

OVINGHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Grievance policy

1. PURPOSE AND SCOPE It is the policy of Ovingham Parish Council as an employer 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 on Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures (April 2009) as set out in the Employment Act 2008. In all matters relating to grievance procedures, the Council will abide by the ACAS Code of Practice, a copy of which is filed herewith.

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 trade union representative, work colleague, fellow Parish Clerk or representative of the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) or Northumberland Association of Local Councils (NALC) 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

3.1 Wherever possible, any grievance should be raised informally with the employee's line manager, or if this is inappropriate with the next level of management. In the case of the Clerk to the Council raising a grievance, this should be directed to the Chairman of the Council unless the complaint is about the Chairman, 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 Advisory Group established to handle employment matters and the issues should be treated with discretion and confidentiality at all times.

3.2 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 their line manager, or if this is inappropriate to the next level of management, or, in the case of the Clerk, to the Chairman.

3.3 Meeting or Hearing Generally, within a reasonable period of time (e.g. five working days of the receipt of a written complaint), the line manager or Chairman will arrange a meeting with the employee and the Ovingham Parish Council relevant Advisory Group. The Chairman will endeavour to make the meeting arrangements mutually convenient and will arrange a confidential location, free from interruptions. The Chairman will investigate the substance of the complaint and hear submissions from the employee concerned together with such other submissions or evidence as s/he shall consider appropriate, and take such steps as s/he shall consider necessary to resolve the issue raised. It may be necessary to adjourn the meeting in order for an investigation to take place. Careful consideration of the evidence and the necessary steps required to resolve the problems will be given to the grievance. The employee may call witnesses by prior arrangement with the Advisory Group. 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 Advisory Group may wish to make its own investigations through interviewing these individuals and/or other witnesses separately. The Advisory Group 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.

3.4 Response The Chairman will advise the decision to the employee in writing and, where appropriate, include an action plan to assist in the resolution of the problem.

3.5 Appeal If the employee is dissatisfied with the decision of the Chairman on his/her complaint, s/he may appeal against the decision to another designated elected Member by written notice 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, the Council shall establish an Appeals Panel to meet and consult with the employee, the line manager or Members concerned and any other persons, as s/he shall consider appropriate without unreasonable delay. The Appeal Hearing Chairman shall consider the issues and shall then take all such steps, as s/he may consider necessary to resolve those issues. Where the Council's Chairman has chaired the initial grievance meeting, the Vice Chairman or another Member will hear the appeal. 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.

3.6 Bullying or Harassment If a grievance concerns alleged bullying or harassment, the matter should be reported promptly to the employee's line manager, the Chairman or another Member, if more appropriate, with an indication of the required action. The complaint 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, Ovingham Parish Council or, in the case of alleged perpetrators being elected Members, a Code of Conduct complaint lodged by the Council through the Complaints Procedure.

3.7 Right to be accompanied At any formal stage of the procedure an employee may be accompanied by a trade union representative, work colleague, fellow Parish Clerk or representative of the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) or Northumberland Association of Local Councils (NALC), but as this is an internal procedure they will not be entitled to be accompanied by any other external supporter e.g. partner, parent, solicitor etc. This right to be accompanied is enshrined in the Employment Relations Act 1999. 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). The companion 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.

3.8 Confidentiality So far as is reasonably practicable, the Council will keep any grievance or complaint of harassment confidential between the manager 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.

3.9 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 in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

3.10 Grievances raised during Disciplinary Processes If, 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 disciplinary matters will be placed on hold until grievances have been aired and actions towards a resolution have been progressed.

4. ACAS CODE OF PRACTICE ON DISCIPLINARY AND GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES (APRIL 2009) In all matters relating to disciplinary and grievance procedures, the Council will abide by the ACAS Code of Practice, a copy of which is filed herewith.