

EXMINSTER PARISH COUNCIL DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURE

1. INTRODUCTION

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 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 APR 2009

No disciplinary action will be taken against an employee until the case has been fully investigated.

Before any Disciplinary Hearing the employee will be advised of the nature of the alleged misconduct 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.

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.

2. DEFINITIONS

2.1 Misconduct includes (but is not limited to):

- Unauthorised absence from work
- Persistent short-term and/or frequent absences from work without a medical reason
- 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 N.B. persistent or frequent absence on medical grounds and long-term sickness absence isn't treated as a disciplinary matter.

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3. Gross Misconduct includes (but is not limited to):

- 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 excessive 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, marriage or civil partnership status, pregnancy or maternity, gender reassignment.
- Serious acts of insubordination
- Serious breach of duty to keep information of the council, its service providers and its clients confidential
- Unauthorised entry to computer records
- 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
- Unauthorised use of council funds or credit
- 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.

4. MINOR MISCONDUCT

For first instances of minor misconduct the Chairman may speak to the employee informally before implementing a formal disciplinary procedure. However, there is no obligation for the Chairman to do this. Where the matter is more serious or informal action has not brought about the necessary improvement the following procedure will be used:

5. INVESTIGATIONS

It is not always necessary to hold an investigatory meeting, but where it is, everyone is required to co-operate fully with the investigation. The council will ask a Manager to investigate a complaint or may for some incidences use an outside consultant to ensure

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impartiality. If you are invited to an investigation meeting, there is no right to be accompanied.

6. FORMAL ACTION

6.1 Notification of a Hearing

The Chairman will issue a letter to the employee advising him/her of the allegation(s), reasons why this is unacceptable and the likely range of consequences if the allegations are true. 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 time, date and venue of the meeting will also be advised. Any documents to be produced at the meeting will also be provided.

6.2 Disciplinary Meetings

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 5 days of the letter being sent, where practically possible. At the meeting the Chairman or Vice Chairman, accompanied by a second Councillor 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 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.

7. OUTCOMES AND DISCIPLINARY PENALTIES

7.1 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, delivered by the Chairman or Vice Chairman and 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.

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A brief note of the oral warning will be kept but it will be spent after 6 months, subject to satisfactory conduct.

7.2 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 Chairman or Vice Chairman. This will give the reason for the written warning, 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 12 months subject to satisfactory conduct.

7.3 Stage 3 – Final Written Warning

If there is still a failure to improve and conduct or performance is still unsatisfactory, or there is already an active written warning on file, or the misconduct is sufficiently serious to warrant a final written warning, a FINAL WRITTEN WARNING will normally be given to the employee. This will give the reason for the written warning, 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 Line Manager (or in the case of the Clerk being disciplined by the Chairman of the Council) but it will be spent after 12 months (in exceptional cases the period may be longer) subject to satisfactory conduct.

7.4 Stage 4 – Dismissal or other sanctions

If conduct is still unsatisfactory and the employee still fails to reach the prescribed standards, or where the Council reasonably believes Gross Misconduct has occurred, DISMISSAL may result. Only the Chairman in consultation with one other Councillor 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. 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. 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.

8. SUSPENSION

The Company may suspend the employee on full basic pay. Suspension is not a disciplinary penalty and carries no implication of guilt. Whilst on suspension the employee

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must be available for work or meetings as required during normal working hours. During a period of suspension their passwords will be barred and if they have access to the computer system it will be denied.

9. APPEALS

The Appeals stage of the disciplinary process is part of the ACAS 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 Chairman 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 or Vice-Chair and one other member who has not been involved in the original disciplinary hearing, who will view the evidence with impartiality. The employee will have the right to be accompanied by a colleague or accredited Trade Union official 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.

9.1 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 any other employee or a trade union representative or an appropriately accredited official employed by a trade union to accompany them, 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.

9.2 Note taking

An independent person will take notes at the disciplinary meeting.

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10. 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. If this happens, disciplinary matters may be placed on hold until grievances have been aired and actions towards a resolution have been progressed.

11. 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.

This Policy has been reviewed by Belinda Newton, HR specialist.