

# Disciplinary<br/>Code of Practice

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#### 1. Disciplinary Code of Practice

#### 1.1. Aim

The Code aims to assist and encourage all employees to achieve and maintain appropriate standards of conduct. The Code and procedure are intended to provide consistency in the treatment of employees and promote good practice to ensure that appropriate decisions are taken when dealing with instances of misconduct.

This Code and the accompanying guidance supersedes all previous managing disciplinary policies, procedures and guidelines.

#### **SCOPE OF THE CODE**

This Disciplinary Code shall apply to all direct employees of the Authority, except employees within a probationary period of service, to whom the provisions of the Authority's procedures for dismissal in the probationary period shall apply. For the purpose of this code the expression 'employee' means any person who is engaged by the Authority under a contract of employment. The expressions Clerk to the Authority ('the Clerk') and General Manager shall include any officer authorised to act on their behalf. The term 'nominated officer' shall mean an officer nominated by the General Manager for the purposes of this Code. The procedures set out in this code for dealing with disciplinary matters apply only to direct employees of the Authority. The Authority may decide on alternative procedures to deal with disciplinary cases where other appointed officers of the Authority are involved, in line with lead borough arrangements where appropriate. The same disciplinary standards apply to all employees and appointed officers.

# 1.2. General Principles/ Policy Statement

The Authority expects a high standard of conduct from all of its employees to ensure the delivery of high quality services to residents and other users of Authority services. This Code provides a framework to support managers in dealing with cases, fairly and consistently, where an employee's conduct does not meet that standard.

# 1.3. Trade Union Representatives

Recognised staff representatives will be subject to the same standards of conduct as other employees, but will have the right to be represented by

their District or Regional Officer. Disciplinary action beyond a verbal warning will not be taken until the circumstances of the case have been discussed with the District/Regional Officer. Following this notification, the procedure will be followed in the same way as detailed for employees generally.

#### 1.4. Senior Management

The Clerk shall decide on hearing arrangements for various stages under this Code relating to the General Manager or Deputy General Manager. There shall be a right of appeal against the Clerk's decision to the Members of the Authority.

# 1.5. General Principles/ Policy Statement

The Authority expects high standards of conduct from its employees and requires all managers and employees to have a clear understanding of the expectations of staff in the course of their duties; these are outlined in the Authority's Code of Conduct.

Formal disciplinary sanctions will only be issued as a result of a disciplinary investigation and each step within the Code will be taken without unreasonable delay.

The Code provides a framework to ensure fair and consistent treatment and that any disciplinary action taken is as a result of a fair and reasonable process.

#### 1.6. Confidentiality

Any person involved with this Code of Practice is expected to maintain confidentiality at all stages, except as required or permitted by the Code. If an employee breaches confidentiality, they could be subject to separate disciplinary action depending on the nature of the breach.

#### 1.7. Roles and Responsibilities

**Employees** are responsible for:

- understanding the Code and what the Authority expects from them in terms of their conduct and behaviour at work;
- cooperating with disciplinary investigations by attending interviews during normal/office working hours whenever possible;

- arranging their own representation as soon as possible to avoid causing undue delay when required to attend investigatory interviews and formal hearings;
- arranging for their witnesses to attend any formal hearings;
- liaising with the Investigating Officer promptly e.g. if they become unwell and are unable to attend interviews or if they wish to book annual leave;
   and
- attending Occupational Health appointments to determine their fitness to attend meetings/hearings if required to do so by the Investigating Officer or their line manager.

#### **Line Managers** are responsible for:

- attending relevant training workshops on how to apply the Code;
- seeking advice and guidance from the Executive Officer in applying the Code;
- ensuring their employees have access to the Code;
- ensuring any action taken under the Code is dealt with in a timely, fair, confidential and consistent manner, avoiding any undue delays;
- ensuring employees are treated objectively and fairly;
- making referrals to Occupational Health, if appropriate in consultation with Executive Officer;
- making any reasonable adjustments that may be required in accordance with the Equality Act 2010;
- maintaining contact with employees and update them periodically on the progress of the investigation, including those who have been suspended from duty;
- providing high quality and concise reports as required under the Code in a timely manner; and
- ensuring a note is taken of all meetings and hearings.

#### The General Manager assisted by the Executive Officer is responsible for:

- ensuring that managers have the knowledge and information they need in order to apply the Code, by providing training, information, advice and support;
- providing managerial support and guidance when requested by Investigating Officers, for the timely progress of cases in accordance with the Code;
- liaising with the Authority's Human Resources ("HR") Advisor (currently Wandsworth Council's HR section) Trade Unions and Internal Audit when

- appropriate e.g. in cases where suspension is deemed appropriate, cases involving potential fraud etc.;
- ensuring the Code and supporting materials are kept up to date and reflect best practice;
- providing advice to employees on the application of the code;
- working with Occupational Health to ensure any referrals are prioritised to ensure investigations progress in a timely manner taking account of any relevant medical information; and
- providing managerial support and guidance to Adjudicating Officers at disciplinary or appeal hearings e.g. Interpreting the Code and ensuring any disciplinary sanctions that are being considered are fair, reasonable and consistent with Authority policy.

#### **Investigating Officers** are responsible for:

- clarifying the allegations;
- establishing the facts of the case;
- maintaining appropriate timescales for the investigation to be carried out;
- attending any Audit or Safeguarding interviews if appropriate;
- conducting the investigation by interviewing the employee under investigation, witnesses and gathering any other relevant evidence;
- maintaining contact with the employee under investigation if the employee is suspended from duty or is absent from work due to sickness during the investigation;
- preparing a concise report of the evidence and findings of the investigation and recommending whether there is a potential disciplinary case to answer;
- presenting their report to the Adjudicating Officer at the hearing;
- liaising with HR (Wandsworth) throughout the investigation as appropriate; and
- maintaining confidentiality.

# **Adjudicating Officers** Chief Officers (Clerk, Treasurer or General Manager) are responsible for:

- reviewing the Investigating Officer's report and deciding whether there is a potential disciplinary case to answer;
- writing to the employee to inform them that they are required to attend a disciplinary hearing;
- conducting the hearing in accordance with the procedure as detailed in paragraph 2.6;

- deciding whether a disciplinary offence has been committed on the balance of probabilities and, if so, deciding what penalty is appropriate;
- informing the employee of their decision following the hearing; and
- writing to the employee to confirm the outcome of the hearing/their decision.

#### 2. Procedure

#### 2.1. Informal Action

Good management practice requires that issues related to behaviour and conduct should be dealt with at the earliest opportunity. It is essential that all employees are aware of the standards of conduct and behaviour expected of them as soon as they commence, and throughout their employment with the Authority.

When minor infringements of the expected standards of conduct occur these should be dealt with outside of the formal procedure and discussed with the employee as part of everyday supervision with appropriate support being given to achieve the desired results/standards. However, should minor infringements, such as continued lateness not improve, formal action should then be taken.

Where a manager is uncertain about whether informal action is appropriate they should seek advice from the Authority's HR Advisor.

#### 2.2. Formal Action

When a manager becomes aware that an act of misconduct may have been committed, they should consult with the General Manager and/or Executive Officer at the earliest opportunity.

If it is agreed that an investigation should be conducted, the General Manager will nominate the Deputy General Manager (DGM) (or an alternative senior officer from Wandsworth, if necessary) to lead the investigation (who is known as the Investigating Officer).

Dependent on the nature and severity of the issues that need to be examined, the DGM will work with Human Resources (Wandsworth) to support them in their investigation.

In cases of potential financial irregularities or potential fraud which may lead to criminal proceedings being brought, Internal Audit should also be consulted for advice.

Depending on the circumstances and the advice that has been given, the line manager will inform the employee about the alleged breach of conduct and ask the employee to give an explanation. This should be done at the earliest opportunity and the employee should be given the available evidence without prejudicing or interfering with any other investigation that may need to take place first.

#### 2.3. Suspension from duty

At the beginning, or during the course of an investigation into an allegation of Gross Misconduct, it may be necessary to consider suspending the employee from duty or finding some other suitable alternative work for them to undertake during the investigation. This will normally be decided by the General Manager following consultation with the Authority's HR Advisor.

Suspension is a neutral act to facilitate the investigation and alternatives to suspension should always be considered. These may include undertaking alternative duties but other actions may be considered. The Investigating or other nominated officer should maintain contact with the employee especially if they are suspended from work and they should be updated with developments in their work area, as well as developments in the investigation. The Investigating Officer should always consider if it may be appropriate to bring the employee back to work. This will only follow advice from the Authority's HR Advisor and authorisation from the Clerk.

The General Manager, or other nominated senior manager, will normally meet the employee in person to suspend them and explain the terms and conditions of their suspension, which must be confirmed in writing.

During any period of suspension, an employee will receive their normal entitlement to pay.

#### 2.4. Criminal, Audit and Safeguarding Investigations

Where an employee has committed an act either in or outside their employment resulting in charges being brought against them by other parties including the Police, or there are investigations by the Police, or the Authority's Internal Audit, these investigations are procedurally separate from the Authority's disciplinary procedure.

It is not usually necessary for a disciplinary investigation to be put on hold until these other investigations are complete, but this may be an appropriate course of action, depending on the circumstances.

Allegations that an employee may have committed criminal offences either within or outside of employment may lead to formal disciplinary action, especially where the allegations are considered to:

- be relevant to the employee's employment with the Authority,
- bring the Authority into disrepute or have a damaging effect upon the Authority's integrity and reputation.

Investigations conducted by the Police and Internal Audit into alleged criminal, fraudulent or inappropriate activity may take place outside of the disciplinary procedure and **without** the employee's knowledge. The outcome of such investigations may be taken into account to inform any subsequent internal disciplinary action. Where appropriate, the Investigating Officer should attend and a representative from the Authority's HR Advisor may attend all meetings that may be relevant to the disciplinary investigation.

# 2.5. Disciplinary Investigation

When the DGM has been appointed as an Investigating Officer, it is important to inform the employee as soon as possible that an investigation is being carried out and the nature of the complaint(s) or allegation(s) against them. This should be confirmed in writing.

The purpose of the investigation is to establish the facts of the case. The Investigating Officer may offer a recommendation as to the level of hearing (Misconduct or Gross Misconduct) but should not make any recommendation in regards to the type of sanction.

Investigations must be conducted fairly, thoroughly, and in a timely manner. Where possible the Investigating Officer should give the employee an indication of the timeframe for the investigation, including any delays or changes to this.

#### 2.6. Use of witnesses

The Investigating Officer shall interview and obtain copies of the interview notes/statements from all relevant witnesses which should be signed and dated.

### 2.7. Investigatory Interviews

The employee and any witnesses will attend separate investigatory interviews. The employee will normally be given a minimum of three days'

notice of investigatory interviews. If all parties consent then the investigation can proceed at an earlier date.

An employee who is the subject of an investigation will be entitled to be accompanied at the meeting by a Trade Union representative or a work colleague.

An investigatory interview can be postponed, generally on only one occasion, unless there are extenuating circumstances, at the discretion of the Investigating Officer if the employee's preferred representative is not available and where an alternative date is proposed by employee/representative.

Witnesses will not normally be accompanied at an investigatory interview by a Trade Union or work colleague unless there are special circumstances (for example if the witness is alleged to have experienced bullying or harassment).

A record of the investigatory interviews will be taken, as arranged by the Investigating Officer. A copy of the record taken will be sent to the employee and representative as soon as reasonably practicable, giving them the opportunity to correct the record for accuracy and amend them if they so wish within a specified timescale. If the employee fails to return the record by the required time, it will be taken that the records have been accepted as an accurate reflection of the investigatory interview.

The Investigating Officer will submit to the Adjudicating Officer a concise report of the investigation which will summarise the case, most importantly the allegations and how the evidence supports or does not support the allegations. Other information such as witness statements will be appended to the report.

If the Adjudicating Officer decides it is not appropriate to convene a disciplinary hearing, the employee will be informed in writing that no formal disciplinary action is to be taken. Where appropriate an informal warning, guidance and advice may be given to the employee by the Adjudicating Officer or the employee's line manager.

If the Adjudicating Officer considers that there is a case to answer, a disciplinary hearing will be arranged to be chaired by them.

The employee will be written to and invited to attend the disciplinary hearing.

For purposes of this code, two levels of Misconduct are specified; they are: - Misconduct and Gross Misconduct. Examples of offences considered to normally constitute Misconduct at these levels are given in the guidance. The lists are not exhaustive.

For example, whilst neglect of duty may ordinarily be considered potential Misconduct, if there is evidence of <u>serious</u> neglect of duty, this may be considered potential Gross Misconduct.

# 2.8. Preparation for the Disciplinary Hearing

Where the Adjudicating Officer has decided that there is a case to answer, the case will be considered at a formal disciplinary hearing. The hearing will be chaired by the Adjudicating Officer who has not previously been involved in the case who will be assisted by the Human Resources (Wandsworth) or nominee who will provide guidance on the procedural aspects of the process.

The employee shall be informed in writing of the arrangements for the hearing. The Investigating Officer's disciplinary report including all evidence that will be referred to at the hearing and a copy of the employee's work record/history will be sent either with the invite letter or separately at least five clear working days prior to the date of the hearing. Also any management witnesses who will be attending the hearing will be named in the invite letter.

The employee will also be advised that if they wish to submit any documents, statements or other written information for consideration by the Adjudicating Officer, then they should do so at least 48 hours before the hearing. They will also be advised to name any witnesses they wish to call and that it is their responsibility to arrange their attendance.

This letter will be delivered by hand to the employee or sent by courier if the employee is not at work.

# 2.9. Conduct of the Hearing

- i. The facts of the case shall be reported in writing by the Investigating Officer and taken as read by the Adjudicating Officer.
- ii. The Investigating Officer may present a short oral report highlighting the key facts of the case.

- iii. Witnesses may attend the hearing to establish the facts and be cross-examined.
- iv. The employee and any representative shall be given the opportunity to ask questions of the officers and any witnesses who are in attendance at the hearing.
- v. The Adjudicating Officer and the representative from the Authority's HR Advisor shall ask the Investigating Officer and any witnesses' questions to establish the facts of the case.
- vi. The employee and any representative shall then respond to the management case by presenting their case to the Adjudicating Officer to explain the circumstances that led to the complaint/allegations and provide any relevant information to explain any mitigating circumstances which if in writing will be taken as read. The employee and their representative may call witnesses to provide evidence.
- vii. The Investigating Officer shall be given the opportunity to ask questions of the employee and/or representative and any witnesses.
- viii. The Adjudicating Officer and the representative from the Authority's HR Advisor or nominee shall ask questions as necessary.
- ix. The Adjudicating Officer may adjourn a hearing in order to allow further evidence to be produced or for any other purpose required by the particular circumstances.
- x. The Investigating Officer shall sum up followed by the employee or representative.
- xi. The Adjudicating Officer will then adjourn the hearing to consider their decision. The representative from the Authority's HR Advisor will be present whilst the Adjudicating Officer deliberates their decision.
- xii. The employee and any representative shall then be informed of the decision.
- xiii. If the Adjudicating Officer finds that an offence has been committed, they shall be presented with the employee's work record. The employee will be given the opportunity to present any mitigation for their actions.
- xiv. The Adjudicating Officer shall then adjourn the hearing again and consider such action as is appropriate in the circumstances. The representative from the Authority's HR Advisor will be present whilst the Adjudicating Officer deliberates their decision.

xv. The employee and any representative shall then be informed of the decision.

#### 2.10. Possible Outcomes of a Hearing

If a case of misconduct or gross misconduct is found at the disciplinary hearing there are three main levels of sanctions which can be considered by the Adjudicating Officer.

### 2.10.1. Written Warning

A Written Warning will be considered an appropriate sanction for acts of Misconduct where there is any act or failure to act by an employee which management consider calls for formal disciplinary action if proven but which is of a nature not to warrant the employee being dismissed or given a final warning.

Warnings at this level normally remain on the work record for two years from the date of the disciplinary decision before being removed.

If a written warning is to be issued, the employee will be reprimanded by the Adjudicating Officer and issued with a two year written warning in writing.

#### 2.10.2. Final Written Warning

A final written warning will be issued for any act of misconduct if a written warning has already been issued and another offence has occurred or, where the conduct is of such a serious nature that a first written warning is not deemed appropriate, or where the offence does not warrant dismissal but it does warrant a final written warning and should another disciplinary offence be found the employee will be liable to dismissal.

Warnings at this level normally remain on the work record for three to five years from the date of the disciplinary decision.

If a final written warning is to be issued, the Adjudicating Officer will reprimand the employee, and, issue a three to five year final warning, consider any additional appropriate sanction and inform the employee in writing.

#### 2.10.3. Dismissal

Dismissal only applies where a final warning has previously been issued (and remains live) or where, on the balance of probabilities, an allegation of gross misconduct has been found. The Adjudicating Officer will inform the employee that they will be dismissed with or without notice, inform them of their appeal rights and the decision will be confirmed in writing.

Summary dismissal, that is immediate dismissal without previous warning and without notice, will only apply in cases with a finding of gross misconduct that is where the conduct is of a sufficiently serious nature to bring the contract to an end without the need for notice or pay in lieu.

#### 2.11. Additional Sanctions

In addition there are a number of supplementary sanctions that an Adjudicating Officer may consider to accompany a written warning or a final written warning, including suspend without pay (up to four weeks) and/or transfer or demotion.

#### 2.12. Confirmation of Decision

The Adjudicating Officer's decision shall be confirmed in writing, within 5 working days of the hearing and be delivered by hand to the employee or sent by courier if the employee is not at work or did not attend the hearing. The employee shall be informed of their appeal rights by the Executive Officer and that such appeals must be lodged within ten working days of the date on which the decision was delivered to the employee.

# 3. Appeal stage

#### 3.1. General Principles

Employees should put their appeal in writing to the Clerk within 10 working days of receiving a letter of confirmation. Appeals will be arranged as soon as possible. The appeal should be dealt with by a Member of the Authority who has not previously been involved in the case.

#### 3.2. Responsibilities

### **Employees** are responsible for:

• submitting their appeal clearly stating the grounds of their appeal within the required timescale.

# Managers are responsible for:

ensuring that all appeals are heard without unreasonable delay.

#### **Human Resources (Wandsworth)** are responsible for:

providing advice and guidance to the panel of the appeal hearing.

#### **Trade Unions are** responsible for:

providing support, advice and representation for employees.

#### 3.3. Preparation for the Appeal

On receipt of an appeal, clearly stating the grounds of their appeal, the employee shall be notified in writing of the date, time and place of hearing and shall be given at least five working days' notice.

Any appeal shall be heard by a Member of the Authority (the Appeal Officer) with the Head of Human Resources (Wandsworth) or their nominee, whose decision on the matter will be final.

#### 3.4. Conduct of the Appeal

- The facts of the case shall be reported in writing by the Adjudicating Officer and taken as read by the Appeal officer. The manager may present a short oral report highlighting the key facts of the case.
- The employee and any representative shall be given the opportunity to ask questions of the officers concerned.
- The Appeal Officer and a representative from the Authority's HR Advisor shall ask such further questions as are necessary to establish the facts of the case.

- The employee and any representative shall then put his/her case in writing and will be taken as read by the Appeal Officer to explain the reasons for their appeal and any other relevant information. The employee may present a short oral report highlighting the key facts of the case.
- The Adjudicating Officer shall be given the opportunity to question the employee.
- The Appeal Officer and the representative from the Authority's HR
  Advisor shall then have the opportunity to question the employee and
  any witnesses.
- The Adjudicating Officer and employee shall then both sum up.
- The Appeal Officer and the representative from the Authority's HR
   Advisor shall then consider the case in private. If it is necessary to recall
   any party to answer any questions, all the parties shall be recalled. The
   Appeal Officer shall decide on the outcome of the appeal in all respects
   on behalf of the Authority as employer.
- All parties shall then be recalled and informed of the decision. The
  appeal decision shall be confirmed in writing by letter, sent by recorded
  delivery or by hand to the residence or workplace of the employee. The
  letter shall confirm the decision and that the decision is final.

# 3.5. Adjournments

The Appeal Officer may adjourn a hearing in order to allow further evidence to be produced, or for any other purpose required by the particular circumstances. An employee who is seeking an adjournment of the hearing must specify the reason for this. The Appeal Officer will consider the request, taking advice from the representative from the Authority's HR Advisor as necessary.

#### 4. Standards

#### 4.1. Representation

Employees are entitled to representation at the formal stages of the Code by either a work colleague or trade union representative. Requests for any other representation are at the discretion of the Head of Human Resources (Wandsworth) or nominee.

#### 4.2. Reasonable Adjustments

The Authority will consider requests for reasonable adjustments for any disabled employees in line with the Equality Act 2010.

# 4.3. Requests for Postponement

Agreement to requests for postponing meetings at any stage of the process will be at the discretion of the Appeal officer. If any requests for postponements are not agreed, the hearing is likely to proceed either with or without the employee being in attendance.

#### 4.4. Absence

If the employee is absent due to sickness during any formal stage of this process, they may be referred to Occupational Health for an opinion about their fitness to take part in an investigatory interview or a hearing.

#### 4.5. Timescales

The Authority is committed to completing all people management processes within a reasonable timescale and not subjecting the employee to any undue delay. The Line Manager or Appeal Officer will keep the employee informed of their estimated timescales and inform them of any subsequent delays or substantial changes to them.

# **Appendix – Examples of Misconduct and Gross Misconduct.**

The following are examples of misconduct and gross misconduct which will be dealt with by the disciplinary code. The list is not exhaustive or exclusive.

Offences may be dealt with as either misconduct or gross misconduct under this code, dependent on the nature of the allegations. For example a serious breach of the code of conduct may be dealt with as gross misconduct, whereas a minor breach may be dealt with as misconduct.

EXAMPLES OF MISCONDUCT	EXAMPLES OF GROSS MISCONDUCT
1. Unauthorised and/ or improper use or possession of Authority property.	1. Theft, or being involved in a theft, or attempted theft, of money, goods, property or services belonging to the Authority, or those in its care or over which it has custody, or responsibility, or to which an employee has access by virtue of official duty, including the handling of stolen goods, and the falsification of any document (s) to gain monetary or other advantages, falsification of attendance records either personally or for another employee, or other dishonesty.
2. Abuse by an employee of any authority vested in him/her.	2. Undertaking private work during hours when contracted to work for the Authority.
3. Prolonged or persistent lateness or absence from duty without permission.	3. Corruptly soliciting or receiving any benefit or advantage from any individual or body with whom the Authority has dealings, including any failure to notify the employing Director of a pecuniary interest in a contract with the Authority.
4. Neglect of duty, or refusal to obey legitimate instructions.	4. Wilful damage to Authority property
5. Failure to notify the employing General Manager of any gift, benefit,	5. Violent, or dangerous or reckless behaviour of any kind on Authority

hospitality, or other advantage in breach of the code of conduct governing employees' dealings with anyone doing business with the Authority.	premises or whilst on Authority business.
6. Reporting or attending for duty whilst under the influence of drugs (other than those which have been medically prescribed) or alcohol, the effect of which renders the employee unfit to perform his/her duties.	6. Serious abuse towards, or assault upon, employees, persons in care, or members of the public.
7. Abuse towards, or assault upon, employees, persons in care, or members of the public.	7. Maltreatment of persons in care or whose personal welfare is otherwise the responsibility of the Authority.
8. Unauthorised and/ or improper use of Authority information.	8. Breaches of confidentiality or other action seriously prejudicial to the interests of any individual or the Authority, including any unwarranted breach of confidentiality in respect of disciplinary records which seriously prejudices the interests of an individual employee.
9. Breach of the Authority's code of conduct.	9. Providing false information to support an application for employment, or during the course of such application the failure to disclose a relationship with a member or senior officer of the Authority.
10. A grievance brought maliciously in bad faith.	10. Offences within or outside the Authority's employment which, by their nature:  a. Prevent the employee from continuing to do the job for which he/she was employed; or  b. Seriously call into question the employee's fitness to continue in the job which he/she was employed to do; or  c. Have a damaging effect upon the reputation and integrity of the Authority.

- 11. Unlawful discrimination against any person in the course of employment with the Authority.
- 12. The occasion of a second misconduct offence.