

# Disciplinary Procedure

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This procedure is designed to encourage employees to maintain acceptable standards of conduct and correct behaviour. Its primary purpose is not a dismissal procedure.
- 1.2 It will:
- apply to all employees of the council other than those employed by schools with delegated powers; and
  - be applied in a fair, consistent and non-discriminatory manner at all times.
- 1.3 Before taking action under this procedure, the manager should attempt to resolve the matter informally.
- 1.4 Minor cases of misconduct should be dealt with by informal advice, coaching and counselling unless this has proved ineffective already.
- 1.5 During the formal procedure, the employee whose conduct is in question will be:
- informed that they have the right to be represented/accompanied by a trade union representative or fellow worker of the council; and
  - be offered confidential support and counselling.

*Note 1: The trade union representative or fellow worker must not be otherwise involved in the particular case. If the employee is a trade union representative see 2.4.*

- 1.6 When an allegation of misconduct arises (see Appendix 1 for guidance) all of the facts must be established promptly.

### **Allegations against people who work with children**

- 1.7 Where an allegation is made against an employee who works with children and it indicates that the employee has:
- behaved in a way that has harmed a child, or may have harmed a child;
  - possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child; or
  - behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates they would pose a risk of harm if they work regularly or closely with children,
- the Children's Multi-Agency Resilience and Safeguarding (MARS) Board procedures for managing allegations against people who work with children should be followed. The MARS procedures can be obtained by searching for 'Safeguarding Children' on the council's website.
- 1.8 Contact must also be made with the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) before an investigation commences. Initial discussions with the LADO should take place in advance of an employee being informed of an allegation, in order

## Disciplinary Procedure

for agreement to be reached on what information can be disclosed to the individual.

- 1.9 If the Police undertake an investigation it may be necessary to suspend any internal procedure until that investigation is concluded.

### **Allegations against people who work with adults with care and support needs**

- 1.10 Where an allegation is made against an employee who works with adults with care and support needs and it indicates that the employee has:

- harmed an adult or child whilst in a professional role;
- harmed an adult or child in a personal relationship; or
- harmed an adult or child in some other role or capacity,

and it is believed that the above poses a current or continuing risk in the person's current role of responsibility, the Guidance for Managing Concerns around People in Positions of Trust (PiPoT) must be followed.

- 1.11 Contact must be made with the PiPoT Lead (Service Manager – Safeguarding Adults) before an investigation commences. Initial discussions with the PiPoT Lead should take place in advance of an employee being informed of an allegation, in order for agreement to be reached on what information can be disclosed to the individual.
- 1.12 If the Police undertake an investigation it may be necessary to suspend any internal procedure until that investigation is concluded.

### **Evidence**

- 1.13 CCTV and other data (i.e. Internet, email, telephone and building access records) are not used for routine monitoring of employees. However, should employees who commit acts of suspected criminal activity or alleged gross misconduct be captured in any of these electronic media this evidence may be used in disciplinary matters.
- 1.14 Such evidence may also be used by an employee responding to a disciplinary investigation and will be provided wherever possible where employees make Subject Access Requests in line with data protection legislation.
- 1.15 Access to, and use of CCTV images will be in line with the council's Information Governance Framework, Schedule 03D – CCTV policy, which can be accessed via the council's website. Access to other electronic media should be requested via the council's internal Audit team in conjunction with Human Resources (HR).

## Customer complaints

- 1.16 Where an employee's attitude or competence causes concern this may be raised through the council's Customer Complaints policy. If a disciplinary investigation originates from a customer complaint it will be investigated in accordance with this procedure. Where there are aspects of the complaint not covered by the disciplinary investigation, they may continue to be dealt with under the Customer Complaints policy.
- 1.17 If a complainant asks to be informed of the outcome of the disciplinary investigation, they will generally be given the same information as if the matter had been dealt with solely under the Customer Complaints policy:
- what happened,
  - why it happened and
  - what action has been taken to prevent it happening again.
- They can also be told, in general terms, that disciplinary action may be taken as a result of the complaint.

## Informal management review

- 1.18 The manager of the employee whose conduct is in question or a delegated senior officer must undertake an initial assessment of the situation to assess whether informal resolution is possible. They will talk to those directly involved to establish the main facts of the case. If the manager can resolve the matter by taking corrective action at this stage they should do so. Corrective action may involve admonishment, instruction on appropriate behaviour or management counselling. A note should be kept of the allegation and the action taken. Any action taken under this paragraph does not constitute formal disciplinary action.

*Note 3: If the allegation/s concern the misuse of digital technologies, fraud or issues of a wider financial nature the council's Audit and Assurance section should be contacted before a formal investigation commences.*

## 2.0 FORMAL PROCEDURE

- 2.1 If an informal management resolution is not appropriate, the HR Operational and Commercial Lead will appoint an investigating officer, within 5 working days. The investigation will begin without delay and be completed as quickly as possible. The investigating officer will have the authority to require full co-operation from all employees concerned. Failure to co-operate may be considered a breach of acceptable conduct.

## Disciplinary Procedure

- 2.2 The investigating officer will ensure that the employee whose conduct is in question is:
- Informed in writing of the matter being investigated;
  - given a copy of the disciplinary procedure;
  - advised of the detail of the allegation/s as far as it is known at the time;
  - given the right to be represented/accompanied at all stages;
  - made aware of the availability of support and assistance from the council's Confidential Staff Welfare and Counselling Service and/or a nominated HR officer.
- 2.3 The investigating officer should establish whether the employee will be represented by a trade union and as appropriate ask the employee to confirm the name of the trade union representative as soon as possible. Thereafter, unless the employee objects, all correspondence and other papers will be copied to the named trade union representative.
- 2.4 Although normal disciplinary action (including precautionary suspension) must be taken where appropriate against trade union representatives, consideration should be given to making contact with the appropriate senior trade union representative prior to proceeding. This should only occur however with the agreement of the trade union representative whose conduct is in question.
- 2.5 The investigating officer will identify and interview all witnesses required to establish the facts. A written statement will be taken from all persons interviewed. All such statements must be typed, and then agreed by the person interviewed who will be required to sign and date each page. Each witness will be advised that they may be required to attend a subsequent hearing and that the matter must remain confidential. Documentary and other evidence should also be gathered at this stage.
- Note 4: At all stages of the procedure witnesses who are also employees of the council should be reminded of the availability of the confidential staff welfare and counselling service.*
- 2.6 The employee whose conduct is in question will be called to a fact finding interview, having been given full details of the allegation/s and reasonable time to prepare. (See paragraph 2.8 below if suspension is a possibility.) At the interview the employee will be asked for a response to the allegation/s and their responses will be recorded in the form of a note of the meeting. A copy of the typed notes of the meeting will be forwarded to the employee whose conduct is in question.
- 2.7 If the employee is absent through sickness and advises that they are unable to attend a fact-finding interview the investigating officer should seek an alternative date as long as it is within five working days of the original date.

## Disciplinary Procedure

Failing this, advice should be sought from the council's occupational health provider on the employee's fitness to attend and/or any disability implications.

### Precautionary suspension

- 2.8 In circumstances of:
- Alleged potential gross misconduct;
  - where relationships have broken down or;
  - where it is considered there are risks to the employee, the council, other parties or property,
- the employee should be suspended from work on normal pay pending investigation.
- 2.9 An employee found to have committed gross misconduct will normally be dismissed from all contracts of employment with the council. This possibility should be made clear to the employee at the start of the investigation. Therefore, any precautionary suspension will normally apply to all contracts.
- 2.10 Advice will be sought from the Strategic HR Lead prior to suspension, wherever possible. The reason for the suspension will be confirmed in writing to the employee with a copy to the Strategic HR Lead. Such suspension is precautionary and will not prejudice the outcome of any subsequent disciplinary hearing.
- 2.11 If an employee is suspended the investigation **will take priority over all other work**. Precautionary suspensions will be kept under active review at all times and will not continue for any longer than is necessary.
- 2.12 The suspended employee will be offered confidential support and counselling and a designated HR contact during the period of suspension. Every effort will be made to keep the suspended employee informed of the progress of the investigation, subject to the limitations imposed by any children's/adult social care and/or police investigation.

### Timescale

- 2.13 It is recognised that the time needed to conduct a thorough investigation will vary. The aim should be to complete investigations within 4 working weeks wherever possible; no investigation should take longer than 12 working weeks unless there are external factors beyond the control of the investigating officer. In the event that an ongoing investigation exceeds 12 weeks, the employee whose conduct is in question, their representative and the Strategic HR Lead will be kept informed of progress on a monthly basis.

## Disciplinary Procedure

### Resignations

- 2.14 The fact that an employee tenders their resignation must not prevent an allegation being followed up. This must occur in cases of allegations bearing on the safety or welfare of children. Wherever possible, the individual should be provided with an opportunity to answer the allegation and give an account of it.
- 2.15 The process of documenting the allegation, corroborating evidence and reaching a decision about whether it can be substantiated on the information available should continue and be recorded even if the person does not cooperate.
- 2.16 It may be difficult to reach a decision in these circumstances, and it may not be possible to apply any disciplinary sanctions if an employee's period of notice expires before the process is complete, but it is important to reach and record a conclusion wherever possible.

### Decision to proceed

- 2.17 Having completed the investigation, the investigating officer should assess the situation on the basis of the evidence obtained and decide how to proceed. The employee, the employee's Director and the HR Operational and Commercial Lead will be informed, including in resignation scenarios. There are normally three options available to the investigating officer:
- No further action;
  - management counselling;
  - a disciplinary hearing.
- 2.18 Directors with the support of HR will be responsible for taking disciplinary action within their service areas but may delegate this responsibility to a senior manager. The exceptions to this are disciplinary matters arising from Dignity at Work investigations, which will be chaired by an independent Director.

### Management counselling

- 2.19 Where conduct is lower than the standard normally accepted but is of a relatively minor nature or is considered out of character, management counselling rather than a formal disciplinary hearing may be recommended.
- 2.20 Management counselling will normally take the form of an interview at which the employee will be informed what improvement in their conduct is expected and for how long this will be kept under review. This will not normally exceed a period of six months.

## Disciplinary Procedure

2.21 At the interview the manager will:

- Clearly explain the shortfall between the employee's conduct and the required standard;
- establish the possible causes of the unacceptable conduct;
- identify the required remedial action;
- identify any necessary training, development, support or other interventions;
- obtain the employee's commitment to reaching the required standard;
- explain that failure to meet the required standard of conduct may result in formal disciplinary action.

### 3.0 DISCIPLINARY HEARING

#### Case management hearing

3.1 A case management hearing may be held at the request of either party so long as both parties agree to it. The purpose of the hearing is to consider and attempt to resolve any procedural issues and/or agree witness statements and witnesses attending wherever possible. The meeting will be chaired by the officer responsible for the disciplinary hearing with the support of the HR Operational and Commercial Lead or a representative from Legal Services. The presenting officer and the trade union representative or the employee (if unrepresented), will be present.

#### Disciplinary hearing

3.2 The employee will be given notice in writing at least 10 working days in advance of the time and place of the hearing and copies of all the documents that are to be relied upon as evidence. This will include all witness statements, including those not being relied upon as evidence, together with a copy of the disciplinary hearing procedure and the names of witnesses available to be called.

3.3 The employee shall provide the investigating officer with the names of any witnesses they intend to call and all documents relevant to their defence at least five working days in advance of the hearing. Thereafter all documentation received will be circulated to the disciplinary panel.

3.4 If the employee or their representative is not available on the date given for the hearing, an alternative date will be sought as long as it is within 10 working days of the original date.

3.5 If the employee is off sick and advises that they are not available to attend an effort should be made to agree a date within a reasonable timescale. Failing



## Disciplinary Procedure

this, advice will be sought from the council's occupational health provider on the employee's fitness to attend a hearing. If the employee fails to attend having been deemed fit to do so, the hearing may be conducted in their absence.

- 3.6 At the start of the hearing the chair should make introductions and remind all present of the hearing procedure and the requirement for confidentiality to be maintained. The procedure to be followed is detailed in Appendix 2.
- 3.7 Evidence which was not circulated in advance will only be allowed at the discretion of the chair and normally, only if both parties agree to it. The reason for the decision will be given and noted.
- 3.8 After all the evidence has been heard the chair will give their decision to both parties as soon as possible. The right of appeal will also be outlined. Both the sanction and the right of appeal will be confirmed in writing within five working days. The letter should state:
- The allegation/s found/ not found, and, if found (see 3.9);
  - the level of sanction applied.
- 3.9 The following definitions should be used when determining the outcome of allegations of abuse against employees who work with children:
- **Substantiated:** there is sufficient identifiable evidence to prove the allegation;
  - **false:** there is sufficient evidence to disprove the allegation;
  - **malicious:** there is clear evidence to prove there has been a deliberate act to deceive and the allegation is entirely false;
  - **unfounded:** there is no evidence or proper basis which supports the allegation being made. It might also indicate that the person making the allegation misinterpreted the incident or was mistaken about what they saw. Alternatively they may not have been aware of all the circumstances;
  - **unsubstantiated:** this is not the same as a false allegation. It means that there is insufficient evidence to prove or disprove the allegation. The term, therefore, does not imply guilt or innocence.

### 4.0 LEVELS OF DISCIPLINARY SANCTION

#### Oral warning

- 4.1 Where conduct does not meet acceptable standards and management counselling is not deemed to be adequate or has taken place previously, the employee will normally be given a formal oral warning in the first instance. They will be advised orally and in writing. A copy of the oral warning will be kept on



## Disciplinary Procedure

the employee's personal file, but it will be disregarded for disciplinary purposes after six months, subject to satisfactory conduct.

### Written warning

- 4.2 Where the offence is a more serious one or if a further offence occurs within six months of the issue of an oral warning, a written warning will be given to the employee orally and in writing. A copy of the first written warning will be placed on the employee's file, but it will be disregarded for disciplinary purposes after six months, subject to satisfactory conduct.

### Final written warning

- 4.3 Where the offence is a substantial breach of conduct, which warrants only one warning but is insufficient to justify dismissal or where further misconduct occurs within six months of the issue of a first written warning, a final written warning will be issued to the employee. It will warn, in writing, that the final written warning is the last stage of the procedure before dismissal and that a failure to improve or any further misconduct may result in dismissal. A copy of the final written warning will be held on the employee's personal file but will be disregarded for disciplinary purposes after 12 months, subject to satisfactory conduct.

### Dismissal

- 4.4 Where the offence constitutes serious misconduct following any previous warning and a further warning is considered inappropriate or misconduct occurs following a final written warning, dismissal with notice will normally result. The employee will be provided with written reasons for dismissal, the date on which employment will terminate and the right of appeal normally within five working days.

### Summary dismissal

- 4.5 If after completion of the investigation, and following a hearing the chair is satisfied that gross misconduct has occurred, the result will normally be summary dismissal without notice. The employee will be provided with written reasons for the dismissal, the date on which employment terminated and the right of appeal. Examples of offences which the council would normally regard as gross misconduct include:
- Theft of the council's property or assets;
  - fighting/assault of another person;
  - wilful damage to council property;
  - fraud or deliberate falsification of records;

## Disciplinary Procedure

- serious negligence which causes loss, damage or injury;
- serious incapability due to alcohol or other substances, or
- serious acts of insubordination, discrimination or harassment.

This list is for guidance only and should not be regarded as exhaustive.

### Disciplinary transfer

- 4.6 In cases of harassment/bullying arising from a Dignity at Work Investigation an employee may, in exceptional circumstances, be offered a transfer to another post as an alternative to dismissal where the independent Director considers this appropriate and where an alternative position is available. A final written warning will accompany such a transfer.

### Right of appeal

- 4.7 If a disciplinary sanction is imposed the employee will be advised of their right of appeal. All appeals must be made in writing within 10 working days of the written notification of the decision.
- 4.8 The employee should indicate the grounds for appeal stating whether it is against the severity of the sanction or if the facts relied upon in the judgement are disputed. A form is provided for this purpose.
- 4.9 If against the severity of the sanction, the appeal will consist of both parties making summary submissions with the officer who made the original decision representing the council. Normally in such circumstances no witnesses will be called or new evidence allowed.
- 4.10 If the appeal is on the facts of the case or if procedural anomalies are alleged there will normally be a full re-hearing of the evidence with all witnesses available to be called. New evidence from either party will be allowed if submitted with the papers at least five working days in advance of the hearing.
- 4.11 If the grounds of the appeal are not specified and cannot be clarified, a full re-hearing will take place.

### Oral, written and final written warnings

- 4.12 The appeal should be in writing to the Director who will hear the matter. Where a hearing has been heard by the Director, the appeal should be sent to the Assistant Director - Governance and Partnerships, who will arrange a meeting of the Appeals Committee.

# Disciplinary Procedure

## Dismissal and summary dismissals

- 4.13 The appeal must be made in writing to the Assistant Director - Governance and Partnerships who will arrange for it to be considered by the Appeals Committee. Action to implement decisions to dismiss will not be suspended pending the appeal but should the appeal be upheld, the appellant will be reinstated to their original post without a break in service.

## 5.0 REFERRAL TO REGULATORY BODIES

- 5.1 If an employee who works with children or vulnerable adults in regulated activity is dismissed on certain grounds of misconduct or resigns in circumstances where dismissal was a possibility, the council has a statutory right to inform the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS). Casual workers and supply teachers must also be referred when their engagement ceases in similar circumstances.
- 5.2 Referral may also be required to separate professional bodies in the case of:
- Registered teachers to the Teaching Agency;
  - Social workers to the Health & Care Professions Council.
- 5.3 Specific guidance should be obtained on a case by case basis from the appropriate regulatory body and the council's legal department before a referral is made.
- 5.4 All employees who are subject to a referral in accordance with the above paragraphs should be given confirmation of this action in writing.

## 6.0 RETENTION OF RECORDS AND REFERENCES

- 6.1 Any records relating to disciplinary processes, including handwritten notes, documentary evidence, hearing files and computerised records, will be retained in accordance with the council's Records Management Policy which is available in the Information Governance Knowledge Base on TOPdesk.
- 6.2 Allegations which are proven to be false, unsubstantiated, unfounded or malicious must not be included in employer references. Nor must a history of repeated concerns or allegations which have all been found to be false, unsubstantiated, unfounded or malicious be included in any reference.

## 7.0 ADDITIONAL

- 7.1 The Chief Executive/Deputy Chief Executive will be responsible for taking disciplinary action against Directors in accordance with this procedure. The Appeals Committee will consider any subsequent appeals.

## Disciplinary Procedure

- 7.2 In the event of an allegation or suspicion of misconduct arising against the Chief Executive/Deputy Chief Executive, the Director of Business Development and the Monitoring Officer should be consulted.

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## Disciplinary Appendix 1 – Disciplinary rules

Disciplinary rules are necessary for the efficient and safe performance of work and for the maintenance of good relations between employees and management. An employee breaching a disciplinary rule may be liable to disciplinary action under the council's disciplinary procedure. The following list of disciplinary offences (not agreed by the trade unions) is not to be regarded as exhaustive. Acts of misconduct not falling within one or more of the offences may also give rise to disciplinary action.

1. Failure to comply with a reasonable order, instruction or contractual requirement.
2. Failure to comply with a work rule.
3. Failure to comply with a health or safety requirement.
4. Any act which may result in an action against the authority for negligence or for breach of the duty of care.
5. Conduct, which is likely to bring discredit to the authority.
6. Improper, disorderly or unacceptable conduct at, during or when arriving at/leaving work.
7. Late attendance and/or inadequate timekeeping.
8. Absence from work without proper cause.
9. While purporting to be absent sick, working or indulging in activities which are unlikely to be conducive to recovery.
10. Committing an act outside work, or being convicted for a criminal offence, which is liable adversely to affect the performance of the contract of employment and/or the relationship between the employer and the employee.
11. Corrupt or improper practice.
12. Giving, receiving or requesting a bribe to improperly perform a public function.
13. Breach of trust.
14. Misuse of the authority's facilities.
15. Loss, damage to, or misuse of the authority's equipment and/or property, assets or funds through willfulness, negligence or carelessness.
16. Theft or misappropriation of, or failure to account for, or falsely claiming entitlement, the employer's property assets or funds.
17. Providing false information orally or by the falsification of records or documents.
18. Unauthorised alteration, mutilation, destruction or retention of the authority's records or documents.
19. Unauthorised entry into the authority's computer systems, unauthorised use of software or breach of the data protection requirements.
20. Harassment or discrimination on any of the grounds listed in the Dignity at Work policy, C.4.
21. Failure to report or record any matter which it is the employee's duty to report or record.
22. Acts of gross misconduct other than or coming within one or more of the foregoing offences.

This council reserves the right to suspend from duty an employee as a precautionary measure while certain matters are investigated. Such suspension will be on normal pay. Precautionary suspensions should be kept under review at all times and should not continue for any longer than is necessary.

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