

Harrietsham Parish Council

Disciplinary Procedure Policy

Purpose and Scope

This procedure is designed to help and encourage all Council employees to achieve and maintain high standards of conduct whilst at work or representing the Parish Council. The aim is to ensure consistent and fair treatment for all. This procedure is prepared in accordance with the dismissal and dispute resolution procedures as set out in the Employment Act 2008 and the ACAS Code of Practice on disciplinary and grievance procedures.

Principles

- No disciplinary action will be taken against an employee until the case has been fully investigated.
- At every stage in the procedure the employee will be advised of the nature of the complaint against him or her and will be given the opportunity to state his or her case before any decision is made.
- At all formal stages, the employee will have the right to be accompanied by a trade union representative or work colleague during the disciplinary interview.
- No employee will be dismissed for a first breach of discipline except in the case of gross misconduct when the penalty of dismissal without notice or payment in lieu of notice may be applied.
- An employee will have the right to appeal against any disciplinary penalty imposed.
- The procedure may be implemented at any stage if the employee's alleged misconduct warrants such action.

The Procedure for Misconduct and Gross Misconduct

Misconduct

The following list provides examples of misconduct which will normally give rise to formal disciplinary action:

- Unauthorised absence from work.
- Lateness for work or poor time keeping.
- Inappropriate standard of dress.
- Minor breaches of Health and Safety or other Society rules or procedures.
- Failure to perform your job to the standard expected or in line with your job description/objectives.
- Time wasting.
- Disruptive behaviour.
- Misuse of the council's facilities (e.g., telephones, computers, email, or the internet).
- Refusal to carry out reasonable requests or instructions.
- Failure to follow an agreed council Procedure.

This list is not exhaustive and offences of a similar nature will result in disciplinary action being instigated.

Gross Misconduct

The following list provides examples of offences which are normally regarded as gross misconduct:

- Theft, fraud, deliberate falsification of records, or other acts of dishonesty.
- Fighting, assault on another person.
- Deliberate damage to property of the council, its workers, or members.
- Gross incompetence in the conduct of work.
- Gross negligence which results in the council or employees being put at risk.
- Being under the influence of illegal drugs or alcohol.
- Acts of incitement towards or actual acts of discrimination, harassment or victimisation including on the grounds of sex, race, colour, ethnic origin, disability, sexual orientation, age, religion, or belief.
- Serious acts of insubordination.
- Serious breach of duty to keep information of the council, its service providers, and its clients confidential.
- Serious breach of the council's Security Policy, Health & Safety Policy, Confidentiality or e-mail and Internet Policy.
- Any action, whether committed on or off the premises, that is likely to or does bring the council into disrepute.
- Serious negligence which causes or might causes significant loss, damage, or injury
- Accepting bribes or incentive payments from suppliers.
- Working with an external agency to provide information which would be detrimental to and cause commercial risk to the council.

This list is not exhaustive and other offences of a similar gravity will result in disciplinary action being instigated at Gross Misconduct level which carries a potential penalty of dismissal. Gross Misconduct is generally any conduct which places extreme pressure on the mutual trust which exists in an employment relationship.

Informal Action

Minor misconduct will be dealt with informally usually in a confidential one-to-one meeting between the employee and line manager. In the case of the Parish Clerk being the individual against whom there is a complaint or allegation the matter should be handled discreetly by the Chair of the Staffing Group. However, where the matter is more serious or informal action has not brought about the necessary improvement the following procedure will be used.

Investigations

The Parish Council will appoint an independent advisor to support the process including attending all meetings and be responsible for maintaining written records of the nature of the grievance raised, the employer's response, action taken (with reasons), details of any appeal and subsequent developments to be retained and kept. All Investigations relating to employees of the Parish Council will be carried out by the Parish Clerk or in the case of the Parish Clerk being disciplined, the Chair of the Staffing Group.

Formal Action

The level of warning you may receive for misconduct/gross misconduct will depend on how serious the council considers the alleged actions to be and your previous conduct in all the circumstances. In the event of alleged gross misconduct, the formal process may commence at Stage 4 (see below).

1. Disciplinary Letters

If there is a concern about an employee's conduct or behaviour then a letter will be given to the employee advising him/her of the allegation(s) and reasons why this is

unacceptable. The letter should invite the employee to attend a meeting at which the alleged misconduct will be discussed and will inform the employee of their right to be accompanied to the meeting. The letter will specify at which stage the disciplinary procedure is being invoked (see 4 stages below) and if invoked at Stage 4 for Gross Misconduct the letter will warn that a potential outcome could be dismissal. The time, date and venue of the meeting will also be advised. Any documents to be produced at the meeting will also be provided.

2. Disciplinary Meetings

All Disciplinary Meetings will be conducted by the Staffing Group. The time and location of a disciplinary meeting should be agreed with the employee and it should be held in a private location with no interruptions. This will normally be without undue delay but allowing the employee to prepare their case e.g., within five days of the letter being sent, where practically possible. At the meeting, the Parish Clerk (or in the case of the Parish Clerk being disciplined, the Chair of the Staffing Group) will state the complaint against the employee and go through the evidence which has been gathered. The employee will also be allowed to ask questions, present evidence, and call witnesses if advance notice has been given that they will do so. If the employee is unable to attend the meeting due to unforeseeable reasons out of their control (e.g., illness) then the Parish Council will reasonably rearrange the meeting. However, if the employee fails to attend the meeting without good reason the meeting can be held in the employee's absence.

Outcomes and Penalties

1. Stage 1 - Oral Warning

In the instance of a first complaint that conduct does not meet acceptable standards, the employee will normally be given a formal ORAL WARNING. He or she will be advised of:

- the reason for the warning,
- that it is the first stage of the disciplinary procedure,
- the improvement that is required and the timescales for achieving this improvement,
- together with a review date and any support available (where applicable) and
- his or her right of appeal.

A brief note of the oral warning will be kept but it will be spent after six months, subject to satisfactory conduct.

2. Stage 2 - Written Warning

If the offence is a serious one, or if further to previous formal disciplinary action, a WRITTEN WARNING will be given to the employee by the Parish Clerk (or in the case of the Parish Clerk being disciplined, the Chair of the Staffing Group considering the matter). This will give details of the complaint, the improvement required and the timescale. It will warn that action under Stage 3 will be considered if there is no satisfactory improvement and will advise of the right of appeal. A copy of this written warning will be kept on file but it will be disregarded for disciplinary purposes after twelve months subject to satisfactory conduct.

3. Stage 3 - Final Written Warning

If there is still a failure to improve and conduct or performance is still unsatisfactory, or the misconduct is sufficiently serious, a FINAL WRITTEN WARNING will normally be given to the employee. This will give details of the complaint, will warn that dismissal will result if there is no satisfactory improvement and will advise of the right of appeal. A copy of this final written warning will be kept by the Parish Clerk (or in the

case of the Parish Clerk being disciplined by the Chair of the Staffing Group considering the matter) but it will be spent after twelve months (in exceptional cases the period may be longer) subject to satisfactory conduct.

4. Stage 4 - Dismissal or other sanctions

If conduct is still unsatisfactory and the employee still fails to reach the prescribed standards, or where the Parish Council reasonably believes Gross Misconduct has occurred, DISMISSAL may result. Only the appropriately convened Staffing Committee can take the decision to dismiss an employee. The employee will be given a written statement of allegations against him/her, invited to a meeting, and then be notified in writing of the reasons for the decision taken at the hearing. Penalties at this stage may include dismissal with notice or summary dismissal (i.e., without any notice), Final Written Warning with/without demotion, loss of pay or loss of seniority. If dismissal is the outcome, the employee will be advised of the date on which employment will terminate by the Chair of the Personnel Committee considering the matter. In all cases the employee has a right of appeal. Very exceptionally, if an offence of Gross Misconduct is extremely serious an employee can be dismissed immediately without a meeting. In this situation a letter setting out reasons for dismissal would be sent to the employee offering the opportunity for an appeal hearing.

Suspension

If you are accused of an act of gross misconduct, you may be suspended from work on full pay while the council investigates the alleged offence. Only the appropriately convened Staffing Committee has the power to suspend. This enables a swift and thorough investigation to occur. Whilst suspended pending disciplinary investigation regular contact with a nominated person at the Parish Council will be maintained although access to premises, equipment or systems may be denied. The External Investigator who compiles evidence for the disciplinary hearing must play no part in the subsequent decision-making to ensure impartiality. Councils need to consider the implications of such arrangements on its hearing and appeal panel plans early on in the disciplinary process.

Appeals

The Appeals stage of the disciplinary process is part of the Code of Practice to which an employee has a right. It can be exercised after any of the stages of disciplinary action for Misconduct/Poor Performance or Gross Misconduct. An employee who wishes to appeal against a disciplinary decision should inform the Chair of the Staffing Group considering the matter that had considered the matter within five working days, in writing and giving reasons for the appeal.

An Appeal may be raised if:

- The employee thinks the finding or penalty is unfair
- New evidence has come to light
- The employee thinks that the procedure was not applied properly.

Where possible the Appeal will be heard by the Chair of the Parish Council and two Parish Councillors who have not been involved in the original disciplinary hearing conducted by the Staffing Group, who will view the evidence with impartiality. The employee will have the right to be accompanied by a colleague or accredited official employed by a trade union or lay member at the appeal hearing. The outcome of the appeal and reasons for it will be advised to the employee as soon as possible after the meeting and be confirmed in writing.

At the Appeal hearing any disciplinary penalty imposed will be reviewed but it cannot be increased. The decision taken at the Appeal hearing will be final.

The Right to be Accompanied

At each formal stage of disciplinary interview an employee has the right to be accompanied and can make a reasonable request for such a person to accompany them. An employee can ask to be accompanied by a colleague or accredited official employed by a trade union or lay member, to give support and help them prepare for the disciplinary interview. This right is enshrined in the 1999 Employment Relations Act. As this is an internal process there is no provision to have any external person accompany or represent an employee e.g., partner, parent, solicitor etc. the companion can address the hearing, put, and sum up the employee's case, respond on behalf of the worker to any views expressed at the meeting, confer with the employee. The companion cannot however answer questions on the employee's behalf or address the hearing if the employee does not wish him/her to or prevent the employee explaining their case.

Grievances Raised During Disciplinaries

In some circumstances when a disciplinary process has commenced an employee chooses to exercise his/her right to raise an internal grievance about the employment relationship with the council or individual Members. In such instances, the disciplinary matters will be placed on hold until grievances have been aired and actions towards a resolution have been progressed. In exceptional circumstances it may be pragmatic to deal with the two disputes concurrently but specialist external advice will be sought if this arises.

Criminal Charges or Convictions

If an employee is charged with or convicted of a criminal offence this does not automatically give rise to a disciplinary situation. Consideration needs to be given to how a charge or conviction may affect an employee's ability to undertake his or her job duties and their relationships with the employer, colleagues, subordinates, or customers.