trade union official. This meeting may result in an extension of the review period or the issuing of a final written warning requiring the employee's attendance to improve and setting out the level of improvement required over a specified period of up to one year.

If the employee does not meet this standard and there is no underlying condition where reasonable adjustments would assist the employee to attend then they may be dismissed. A final meeting will be convened which shall be conducted by a manager with appropriate authority to dismiss and will consider any representations made by or on behalf of the employee who will once again have the right to be accompanied by a fellow employee or trade union official.

Any dismissal arising out of this meeting will be with notice.

There is a right of appeal against a decision to dismiss which must be exercised within five working days of the decision being communicated.

### **Long-term Sickness Absence**

Where an employee is absent for an extended period – or it is clear that their absence is likely to continue for some time – then Together Women will want to investigate the prospects for their return and consider what actions can be taken to facilitate this. The extent to which Together Women can continue to accommodate an employee's absence will depend on a range of factors, including the role of the employee and the prevailing circumstances of the business.

Together Women will seek medical advice as to the employee's condition either from the appropriate professionals caring for the employee or from a specialist occupational health practitioner. The focus will be on ascertaining when the employee will be able to return to work and what steps Together Women can take to facilitate this.

An employee is not obliged to consent to any medical reports or records being shared with Together Women as part of this process. However, in the absence of medical evidence Together Women will have to work on the basis of what information is available in reaching its decision.

One or more meetings will be arranged with the employee to discuss their condition, the prospects for any return to work, and whether anything more can be done by



Together Women to help. The employee will be entitled to be accompanied at the meeting by a fellow employee or trade union official.

Every effort will be made to make suitable arrangements for the meeting to allow the employee to attend. Where the employee is simply too ill to take part in the process, however, Together Women may proceed to dismissal in the absence of a meeting taking into account any representations made on the employee's behalf.

Where it appears that the employee will be unable to return to work within a reasonable time frame then Together Women may need to consider dismissal. Any dismissal will be with notice.

There is a right of appeal against a decision to dismiss which must be exercised within five working days of the decision being communicated.

The Company reserves the right not to follow these procedures in full for employees who are within their first two years of employment with the Company.

### **5.3 Disciplinary Procedure**

Together Women always tries to deal with disciplinary issues fairly and promptly. This procedure sets out the framework under which allegations of misconduct will be investigated and considered. While the procedure set out in this policy will be appropriate in most cases, there may be situations in which it is not practicable to comply with a particular requirement of it. When this happens Together Women will do its best to deal with the matter fairly and will pay particular attention to the need to give the employee every opportunity to explain their version of events.

Together Women reserves the right not to follow this procedure in full for employees who are within their first two years of employment with Together Women.

#### **Definition of Misconduct**

Behaviour which is disruptive, disrespectful to colleagues, or which falls short of the requirements set out in this handbook will be treated as misconduct under the disciplinary procedure. While employees will not usually be dismissed for a first offence a failure to remedy the behaviour or to adhere to required standards may ultimately lead to dismissal once appropriate warnings have been given.

#### **Definition of Gross Misconduct**

Gross misconduct is behaviour which is fundamentally at odds with the employee's duty to Together Women and their colleagues. In accordance with the disciplinary procedure, gross misconduct will usually result in dismissal without notice, or payment in lieu of notice, even in cases of a first offence.

It is not possible to list every example of gross misconduct which may arise, but the following provides an illustration of the sort of conduct that will fall into this category – some of which are then explained in more detail below:

- Theft;

- Deliberate acts of discrimination or harassment;
- Refusal to carry out reasonable instructions;
- Violent or intimidating behaviour;
- Wilful damage to property;
- Reckless behaviour posing a risk to health and safety;
- Any act or omission constituting serious or gross negligence/or dereliction of duty;
- Sleeping on duty;
- Recording audio and/or video of any meeting, conversation or discussion with another person or people without the express prior consent of the person or people being recorded;
- Any illegal act during working time or on Together Women premises; and
- Any act described as gross misconduct elsewhere in this handbook.

### **Informal Action**

Most minor acts of misconduct can be dealt with informally through discussions between an employee and their line manager. This may consist of management guidance or an informal warning given orally or in writing. These steps are an everyday part of the management process and no formal procedure needs to be followed in respect of them.

Where informal action of this kind fails to resolve an issue, or where the misconduct alleged is considered too serious, then the matter will be dealt with formally under this procedure.

### **Investigation**

If it is alleged that you have committed misconduct, an appropriate investigation will be carried out aimed at gathering all of the relevant evidence. You may be interviewed as part of this investigation and will have the opportunity to point the investigator towards any evidence that you feel is relevant. The right to be accompanied (see below) does not apply to any investigatory interview.

### **Suspension**

If an allegation of misconduct is made against you, then you may be suspended from your duties on full pay while the matter is being dealt with. Together Women will make every effort to ensure that any period of suspension is kept as short as possible. The purpose of a suspension is either to allow an unhindered investigation to take place, or to protect the interests of Together Women and its employees. During any period of suspension you may be instructed not to contact other members of staff except for the purposes of preparing for any disciplinary hearing, where specific arrangements will

be made with you. This is not a disciplinary sanction and should not be seen as a predetermination of any disciplinary process.

## **Hearing**

Once the investigation has been carried out, the investigating officer will make a decision about whether there is sufficient evidence to warrant a disciplinary hearing. If there is you will be informed of this and an appropriate date for the hearing will be arranged. This will take place within normal working hours wherever possible.

To ensure that you have adequate time to prepare for the hearing, Together Women will provide you in advance with a copy of all of the written evidence that will be considered at the hearing. In exceptional cases Together Women may need to withhold the identities of certain witnesses or hold back sensitive items of evidence. This will only be done where it is considered necessary to protect individuals or the essential interests of Together Women and every effort will be made to ensure that you are given as much information as possible so that a fair hearing can be conducted.

You will be given sufficient notice of any hearing to allow you to prepare for it. While this will vary from case to case, Together Women will generally try to give at least two days' notice of any hearing and in complicated cases a longer period of notice may be given.

The purpose of the hearing will be to consider the evidence gathered during the investigation and to consider any representations made by you or on your behalf. The hearing will be conducted by an appropriate manager who, wherever possible, has not previously been involved in the case and who was not responsible for carrying out the investigation.

## **The Right to be Accompanied**

Employees are entitled to be accompanied at any disciplinary hearing by a fellow employee or trade union official of their choice. Together Women will provide any chosen companion with appropriate paid time off to allow them to attend the hearing. It is, however, up to the employee in question to arrange for a companion to attend the hearing.

If your chosen companion cannot attend on the day scheduled for the hearing then Together Women will agree a new date. This will usually be within 5 working days of the date originally scheduled. If your companion is not available within that timescale then you may need to find someone else to take their place.

The companion's role is to advise you during the hearing and make representations on your behalf; it is not to answer questions for you. However, both you and your companion are required to cooperate in ensuring a fair and efficient hearing. The companion cannot answer questions on your behalf.

## **Evidence**

The hearing will consider any evidence you choose to present. Should witnesses be prepared to appear on your behalf they will be permitted to do so provided that their evidence is relevant to the issues that need to be decided. Together Women will not

compel or require any employee to appear as a witness on your behalf and in most circumstances evidence arising from the investigation will be presented in written form. You will be entitled to challenge any of the evidence presented but will not be entitled to cross-examine witnesses.

### **Disciplinary Action**

After considering all of the evidence, including any submissions made by you or on your behalf, the manager conducting the hearing will decide on the outcome. If misconduct is found to have taken place then the usual outcome will be a **written warning** which will be placed on your personnel file.

A warning will stay active for a period of 1 year, after which it will not be taken into account in any future disciplinary action.

If however a further instance of misconduct is found to have occurred (in accordance with this procedure) during the currency of a warning – or if any misconduct is considered to be serious enough to warrant it – then, subject to the formal process above being followed, you will be issued with a **final written warning**.

A **final written warning** will usually remain active for one year, but a longer period may be specified if the manager conducting the hearing feels that the circumstances warrant it.

An employee who is found to have committed further misconduct during a period covered by a final written warning will, following a hearing conducted in accordance with this procedure, generally be dismissed.

### **Dismissal**

An employee will not normally be dismissed under this procedure for a single instance of misconduct unless a final written warning is already in place. However, where gross misconduct is found to have occurred then dismissal without notice or payment in lieu will be the usual outcome.

Gross misconduct is misconduct that is so serious that it fundamentally undermines the relationship between employer and employee. If you are accused of gross misconduct this will be made clear when you are invited to a disciplinary hearing. A wide range of behaviours can amount to gross misconduct but the most common involve dishonesty, violent or aggressive behaviour, the wilful destruction of Together Women property or a deliberate refusal to obey a reasonable instruction.

### **Appeal**

An employee may appeal against the outcome of a disciplinary hearing by doing so in writing within one week of being notified of the outcome. The person to whom an appeal should be directed will be detailed in the disciplinary outcome letter. An appeal

hearing will be convened and conducted by an appropriate member of the senior management team.

The appeal will consider any grounds the employee chooses to put forward and they will have the same right to be accompanied as at a disciplinary hearing. The result of the appeal hearing will be final.

### **Employee Absence**

It is important that disciplinary issues are dealt with promptly. Together Women may therefore need to proceed with a disciplinary hearing even if the employee is absent due to ill health or simply does not attend. Before hearing the matter in an employee's absence, Together Women will attempt to arrange the hearing in such a way that the employee will be able to attend or to submit written representations to the hearing and/or to arrange for an appropriate representative to attend the hearing on their behalf.

## **5.4 Grievance Procedure**

Together Women aims to be responsive to concerns raised by employees and if you are unhappy with something affecting you at work you are encouraged to raise this with your line manager. If that is not possible then you should speak your line managers manager or HR who will try to assist you in resolving any issue you may have. The following procedure is designed to be used when these informal attempts to resolve any dispute have not been successful.

### **Raising a Grievance**

If you feel that the matter needs to be raised formally you should raise a grievance by making a written complaint, stating that it is being made under this procedure. You should give as much information about your grievance, including any relevant dates and times, as you can, so as to allow for any investigation into your concerns to take place.

A grievance will normally be dealt with by your line manager and should be addressed to them directly. Where the grievance is directly concerned with your line manager's behaviour, however, you should submit your grievance to your line managers manager who will arrange for somebody who is not directly involved in the issue to deal with it.

### **Grievance Hearing**

A grievance hearing will then be arranged so that you can explain the issue and suggest how it can be resolved. You will have the right to be accompanied by a fellow employee or trade union official as described in Section 5.1, above. The manager conducting the hearing will consider what you have said and may either deal with the matter immediately or decide to carry out further investigations. In that case the hearing will be adjourned until the investigation has been completed.

Once the investigations are concluded, if new information comes to light, if it is considered appropriate, you may be invited in to a reconvened meeting, to have the

opportunity to consider and respond to the findings of the investigation. Following this a decision on the outcome of your grievance will be made.

### **Allegations of Misconduct**

Where an employee is making allegations of misconduct on the part of other employees then Together Women may need to carry out an investigation into the allegations and pursue the matter through the disciplinary procedure. Where this happens the grievance will be held over until the disciplinary process has been concluded.

### **Relationship with Other Procedures**

Where your grievance relates to the conduct of other procedures such as the disciplinary or performance management procedures then Together Women may choose to either delay the consideration of the grievance until that procedure has been completed or to deal with the grievance in the course of that procedure or by way of appeal if that appears to be a fairer or more straightforward way of dealing with the issue.

### **Appeals**

If you are dissatisfied with the outcome of a grievance then you may appeal. You should submit your appeal in writing within one week of being informed of the outcome of your grievance. Your appeal should be directed to the person named in the grievance outcome letter. An appeal hearing will then be convened and conducted by an appropriate member of the senior management team. You will have the right to be accompanied at the appeal by a fellow employee or trade union official as described in Section 5.1. The outcome of any appeal will be final.

# 6

## **EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES & BULLYING AND HARASSMENT POLICY**

### **6.1 Equal Opportunities Statement**

We are equal opportunity employer and are fully committed to a policy of treating all of our employees and job applicants equally in all aspects of employment including: recruitment and selection, promotion, transfer, opportunities for training, pay and benefits, other terms of employment, discipline, selection for redundancy and dismissal.

We will take all reasonable steps to employ, train and promote employees on the basis of their experience, abilities and qualifications, without regard to race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, pregnancy or maternity, gender reassignment, age, marriage and civil partnership or disability. In this Policy these are known as the "Protected Characteristics".

We will appoint, train, develop and promote on the basis of merit and ability alone. We will also take all reasonable steps to provide a work environment in which all employees are treated with respect and dignity and that is free of harassment based upon any of the Protected Characteristics. We will not condone any form of harassment, whether engaged in by employees or by outside third parties who do business with us, such as clients, customers, contractors and suppliers.

Employees have a duty to co-operate with us to ensure that this policy is effective in ensuring equal opportunities and in preventing discrimination, harassment or bullying. Action will be taken under our Disciplinary Procedure against any employee who is found to have committed an act of improper or unlawful discrimination, harassment, bullying or intimidation. Serious breaches of this policy will be treated as potential gross misconduct and could render the employee liable to summary dismissal.

Employees must not harass, bully or intimidate other employees for reasons related to one or more of the Protected Characteristics. Such behaviour will be treated as potential gross misconduct under our Disciplinary Procedure. Employees who commit serious acts of harassment may also be guilty of a criminal offence.

You should draw to the attention of your line manager any suspected discriminatory acts or practices or suspected cases of harassment. You must not victimise or retaliate against an employee who has made allegations or complaints of discrimination or harassment or who has provided information about such discrimination or harassment. Such behaviour will be treated as potential gross misconduct. Employees should support colleagues who suffer such treatment and are making a complaint.

#### **Discrimination**

You must not unlawfully discriminate against or harass other people, including current and former employees, job applicants, clients, customers, suppliers and visitors. This

applies in the workplace, outside the workplace (when dealing with customers, suppliers or other work-related contacts or when wearing a work uniform), and on work-related trips or events including social events.

The following forms of discrimination are prohibited under this policy and are unlawful:

- Direct discrimination – when someone is treated less favourably than another person because of a Protected Characteristic.
- Associative discrimination or discrimination by association – direct discrimination against someone because they associate with another person who possesses a Protected Characteristic.
- Discrimination by perception – direct discrimination against someone because it is thought that they possess a particular Protected Characteristic even if they do not actually possess it.
- Indirect discrimination - occurs where an individual's employment is subject to an unjustified provision criterion or practice which e.g. one sex or race or nationality or age group finds more difficult to meet, although on the face of it the provision, criterion or practice is 'neutral'.
- Harassment – unwanted conduct related to a relevant Protected Characteristic which has the purpose or effect of violating an individual's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that individual. You may complain of such offensive behaviour even if it is not directed towards you personally.
- Victimisation – when an employee is treated less favourably because they have made or supported a complaint or raised a grievance about unlawful discrimination or are suspected of doing so.
- Disability discrimination: this includes direct and indirect discrimination, any unjustified unfavourable treatment because of something arising in consequence of a disability, and failure to make reasonable adjustments to alleviate disadvantages caused by a disability.

## **Our Commitment**

### **Recruitment**

The recruitment process will be conducted in such a way as to result in the selection of the most suitable person for the job in terms of relevant abilities and qualifications. We are committed to applying our equal opportunities policy statement at all stages of recruitment and selection.

Recruitment publicity will aim to positively encourage applications from all suitably qualified people when advertising job vacancies, in order to attract applications from all sections of the community.

Where vacancies may be filled by promotion or transfer, they will be published to all eligible employees in such a way that they do not restrict applications from employees with a particular Protected Characteristics. However, where having regard to the nature



and context of the work, having a particular Protected Characteristics is an occupational requirement and that occupational requirement is a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim, we will apply that requirement to the job role and this may therefore be specified in the advertisement.

The selection process will be carried out consistently for all jobs at all levels. We will ensure that this equal opportunities policy is available to all staff, and in particular is given to all staff with responsibility for recruitment, selection and promotion.

The selection of new staff will be based on job requirements and the individual's suitability and ability to do, or to train for, the job in question. Person specification and job descriptions will be limited to those requirements that are necessary for the effective performance of the job. Candidates for employment, promotion or transfer will be assessed objectively against the requirements of the job.

With disabled job applicants, we will have regard to our duty to make reasonable adjustments to work provisions, criteria and practices or to physical features of work premises or to provide auxiliary aids or services in order to ensure that the disabled person is not placed at a substantial disadvantage in comparison with persons who are not disabled.

All applications will be processed consistently. The staff responsible for short listing, interviewing and selecting candidates will be clearly informed of the selection criteria and of the need for their consistent application. All questions that are put to the applicants will relate to the requirements of the job.

### **Training, transfer and promotion**

We will take such measures as may be necessary to ensure the proper training, supervision and instruction for all line managers in order to familiarise them with our policy on equal opportunities, and in order to help them identify discriminatory acts or practices and to ensure that they promote equal opportunity within the centres for which they are responsible. The training will also enable line managers to deal more effectively with complaints of bullying and harassment.

We will also provide training to all employees to help them understand their rights and responsibilities under the equal opportunities and anti-harassment policies and what they can do to create a work environment that is free of bullying and harassment.

All persons responsible for selecting new employees, employees for training or employees for transfer or promotion to other jobs will be instructed not to discriminate because of one or more of the Protected Characteristics. Where a promotional system is in operation, the assessment criteria will be examined to ensure that they are not discriminatory. The promotional system will be checked from time to time in order to assess how it is working in practice.

When a group of workers who predominantly have a particular Protected Characteristic appear to be excluded from access to promotion, transfer and training and to other benefits, our systems and procedures will be reviewed to ensure there is no unlawful discrimination.

### **Terms of employment, benefits, facilities and services**

All terms of employment, benefits, facilities and service will be reviewed from time to time, in order to ensure that there is no unlawful discrimination on the grounds of one or more of the Protected Characteristics.

### **Disabilities**

If you are disabled or become disabled, we encourage you to tell us about your condition so that we can support you as appropriate.

If you experience difficulties at work because of your disability, you may wish to contact your line manager to discuss any reasonable adjustments that would help overcome or minimise the difficulty. Your line manager may wish to consult with you and your medical adviser about possible adjustments. We will consider the matter carefully and try to accommodate your needs within reason. If we consider a particular adjustment would not be reasonable we will explain our reasons and try to find an alternative solution where possible.

We will monitor the physical features of our premises to consider whether they might place anyone with a disability at a substantial disadvantage. Where necessary, we will take reasonable steps to improve access.

## **6.2 Bullying and Harassment**

We are committed to providing a working environment free from harassment and bullying and ensuring all staff are treated, and treat others, with dignity and respect. This includes harassment or bullying which occurs at work and out of the workplace, such as on business trips or at work-related events or social functions.

Harassment is any unwanted physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct that has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them. A single incident can amount to harassment. It also includes treating someone less favourably because they have submitted or refused to submit to such behaviour in the past.

Unlawful harassment may involve conduct of a sexual nature (sexual harassment), or it may be related to a Protected Characteristic. Harassment is unacceptable even if it does not fall within any of these categories.

Harassment may include (this is a non-exhaustive list), for example:

- (a) unwanted physical conduct or "horseplay", including touching, pinching, pushing and grabbing;
- (b) unwelcome sexual advances or suggestive behaviour (which the harasser may perceive as harmless);
- (c) offensive e-mails, text messages or social media content;
- (d) mocking, mimicking or belittling a person's disability.

A person may be harassed even if they were not the intended "target". For example, a person may be harassed by racist jokes about a different ethnic group if the jokes create an offensive environment.

Bullying is offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour involving the misuse of power that can make a person feel vulnerable, upset, humiliated, undermined or threatened. Power does not always mean being in a position of authority, but can include both personal strength and the power to coerce through fear or intimidation.

Bullying can take the form of physical, verbal and non-verbal conduct. Bullying may include (this is a non-exhaustive list), by way of example:

- (a) physical or psychological threats;
- (b) overbearing and intimidating levels of supervision;
- (c) inappropriate derogatory remarks about someone's performance;

Legitimate, reasonable and constructive criticism of a worker's performance or behaviour, or reasonable instructions given to workers in the course of their employment, will not amount to bullying on their own.

### **6.3 Procedure**

If you are being harassed or bullied, consider whether you feel able to raise the problem informally with the person responsible. You should explain clearly to them that their behaviour is not welcome or makes you uncomfortable. If this is too difficult or embarrassing, you should speak to your line manager who can provide confidential advice and assistance in resolving the issue formally or informally. If informal steps are not appropriate, or have not been successful, you should raise the matter formally under our Grievance Procedure.

We will investigate complaints in a timely and confidential manner. The investigation will be conducted by someone with appropriate experience and no prior involvement in the complaint, where possible. Details of the investigation and the names of the person making the complaint and the person accused must only be disclosed on a "need to know" basis. We will consider whether any steps are necessary to manage any ongoing relationship between you and the person accused during the investigation.

Once the investigation is complete, we will inform you of our decision. If we consider you have been harassed or bullied by an employee the matter will be dealt with under the Disciplinary Procedure as a case of possible misconduct or gross misconduct. If the harasser or bully is a third party such as a customer or other visitor, we will consider what action would be appropriate to deal with the problem. Whether or not your complaint is upheld, we will consider how best to manage any ongoing working relationship between you and the person concerned.

Staff who make complaints or who participate in good faith in any investigation must not suffer any form of retaliation or victimisation as a result. Anyone found to have retaliated against or victimised someone in this way will be subject to disciplinary action under our Disciplinary Procedure.

Information about a complaint by or about an employee may be placed on the employee's personnel file, along with a record of the outcome and of any notes or other

documents compiled during the process. These will be processed in accordance with our Data Protection Policy.

## **6.4 Monitoring equal opportunities and dignity at work**

We will regularly monitor the effects of selection decisions and personnel and pay practices and procedures in order to assess whether equal opportunity and dignity at work are being achieved. This will also involve considering any possible indirectly discriminatory effects of its working practices. If changes are required, we will implement them. We will also make reasonable adjustments to its standard working practices to overcome barriers caused by disability.

### **Breaches of this Policy**

We take a strict approach to breaches of this policy, which will be dealt with in accordance with our Disciplinary Procedure. Serious cases of deliberate discrimination may amount to gross misconduct resulting in dismissal.

If you believe that you have suffered discrimination you can raise the matter through our Grievance Procedure or Bullying & Harassment Procedure. Complaints will be treated in confidence and investigated as appropriate.

You must not be victimised or retaliated against for complaining about discrimination. However, making a false allegation deliberately will be treated as misconduct and dealt with under our Disciplinary Procedure.

### **Related Policies**

This policy is supported by the following other policies and procedures (in the Employee Handbook):

- (a) Grievance Procedure.
- (b) Disciplinary Procedure.
- (c) Flexible Working Procedure.
- (d) Maternity, Paternity, Adoption and Shared Parental Leave Policies.
- (e) Parental Leave Policy.
- (f) Time Off for Dependants Policy.
- (g) Data Protection Policy.

# 7

## APPENDICES

### 7.1 Specific Examples of Acceptable and Unacceptable Practice:

How the values referred to in section 2 translate into practice is illustrated by the following examples of acceptable and unacceptable conduct. This list is intended as guidance and is not exhaustive.

#### 1) **Financial Transactions etc.:**

- No financial transactions, buying, selling, exchanging or bartering, should take place between workers and customers, e.g. – agreeing to put a customer's personal cheques/giros through your account.
- Staff would not normally lend their personal money or possessions to customers
- Staff must not borrow personal money or possessions from customers
- Staff would not usually give or accept personal presents or offers of labour from customers. Where it would offend to refuse, a small gift may be accepted on behalf of the team and shared with colleagues.
- Staff should not mix their personal finances with the finances of Together Women, examples would be:
  - Purchasing goods through the Association's purchasing process.
  - Borrowing the Association's money
  - Claiming expenses not due, or in a way that is not defined by the financial regulations
  - Promise to put in a good word for an external supplier.
  - Contract an external supplier to carry out work privately with prior discussion with their line manager.

#### 2) **Relationship/Contact with Customers Outside of Work:**

- Staff would not normally allow customers to visit their homes or encourage customers to develop relationships with their) friends or family members.
- There will be occasions when staff know someone who is referred socially, or in some other connection – in these circumstances, it would be necessary to always inform the line manager.
- Out of hours social contacts should be kept to minimum. Staff who bump into customers out of hours should be pleasant and civil, if approached, but should generally discourage prolonged social contact. Where this does occur, a note of the encounter should be entered into the case file.
- Staff should never enter into anything but a professional relationship with customers. The development of a sexual relationship will be treated as gross misconduct and is likely to be grounds for dismissal.
- Staff should not use inappropriate language with customers e.g. referring to them by pet names, in terms of endearment, or in ways which are demeaning.
- Staff should never overstep professional boundaries and confuse befriending with friendship. All workers should be aware of the difference between befriending a customer (which is a professional relationship, which is made to meet the customer's needs), and becoming a customer's friend (which is a relationship which meets the needs of both parties). Befriending is an appropriate relationship for workers, and part of building the

necessary trust to work with customers. Becoming a friend is inappropriate for a worker/customer relationship as this may lead to favouritism or the customer trying to meet the support worker's emotional needs.

- It should be noted that the blurring of these boundaries can potentially lead to the development of negative relationships which can put staff at risk of allegations of improper conduct even if this was not intended.

### **3) Respect**

- Staff should address or refer to customers by the names they wish to be called.
- Patronising behaviour or remarks that consciously or unwittingly demean other people should be challenged.
- Labelling or stereotyping of customers/ groups should not occur.
- Racist or discriminatory remarks or behaviour from whatever source must be challenged.
- Staff should respect everyone as individuals and for their differences.
- "Gossip" or hearsay should not feature as an aspect of service culture and should be actively discouraged among both staff and customers.
- Staff should be extremely cautious about physical contact (e.g. comforting a person when they're distressed).
- Staff should never share personal details about other staff or customers with other customers.

### **4) Illegal Activities/ Collusion (at work)**

- Staff should not participate in any illegal activities e.g. buying stolen goods or allowing them to be kept on the premises or smoking a joint, etc.
- Staff should not collude with customers by deliberately ignoring illegal activities or breaches in their tenancy agreements. Together Women does operate a harm reduction approach in relation to drugs use but this complies with the legal situation and training opportunities are provided on this area.

### **5) Confidentiality**

- Workers should maintain customers' confidentiality: information confided should not be made available to other customers or to individuals outside the organisation. The information can, and sometimes should, be shared within the organisation, however, and the customer should be made aware of this. Limits on confidentiality should be explained to customers on their introduction to the Service.
- Customers should be aware that all workers cannot keep knowledge of suspected illegal activity confidential.
- Workers should not disclose customer's names, whereabouts or occupancy to outside callers without their permission to do so. This includes previous customers, family, friends etc.  
(Please refer to the Confidentiality Policy for further guidance.)


### **6) Staff Relationships**

- Work is a large part of our lives, and it is accepted that close friendships and relationships will be formed, and broken. Staff should conduct their inter-relationships at work on a friendly but professional basis. Displays of

animosity, personal affection or privilege, sexualised behaviour or banter is not appropriate.

- The requirement for staff to behave in a friendly professional way extends to all cases of Association business including away days, training or conferences. This does not mean that staff at an appropriate point cannot 'let their hair down' or relax and enjoy themselves, but such activity should be appropriate to the context of the occasion.
- Care should be taken in carrying out extra curricular activities, particularly where they might directly or indirectly effect or involve a customer. Examples of such activities are the promotion of political or campaigning events, the running of lottery syndicates, book clubs or charitable fund raising activities. Permission should be obtained from you line manager, and the association can and will withdraw permission if it considers it to be in the best interest of the customer or the association.

## 7.2 Professional Boundaries a Simple Model

Appropriate Boundaries	Boundary Crossing	Boundary Violation
		
Indicators	Indicators	Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff perform duties within legislative framework.</li> <li>• Avoid personal; bias in performance of duties.</li> <li>• Promote customer's participation</li> <li>• Able to identify own strengths and limitations through supervision</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spending free time with a customer.</li> <li>• Planning others care around a customers needs.</li> <li>• Keeping secrets with a customer.</li> <li>• Acting or feeling possessive about a customer</li> <li>• Sharing personal information with a customer.</li> <li>• Changing dress style when working with a customer.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entering into a sexual relationship with a customer.</li> <li>• Borrowing or giving money.</li> <li>• The indulgence of personal privilege by a member of staff.</li> <li>• Abusive or neglectful behaviour.</li> <li>• Involvement in illegal behaviours.</li> <li>• The breaking of trust/divulgence of privileged or confidential information.</li> </ul>



### 7.3 Staff Declaration of Secondary Employment and Interests

As part of the implementation of the staff code of conduct, all staff undertaking secondary paid employment should declare this employment to Together Women in order to protect the integrity of the organisation and the interests of employees. All such employment is subject to agreement by Together Women which will take into account issues such as potential conflicts of interest and Health and Safety. In addition, staff are asked to record unpaid work that may give rise to a conflict of interest and to declare any links with Board members or suppliers.

Staff Name:	Centre:
Are you engaged in secondary <b>paid</b> employment or self employment?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, please give the name and address of the employer including contact details and the nature and hours of the work being undertaken  Employer:	Nature and hours of Work:
How many hours a week do you work?	
Are you engaged in any personal <b>voluntary</b> work with a similar customer group that <b>may</b> involve a potential conflict of interest?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> If Yes, please record brief details overleaf
Do you have any links with any of Together Women's <b>Board of Directors or suppliers</b> ?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> If Yes, please record brief details overleaf
Signed: Staff Member	Date:
Signed: Line Manager	Date:

\*\*\*Please retain on personnel file \*\*\*

\*\*This form will be reviewed annually as part of the PDR process\*

**EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK RECEIPT**

This Handbook has been drawn up by Together Women to provide you with information on employment policies and procedures.

The policies and procedures contained within this handbook do not form part of your contract of employment; therefore Together Women reserves the right to make amendments as necessary, for example reflecting changes to the law. Any change will be communicated to all staff. However, you are expected to read and comply with the policies and procedures contained within this handbook. Failure to do so could result in disciplinary action.

If you have any questions or any part of the Handbook is unclear to you, please do not hesitate to raise any queries with a member of management.

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I acknowledge I have read and understood the policies and procedures contained within this handbook

Received by ..... (Employee)

Signed .....

Date .....