

## **Staff Grievance Procedure**

### **1. PURPOSE AND SCOPE**

It is the policy of the Council to give employees the opportunity to air and seek redress for any individual employment grievance which they may have. Grievances may be any concerns, problems or complaints employees wish to raise with the Council. This document describes the procedure which aims to facilitate a speedy, fair and consistent solution to an individual employee's employment grievance. This procedure is produced in line with the ACAS Code of Practice 2015 as set out in the Employment Act 2008.

### **2. PRINCIPLES**

- a) At every stage in the procedure the employee will be given the opportunity to state his or her case before any decision is made.
- b) Grievances will be dealt with promptly and consistently
- c) At all formal stages the employee will have the right to be accompanied by a work colleague or trade union representative during the Grievance Hearing.
- d) An employee will have the right to appeal against any outcome of a Grievance Hearing.
- e) At no time will an employee be penalised or victimised for having raised a grievance against the Council.

### **3. PROCEDURE**

#### **INITIAL CONTACT**

Wherever possible, any grievance should be raised informally with the employee's line manager, or if this is inappropriate with the Clerk. In the case of the Clerk to the Council raising a grievance this should be directed to the Chair of the Council unless the complaint is about the Chair in which case another Member can be identified to handle the Clerk's concerns. The recipient of the grievance from a Clerk should share the grievance with the relevant committee established to handle employment matters and the issues should be treated with discretion and confidentiality at all times.

#### **WRITTEN STATEMENT**

If the employee does not consider it appropriate to raise the grievance informally, or if requested by the person the employee spoke to informally, then the employee should submit a formal grievance in writing to the Clerk, or if this is inappropriate to the Chair of the Council.

#### **MEETING OR HEARING**

Within a short period of time (a maximum of five working days from receipt of a written complaint) the Clerk shall arrange a meeting with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Council and the employee. The meeting shall be at a mutually convenient time and will be at a confidential location, free from interruptions. If the Clerk, Chair or Vice-Chair is the subject of the grievance, then that person will not be present at the meeting.

## **INVESTIGATION**

The Clerk or Chair will investigate the substance of the grievance and hear submissions from the employee concerned together with such other submissions or evidence as shall be considered appropriate. Careful consideration of the evidence and the necessary steps required to resolve the grievance will be given.

## **SOLUTION**

The Clerk and Chair shall consider the necessary steps that can be taken to resolve the issue raised. A further meeting shall be arranged with the employee to discuss the solution to be taken. If the employee is unhappy about the solution they can request the grievance to be heard by a Hearing Panel. The Finance & Staffing Committee will agree the Councillors to be part of the Hearing, which should be the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Council and one other Councillors, unless the Chair or Vice-Chair are the subject of the grievance, in which case additional Councillors shall be appointed to make the membership of the Hearing Panel 3 Councillors.

## **HEARING PANEL**

The employee may call witnesses by prior arrangement with the Hearing Panel. There is no right for a Member or employee implicated in an employee's grievance to cross examine the aggrieved during a grievance hearing but the panel may wish to make its own investigations through interviewing these individuals and other witnesses separately. The Panel may ask the employee what he or she would like to happen as a result of raising the grievance and bear this in mind when preparing the response. The Clerk shall attend to record minutes and the employee has the right to request another employee or Member to carry out this function.

## **RESPONSE**

The Hearing Panel will advise the decision to the employee in writing and, where appropriate, include an action plan to assist in the resolution of the problem. Councils which handle internal disputes effectively generally consider the options and costs in a timely fashion, then agree and publicise the workable solutions, monitor, review and learn from the experience. There may be some value in exploring Mediation as a way in which to resolve differences between two parties. The SLCC can advise on approaches and bodies which may be able to assist.

## **APPEAL**

If the employee is dissatisfied with the decision of the Hearing Panel on their grievance they may appeal against the decision to the Clerk within five working days of the decision.

An Appeal may be raised if:

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

On receipt of the appeal request the Clerk will arrange an Appeals Panel to meet. The Councillors to sit on the Appeals Panel will be appointed by the Finance and Staffing Committee and cannot contain any of the same Councillors that sat on the Hearing Panel. The Appeals Hearing shall consider the issues and shall then take all such steps as they consider necessary to resolve the grievance. The decision of the Appeal Hearing will be

final. The Council will need to ensure that the Members involved in the hearings are able to act impartially and reasonably at all times. The outcome of the appeal should be conveyed to the employee in writing in a timely manner.

### **BULLYING OR HARASSMENT**

If a grievance concerns alleged bullying or harassment the matter should be reported promptly to the Clerk, or if the grievance concerns the Clerk then the Chair of the Council. The grievance will then be investigated and any action taken and any resolution achieved will be reported back. If the solution is not satisfactory to the complainant, the matter will be discussed further and, if appropriate, an alternative solution agreed. The decision at this stage will generally conclude the enquiry. If a further appeal or review is available the employee will be notified. As a result of an investigation into a claim of harassment disciplinary action may be instigated against any alleged perpetrators of the action or in the case of alleged perpetrators being elected Members a Code of Conduct complaint lodged by the council through the adopted process.

### **RIGHT TO BE ACCOMPANIED**

At any formal stage of the procedure an employee may be accompanied by a fellow employee of their choice or their trade union representative or official of a trade union (appropriately accredited) but as this is an internal procedure they will not be entitled to be accompanied by any external supporter e.g. partner, parent, solicitor etc. To exercise this right the employee should make a reasonable request. The companion will be allowed to address the hearing, put and sum up the employee's case, respond to views expressed at the hearing and to confer with the employee during the hearing (sometimes in an adjournment) but is not allowed to answer questions on the employee's behalf, address the hearing if the employee does not wish it or prevent the employer from explaining their case.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

So far as is reasonably practicable, the council will keep any grievance or complaint of harassment confidential between the Clerk or Member investigating the grievance or complaint, the employee and the person about whom the grievance or complaint is made. If it is necessary to investigate the matter with any other employee or person, the employee will be so advised.

### **RECORD KEEPING**

In all cases, written records of the nature of the grievance raised, the employer's response, action taken (with reasons), details of any appeal and subsequent developments will be retained and kept.

### **GRIEVANCES RAISED DURING DISCIPLINARY**

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. The SLCC recommends, in line with ACAS advice, that disciplinary matters are placed on hold until grievances have been aired and actions towards a resolution have been progressed. In exceptional circumstances it is pragmatic to deal with the two disputes concurrently but SLCC would advise caution and specialist advice should be sought if this arises.

## **GETTING IT WRONG**

Employees no longer have to raise a grievance before going to an employment tribunal. However, establishing a mechanism for differences and disputes to be resolved internally can often allow the employment relationship to continue. Failure to follow the ACAS Code of Practice (available at [www.acas.org.uk](http://www.acas.org.uk)) when dealing with grievances can lead to an Employment Tribunal awarding an uplift of an award against the council of up to 25%. Tribunals dealing with constructive dismissal and discrimination claims are particularly interested in whether the employer followed a procedure when dealing with an internal dispute and whether the employer acted fairly and reasonably. One way in which to avoid such a penalty is to have an agreed procedure, communicate that procedure to staff and Members, revisit and review the procedure regularly and have some training for those who are expected to operate the procedure.