

Freedom of Information request reference number: 8761.1

Date of response: 01/07/2024

Request:

Can you supply your practice policy documents on conducting disciplinary investigations against staff as well as the rules and management code of conduct on discipline hearings at all stages?

Response:

Our discipline (conduct) procedure is published here [LFB policy number 392 - Discipline \(Conduct\) procedure](#) which includes conducting disciplinary investigations as well as the rules and management code of conduct on discipline hearings at all stages.

I have also attached a copy of the London Fire Brigade Policy 392a Disciplinary procedure – Uniformed staff, Fire and Rescue staff and Control Staff. This includes the Disciplinary procedure and guidance, Also a copy of Section 6 of the Grey book which contains details of the procedure for operational staff.

We have dealt with your request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. For more information about this process please see the guidance we publish about making a request on our website: <https://www.london-fire.gov.uk/about-us/transparency/request-information-from-us/>

Disciplinary procedure – uniformed staff, fire and rescue staff and control staff

New policy number: **392a**
 Old instruction number: **392a, 392b, 392c**
 Issue date: **19 April 2005**
 Reviewed as current: **17 July 2023**
 Owner: **Head of Professional Standards Unit**
 Responsible work team: **Professional Standards Unit**

Contents

- 1 Introduction 2
- 2 Management levels of authority 2
- 3 Policies affected 2
- Appendix 1 - Disciplinary procedure and guidance 3
- Appendix 2 - Other legal issues 13
- Document history 14

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The disciplinary procedure and guidance for uniformed staff, fire and rescue staff, and control staff is attached at Appendix 1. The procedure covers conduct (disciplinary offences) and poor performance (capability).
- 1.2 The disciplinary procedure for directors and heads of service is contained within [Policy number 392b](#) - Disciplinary Procedure – Commissioner, directors, heads of service and assistant commissioners.
- 1.3 Further information is contained in the Disciplinary Toolkit on hotwire at HR, pay and employment>Disciplinary and Grievances>Disciplinary Toolkit, see link below.
http://hotwire-live/HR_pay_employment/Disciplinary/Pages/Disciplinary-Procedure-Toolkit.aspx
- 1.4 The Disciplinary Toolkit includes a document 'Guidance on the Conduct of Hearings': this guidance will assist managers chairing hearings under this disciplinary procedure.

2 Management levels of authority

- 2.1 The term 'manager' within the Disciplinary Procedure applies to non-uniformed and uniformed roles.
- 2.2 Levels of investigation and decision-making (which are the minimum levels set for the formal stages in the Disciplinary Procedure Guidance, paragraph 28), are as follows:

Informal Stage: FRS B/leading firefighter/assistant control commander.

Formal Stage 1: Investigation – FRS C/sub/stn officer/Control commander; conduct hearing/take action;

For conduct issues – FRS D/station commander/Control commander;

For performance issues – FRS C/sub/stn officer/Control commander.

Formal Stage 2: Investigation – FRS D/station commander/Control commander;

Conduct hearing/take action – FRS E/group commander/senior control commander.

Formal Stage 3: Investigation – FRS E/group commander/senior control commander;

Conduct hearing/take action – FRS G/deputy assistant commissioner/Deputy Assistant Commissioner for Control.

Hence head of service/Brigade manager will hear appeals against action taken at Formal Stage 3 (which will include dismissals).

3 Policies affected

Cancelled policies

- Policies 392b and 392c are hereby cancelled having been merged with 392a.

Appendix 1 - Disciplinary procedure and guidance

Introduction

- 1 This procedure applies in cases of conduct and unsatisfactory work performance. For further details please refer to the guidance. The guidance covers the scope of the procedure; the requirement to undertake an appropriate investigation; the stages of the procedure; the sanctions available to the employer; the rights of the employee; and the appeal mechanism; etc.
- 2 The basis of this procedure is that the principle of natural justice applies, at every stage, in a framework which also ensures fairness for both employees and managers. A guiding principle of the procedure is to obtain improvement and remedy problems.
- 3 Employees have a statutory right to be accompanied by a fellow employee or trade union official at all formal stages of the procedure.

Informal stage

- 4 This is an informal discussion with the line manager. The separate formal stages of initiating action, investigation, hearing and decision are not relevant at this stage. The informal approach means that minor problems should be dealt with quickly and confidentially. The line manager will speak to the employee about their conduct or performance and may put this in writing although it would not form part of the disciplinary record.
- 5 At the informal stage the manager should ensure that employees are clear of the expected outcomes and the process by which they will be achieved.

First formal stage

- 6 An employee's line manager, at sub/stn officer/FRS C/Control commander level or above, may initiate the disciplinary process and investigate. Where, following a disciplinary meeting, the employee is found guilty of misconduct; the usual first step would be to give them a warning.
- 7 A warning must give details and an explanation of the decision. It should warn the employee that failure to improve or modify behaviour may lead to further disciplinary action and advise them of their right of appeal. A warning should be disregarded for disciplinary purposes after six months.
- 8 Where the issue is one of unsatisfactory performance, please refer to the guidance.
- 9 A warning may only be given to an employee by a manager at station commander/FRS D/Control commander level or above.

Second formal stage

- 10 Where there is a failure to improve or change behaviour in the timescale set at the first formal stage, or where the offence is sufficiently serious, the sanction may be no greater than a final written warning. This sanction may only be issued after a further investigation and hearing.
- 11 A final written warning must give details and an explanation of the decision. It should warn the employee that failure to improve or modify behaviour may lead to dismissal or to some other sanction and advise them of their right of appeal. A final written warning should be disregarded for disciplinary purposes after eighteen months. Where a lesser sanction is issued, the same right of appeal applies.
- 12 A final written warning may only be given to an employee by a manager at group commander/FRS E/senior control commander level (or equivalent) or above.

Third formal stage

- 13 Where employees continually fail to improve or where the offence is sufficiently serious, there should be an investigation and hearing. The sanctions available may include dismissal. Alternatively, the outcome may be a sanction less than dismissal (see Guidance for details). Employees must be told they have the right to appeal and details of the appeals process.
- 14 Any sanction up to dismissal may only be given to an employee at deputy assistant commissioner/FRS G/principle operations manager level or higher.

Gross misconduct

- 15 Acts which constitute gross misconduct are those resulting in a serious breach of contractual terms and thus potentially liable for summary dismissal. It is still important to establish the facts before taking any action. Please refer to the guidance for further information.

General issues

- 16 Other general issues to be aware of include the following:
 - Grievance during a disciplinary procedure.
 - Disciplinary action against trade union representatives.
 - Criminal offences.
 - Suspension.

Further details are given in the Guidance.

Disciplinary procedure guidance

1 Introduction

1.1 Preamble

- 1 The disciplinary procedures will be made available to all employees, for instance on a notice board and in the staff handbook and will be referred to in contracts of employment. Management will do all they can to ensure that every employee knows and understands the procedures, including those employees whose first language is not English or who have trouble reading. This will be done as part of each employee's induction process.
- 2 The procedure, which reflects and improves on the statutory provisions and the ACAS Code on Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures, is designed to help and encourage all employees to achieve and maintain standards of conduct and job performance. The aim is to ensure consistent and fair treatment for all employees in the organisation. Disciplinary procedures are a legal requirement in certain circumstances (see Appendix A).
- 3 The procedure should be supplemented locally by more detailed guidance, for example on the conduct of hearings. Every effort should be made to jointly agree such guidance.
- 4 All managers, at every level, who may be involved in disciplinary action, shall be fully trained and competent in the operation of the procedure. Responsibility for the appropriate level of disciplinary action must be in accordance with the relevant role map, the role of the manager and levels of delegated authority.
- 5 The basis of this procedure is that the principle of natural justice both applies, and is clearly seen to apply, at every stage. The aim is to ensure that appropriate action can be taken without

unnecessary delay, but in a framework which also ensures fairness for both employees and managers.

- 6 The guiding principle of the procedure is that, in every case except dismissal, the aim is to obtain improvement and remedy problems. Each case shall be treated on its merits in the light of the particular circumstances involved.
- 7 On issues of conduct the procedure may be initiated at any stage depending on the seriousness of the case. Where issues concern unsatisfactory performance the stages in the procedure would normally be followed in sequence and account should be taken of the Personal Development Record (PDR) where appropriate.
- 8 On issues of incapacity at work brought on by misuse of alcohol or drugs, separate remedial procedures should be considered as an alternative.

1.2 Scope

- 9 This guidance covers the scope of the procedure (conduct and job performance); the requirement to undertake an appropriate investigation; the stages of the procedure; the sanctions available to the employer; the rights of the employee; and the appeal mechanism; etc.
- 10 The disciplinary procedure is designed to cover behaviour which is contrary to that necessary for ensuring a safe and efficient workplace, and for maintaining good employment relations. Such behaviour could include, but is not limited to:
 - bad behaviour, such as fighting or drunkenness;
 - unsatisfactory work performance;
 - harassment, victimisation or bullying;
 - misuse of company facilities (for example e-mail and internet);
 - poor timekeeping;
 - unauthorised absences;
 - repeated or serious failure to follow instructions.
- 11 Acts which constitute gross misconduct are those resulting in a serious breach of contractual terms. Examples of gross misconduct might include:
 - theft or fraud;
 - bribery or accepting a bribe;
 - physical violence or bullying;
 - deliberate and serious damage to property;
 - serious misuse of the Brigade's property or name;
 - deliberately accessing pornographic, offensive or obscene material;
 - unlawful discrimination or harassment;
 - bringing the Brigade into serious disrepute;
 - serious incapacity at work brought on by misuse of alcohol or illegal drugs;
 - causing loss, damage or injury through serious negligence;
 - a serious breach of health and safety rules;
 - a serious breach of confidence.

1.3 Time limits

- 12 Time limits applicable to the different stages of the procedure are set out in the guidance below. These may be varied by mutual agreement.

1.4 Initiating formal disciplinary action

- 13 For apparent cases of misconduct, where, in the judgement of the line manager the issue is one which would not result in a formal sanction greater than a written warning, the disciplinary procedure may be initiated by the line manager, who will ensure that an investigation will be conducted by themselves or another appropriate manager.
- 14 Where, in the line manager's judgement, the sanction could be greater than a written warning, the procedure should be initiated by a manager not lower than station commander/FRS D/Control commander who will ensure that an investigation will be conducted by themselves or another appropriate manager.
- 15 Where appropriate, where there are issues of performance, account should be taken of the outcome of the review of the PDR, which is designed to offer support and assistance. In these cases, the disciplinary process should only be used where actions to remedy unsatisfactory performance, based on the developmental PDR, are not proving effective.

1.5 Investigation

- 16 An investigation should be carried out to establish the facts promptly. It is important to keep a written record for later reference. Having established the facts, the manager will decide whether to drop the matter or deal with it in accordance with the procedure, which may include reference back to the informal stage. Where necessary technical expertise relevant to the case should also be made available.
- 17 Where the employee is to be interviewed as part of an investigation they should be advised of the purpose of the meeting in advance and that they may be accompanied. When making these arrangements this should not frustrate the investigation.

1.6 Information for the employee before a disciplinary hearing

- 18 In advance of any disciplinary hearing the manager will write to the employee. The letter should contain enough information for the employee to fully understand the case against them with all relevant details (e.g. dates, times, location, etc.) and the reasons why this is not acceptable. If the employee has difficulty reading, or if English is not their first language, the manager should explain the content of the letter to them orally.

The letter should also invite the employee to a hearing at which the problem can be discussed, and it should inform the employee of their right to be accompanied at the meeting (see paragraph 1.10). The employee will be given copies of any documents that will be produced at the hearing.

- 19 At all stages employees shall be fully informed.

1.7 Hearings

- 20 The timing and location of the hearing should where practicable be agreed with the employee and/or their representative. The length of time between the written notification and the hearing should be long enough to allow the employee and/or their representative to prepare and shall in any event be not less than:
- seven days for first formal stage;
 - ten days for the second stage;
 - twenty-one days for the third stage.
- 21 The manager should hold the hearing in a private location and ensure both that there will be no interruptions and that the employee feels the issue is being treated confidentially.

- 22 At the hearing, the process will be explained to the employee. The case against the employee will be stated including the evidence. The employee and/or their representative will be given every opportunity to set out their case and answer any allegations that have been made. The employee will also be allowed to ask questions, present evidence and/or information, call witnesses and character witnesses where appropriate and be given an opportunity to raise points about any information provided by witnesses.
- 23 An employee and/or their representative who cannot attend a hearing should inform the manager in advance, as soon as possible. If the employee fails to attend through circumstances outside their control, and unforeseeable at the time the hearing was arranged (e.g. illness), the manager should arrange another hearing. A decision may be taken at a hearing in the employee's absence if they fail to attend the rearranged hearing without good reason. An employee's representative may attend on their behalf, if the employee is unable to attend. If an employee's representative cannot attend on a proposed date, the employee has a statutory right to suggest another date so long as it is reasonable and is not more than seven days after the date originally proposed by the employer. This seven-day time limit may be extended by mutual agreement.

1.8 Decision on outcome and action

- 24 Following the hearing the manager must decide whether action is justified or not. Where it is decided that no action is justified the employee should be informed. Where it is decided that action is justified the manager will need to consider what form this should take. Before making any decision, the employer should take account of the employee's disciplinary and general record, length of service, actions taken in any previous similar case, the explanations given by the employee and other relevant factors. The intended action must be reasonable under the circumstances.
- 25 Examples of actions the manager might choose to take are set out in paragraphs 2.2 to 2.5. It is normally good practice to give employees at least one chance to improve their conduct or performance before they are issued with a final written warning. However, if an employee's misconduct or unsatisfactory performance – or its continuance – is sufficiently serious, for example because it is having, or is likely to have, a serious harmful effect on the organisation, it may be appropriate to move directly to a final written warning. In cases of gross misconduct, the employer may decide to dismiss even though the employee has not previously received a warning for misconduct.
- 26 Following the meeting/hearing the decision should be confirmed in writing as soon as possible, within seven days. The decision shall include a description of the nature of the issue, any required remedial action and the timescale for improvement. Except in cases of dismissal, where the issues relate to performance and in other cases where appropriate the decision shall include the following:
- the improvement that is required;
 - the timescale for achieving this improvement;
 - a review date;
 - all support the employer will provide to assist the employee.
- 27 Employees should also be informed that if there is no improvement, further stages, leading ultimately to dismissal, may be invoked.

1.9 Level of management

- 28 The lowest levels of line management who can take action within the procedure is set out below. The lowest level at the informal stage would be leading firefighter/FRS B/assistant control

commander. Subject to training, competence, and levels of delegated authority, the formal stages are as follows:

	Investigation	Conduct hearing/take action
Formal stage 1	Sub/stn officer/FRS C/Control commander	station commander/FRS D/Control commander*
Formal stage 2	Station commander/FRS D/Control commander	Group commander/FRS E/senior Control commander
Formal stage 3	Group commander/FRS E/senior control commander	Deputy assistant commissioner/FRS G/Deputy Assistant Commissioner for Control

* In cases of unsatisfactory performance, it is appropriate for a sub/stn officer/FRS C/Control commander to inform the employee that a failure to improve could lead to disciplinary action being taken.

- 29 Where the manager who would normally deal with the issue cannot be available, or, there may be a conflict of interest, another manager at the same or higher level, should be appointed to deal with the case. Where the procedure has reached the second formal stage or higher, the hearing should be conducted by a manager who is not the investigating manager but is at the same or higher level. The investigating manager would normally present the management case at the second and third formal stages.

1.10 Representation

- 30 Employees have a statutory right to be accompanied by a fellow employee or trade union official of their choice at all formal stages of the procedure.
- 31 In addition, it is good practice for employees to be provided with the opportunity to be accompanied at the investigation stage although this should not frustrate the process.
- 32 Fellow employees or trade union officials do not have to accept a request to accompany an employee, and they should not be pressurised to do so.
- 33 An employee or lay trade union official who has agreed to accompany a colleague employed by the same employer is entitled to take a reasonable amount of paid time off to fulfill that responsibility. This should cover the hearing and allow time for the representative to familiarise themselves with the case and confer with the employee before and after the hearing. A request for reasonable paid time off by a trade union official to accompany an employee employed by another fire authority in the same region shall be given due consideration by the respective employers.
- 34 Employers should cater for an employee's disability at a meeting/hearing; they should also cater for a representative's disability, for example providing for wheelchair access if necessary.
- 35 Before the meeting/hearing takes place, the employee will tell the manager who they have chosen as a representative.
- 36 The representative should be allowed to address the meeting/hearing in order to:
- put the employee's case;
 - sum up the employee's case;
 - respond on the employee's behalf to any view expressed at the hearing.

- 37 The representative can also confer with the employee during the meeting/hearing and participate as fully as possible in the meeting/hearing, including asking witnesses questions. The representative has no right to answer questions on the employee's behalf, or to address the hearing if the employee does not wish it, or to prevent the employer from explaining their case.

2 Stages of disciplinary action

2.1 Informal stage

- 38 Cases involving minor misconduct or unsatisfactory performance are usually best dealt with informally by the line manager. A quiet word is often all that is required. The informal approach means that minor problems can be dealt with quickly and confidentially. Where issues involve performance, supportive action, reference to the PDR and specialist advice may be more appropriate.
- 39 At this informal stage the manager should ensure that employees understand the position, if necessary by giving them a written note. This would not form any part of their disciplinary record but it would be filed on their Personal Record File.
- 40 There will, however, be situations where matters are more serious or where an informal approach has been tried but isn't working. At this point it may be appropriate to enter the formal stages of the procedure.

2.2 First formal stage

- 41 The employee's line manager will investigate the matter. If required a meeting/hearing may be held at which the relevant manager will make a decision. The employee has the right to be represented and present their case in response to management.
- 42 Where, following a disciplinary hearing an employee is found guilty of misconduct, the usual first step would be to give them a warning setting out the nature of the misconduct and the change in behaviour required.
- 43 The employee should be informed that the warning is part of the formal disciplinary process and what the consequences will be of the failure to change behaviour. The consequences could be a final written warning and ultimately, dismissal. The employee should also be informed that they may appeal against the decision. A record of the warning should be kept, but it should be disregarded for disciplinary purposes after six months.
- 44 Where there are issues of performance, and where appropriate, account should be taken of the review of the employees PDR, which is designed to offer support and assistance whenever possible. The disciplinary process should only be used where actions to remedy unsatisfactory performance, based on the developmental PDR, are not proving effective. An employee who is found to be performing unsatisfactorily should be given a written note detailing the following:
- the performance problem;
 - the improvement that is required;
 - the timescale for achieving this improvement;
 - a review date;
 - all support the employer will provide to assist the employee.
- 45 The employee should be informed that failure to improve could lead to disciplinary action being taken. A copy of the note should be kept and used as the basis for monitoring and reviewing performance over a specified period e.g. six months.

2.3 Second formal stage

- 46 Where there is a failure to improve or change behaviour in the timescale set at the first formal stage, the employee may be issued with a final written warning – but only after a further investigation and hearing. Alternatively, where the offence is sufficiently serious, action may be initiated at this stage. The final written warning will give details and an explanation of the decision. It should warn the employee that failure to improve or modify behaviour may lead to dismissal or to some other sanction and advise them of their right of appeal against the final written warning which should be disregarded for disciplinary purposes after eighteen months. Where a lesser sanction is issued, the same right of appeal applies.
- 47 A final written warning may only be given to an employee by a manager at group commander/FRS E/senior control commander or equivalent or above.

2.4 Third formal stage

- 48 Where employees fail to improve, or where the offence is sufficiently serious, following an investigation and hearing, employees may be dismissed at deputy assistant commissioner/FRS G/Deputy Assistant Commissioner for Control level or above. Employees must be told they have the right to appeal and details of the appeals process.
- 49 Alternatively where there has been a failure to improve as required or, in exceptional cases, at the first offence, following the investigation and hearing, a decision may be made by a deputy assistant commissioner/FRS G/Deputy Assistant Commissioner for Control level or above to award a sanction less than dismissal, or in serious cases, as an alternative to dismissal. These sanctions are:
- A warning.
 - Demotion (no more than one grade; a demotion of more than one grade can only be done with the agreement of the employee).
 - Disciplinary transfer (which should involve no loss of remuneration and unless the employee agrees otherwise should be within the same working pattern).
 - Loss of pay up to a maximum of thirteen days.

2.5 Gross misconduct

- 50 If a manager considers an employee guilty of gross misconduct, and thus potentially liable for summary dismissal, it is still important to establish the facts before taking any action. A short period of suspension with full pay may be helpful or necessary, although it should only be imposed after careful consideration and should be kept under review. It should be made clear to the employee that the suspension is not a disciplinary action and does not involve any prejudgement (see paragraph 3.5 below on suspension).
- 51 It is a core principle of reasonable behaviour that employers should give employees the opportunity of putting their case at a disciplinary hearing before deciding whether to take action. This principle applies as much to cases of gross misconduct as it does to ordinary cases of misconduct or unsatisfactory performance.
- 52 Paragraph deleted: this referred to a non- contractual briefing note within the Grey Book.

3 General issues

3.1 Appeals

- 53 Employees who have had disciplinary action taken against them will be given the opportunity to appeal. Employees will be allowed to appeal no later than seven days after they have been informed of the decision.
- 54 The appeal shall be heard by a higher level of manager. Arrangements for the final appeal stage against dismissal should be determined locally but be consistent with the principle that the corporate level involved should be higher than the level which heard the previous stage.
- 55 Where an employee appeals against disciplinary action taken against them they must put their grounds of appeal in writing. The grounds of appeal will normally be one or more of the following:
- There was a defect in the procedure.
 - The issue is not proven on the balance of probabilities.
 - The disciplinary sanction was too severe.
 - New evidence has come to light since the hearing which will have an impact on the decision.
- 56 Normally the Appeal Manager will conduct the appeal hearing as a rehearing (in full or part), where this is required. Otherwise the appeal hearing will be conducted as a review. A rehearing would normally be required in the following instances (this is not necessarily an exhaustive list):
- There was a procedural defect at the original hearing such that the hearing was Unfair.
 - New evidence has come to light which needs to be heard in full.
 - There is a dispute about evidence given by one or more witnesses at the original hearing. In these cases, it may be necessary to rehear the witness evidence at the appeal.
- 57 Where the appeal hearing is conducted as a review, the Appeal Manager will have available all the documents presented to the original hearing. They will also have a copy of the record of the hearing, the letter confirming the outcome of the original disciplinary hearing, the letter of appeal and all other relevant information. The Appeal Manager will reach findings based on the documentation and the submissions at the appeal hearing from the parties.
- 58 At the appeal hearing the employee and/or their representative will first put their case by explaining the grounds of appeal and presenting any relevant evidence. The management case will then be put, responding to the grounds of appeal, normally by the manager who conducted the original hearing. Relevant witnesses may be brought by either side and be questioned by all parties.
- 59 The outcome of the appeal will be either:
- The case against the employee is upheld (in whole or part); the sanction will then be the same or a lesser penalty.
 - The case against the employee is not upheld.
- 60 At the final appeal against dismissal, if the employer's representative is legally qualified, the employee's representative may, if the employee wishes, also be a legal representative.
- 61 In cases of gross misconduct dismissal will be summary following the hearing. If the employee is reinstated on appeal, pay will be reinstated and backdated.
- 62 In other cases of dismissal, employees shall be given contractual notice of dismissal following the hearing. Every effort will be made to conclude any appeal process within the notice period. Where it has not been possible to conclude the appeal process within the notice period, notice may be extended for a reasonable period with a view to concluding the appeal process within the notice period. If the dismissal is not upheld on appeal, the employee will be reinstated.

63 In cases of sanctions other than dismissal, the sanctions should not be implemented until any appeal process has been concluded.

3.2 **Where a grievance is raised during a disciplinary procedure**

64 In the course of a disciplinary process, an employee might raise a grievance that is related to the case. If this happens, the manager should consider suspending the disciplinary procedure for a short period while the grievance is dealt with. Depending on the nature of the grievance, the manager may need to consider bringing in another manager to deal with the disciplinary process (see ACAS Code).

3.3 **Disciplinary action against trade union representatives**

65 Disciplinary action against a trade union representative can lead to a serious dispute if it is seen as an attack on the union's functions. Normal standards apply but, if disciplinary action is considered, the case should be discussed, after obtaining the employee's agreement, with a senior trade union representative or permanent union official.

3.4 **Criminal offences**

66 If an employee is charged with, or convicted of, a criminal offence not related to work, this is not in itself reason for disciplinary action. The manager should establish the facts of the case and consider whether the matter is serious enough to warrant starting the disciplinary procedure. The main consideration should be whether the offence, or alleged offence, is one that makes the employee unsuitable for their type of work. Similarly, an employee should not be dismissed solely because they are absent from work as a result of being remanded in custody.

3.5 **Suspension**

67 It is impossible to predict the full range of circumstances which will arise in disciplinary cases. Emphasis will always be on a speedy and fair resolution. In some cases, it may be appropriate to suspend an employee from the workplace while an investigation or preparation for a disciplinary hearing takes place.

68 If an employee is to be suspended they should be informed of the reasons for the suspension, that suspension is not disciplinary action, and that they will be asked to return to work for an investigative meeting or disciplinary hearing as soon as possible. It is also appropriate at this stage to discuss any conditions which will apply during the period of suspension, for example, communications channels, availability to attend meetings, facilities to meet with their representative, etc.

69 Where an employee is suspended, they will receive full pay unless they commence sick leave in which case their pay will be in accordance with the rules of the sick pay scheme.

Appendix 2 - Other legal issues

- 1 It should be noted that the appeal stage against dismissal or other serious sanction short of dismissal is part of the statutory procedure and if the employee pursues an employment tribunal claim the tribunal may reduce any award of compensation if the employee did not exercise the right of appeal.
- 2 Managers and employees will normally be expected to go through the dismissal and disciplinary procedure unless they have reasonable grounds to believe that by doing so they might be exposed to a significant threat, such as violent, abusive or intimidating behaviour, or they will be harassed. There will always be a certain amount of stress and anxiety for both parties when dealing with any disciplinary case, but this exemption will only apply where the employer or employee reasonably believes that they would come to some serious physical or mental harm; their property or some third party is threatened or the other party has harassed them and this may continue.
- 3 Equally, the procedure does not need to be followed if circumstances beyond the control of either party prevent one or more steps being followed within a reasonable period. This will sometimes be the case where there is a long-term illness or a long period of absence abroad but in the case of managers, wherever possible they should consider appointing another manager to deal with the procedure.

Document history

Assessments

An equality, sustainability or health, safety and welfare impact assessment and/or a risk assessment was last completed on:

EIA	06/02/24	SDIA	L - 21/07/23	HSWIA		RA	
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Audit trail

Listed below is a brief audit trail, detailing amendments made to this policy/procedure.

Page/para nos.	Brief description of change	Date
Throughout	Amalgamation of policies 392a, 392b and 392c	28/05/2010
Throughout	The terms "principal controller", "assistant controller", "control commander", "senior control officers" and "control officers" have been replaced respectively by "principal operations manager", "senior operations manager", "operations manager", "assistant operations manager" and "control room officers" in line with new role titles.	02/12/2010
Page 10	"Disability Discrimination Act" replaced by "Equality Act 2010" in line with current legislation	14/10/2011
Throughout	Amendments to managerial authority levels within Control.	08/03/2012
Throughout	This policy has been marked reviewed as current, no changes were necessary.	29/04/2013
Page 14	SIA date added.	31/10/2013
Page 5 para 11	Bullet point added 'bribery or accepting a bribe'.	29/04/2014
Page 14	Subject list and FOIA exemptions tables updated.	22/12/2014
Page 2	Reference to the Deputy Commissioner removed due to the TMR.	16/12/2015
Throughout	Reviewed as current with no changes.	10/06/2016
Page 2	New para 1.3 referencing the Disciplinary Toolkit.	24/10/2018
Throughout	Deletion of all references to 'attendance' as this is no longer managed within the disciplinary procedure, but under PN873 – the sickness capability process, and PN889 - managing attendance policy. Paragraphs 46-48 referring to attendance have been deleted and the following paragraphs renumbered.	01/08/2019
Throughout	Role to rank changes made to content.	15/10/2019
Page 1	Owner changed from 'Head of Human Resource Management' to 'Assistant Director, People Services'.	13/08/2020
Throughout	The word 'Authority' replaced with 'Brigade due to the abolition of LFEPA.	

Page/para nos.	Brief description of change	Date
Throughout	Reviewed as current with no changes.	17/07/2023
Page 14	SDIA added.	08/08/2023
Page 1	Owner and responsible work team updated.	05/04/2024
Page 14	Equality impact assessment date updated.	23/04/2024

Subject list

You can find this policy under the following subjects.

Appeals	Discipline and conduct

Freedom of Information Act exemptions

This policy/procedure has been securely marked due to:

Considered by: (responsible work team)	FOIA exemption	Security marking classification

SECTION 6 - GRIEVANCE AND DISCIPLINARY

In operating these grievance and disciplinary procedures, both employees and managers should recognise the significant change in culture involved and the importance of appropriate training and development.

INDIVIDUAL GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

Informal stage

1. Employees should be informed that if they have a grievance relating to their employment they should discuss it with their line manager.

Formal stage

2. If the employee is not satisfied with the reply they may proceed to the next stage. At this stage the grievance must be set out in writing. Also at this stage a representative of their union or a fellow employee may if they wish accompany them and take up the matter on their behalf.
3. The line manager should hear the grievance within seven days. Where the decision that gave rise to the grievance was made at a higher level, the grievance will initially be heard at that level. The employee will be given a written decision with reasons within seven days, explaining the decision.

Appeal stage

4. If the employee remains dissatisfied with the decision they may appeal within seven days in writing. This appeal should be heard within seven days by the next highest level of management who have the authority to review and change the original decision. Their decision with reasons must also be in writing. The employee will be given a written decision with reasons within seven days explaining the decision.
5. If the employee is dissatisfied with the decision of the Appeal described at paragraph 4 and the issue has been identified as being one of a serious nature then the grievance shall be reviewed at the corporate level appropriate to the issue (see paragraph 8 of guidance).

Time limits

6. The time limits referred to above may be varied by mutual agreement.

GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE - GUIDANCE

Preamble

1. The individual grievance procedure is intended to cover the range of concerns, problems and issues which individuals may raise with their employer. It fulfils the statutory requirements, which are set out in the annexes to the ACAS Code of Practice on Grievance and Disciplinary Procedures. Other legal considerations are set out in Appendix A to the procedure.

2. The grievance procedure applies to current employees. Ex-employees are not entitled to use the grievance procedure except as described in the Employment Act 2002, see Annex B of the ACAS Code of Practice.
3. Grievances will normally be raised with the line manager and it is the responsibility of the employer to ensure that employees know who their line manager is. Where grievances are about serious problems such as allegations of bullying, harassment, racism or other unlawful discrimination which suggest major problems, for example of culture or management style, then the appropriate corporate level of the employing authority shall be involved in the appeal (see paragraph 8 below). It is the responsibility of both employer and employee to ensure that grievances are heard fairly, consistently, speedily and at the appropriate level (see paragraph 2 below). The procedure must be made available to all employees so that any grievances they may have can be properly considered.
4. Where separate procedures exist for dealing with grievances on particular issues (for example, the right to request flexible working) these should be used instead of the normal grievance procedure.
5. Employees should be encouraged to seek help with setting out their grievance (for example from representatives of recognised unions). As required under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 employers must make reasonable adjustments which may include assisting employees to formulate a written grievance if they are unable to do so themselves because of a disability.
6. In line with the statutory procedures, employees have the right to be accompanied by a trade union representative or fellow employee at the hearing.
7. Where a grievance involves difficulty in reconciling work and caring responsibilities, managers shall make every effort, subject to the exigencies of the service, not to implement any proposed change until the grievance has been resolved.
8. Grievances should be raised within 3 months of the management decision causing the grievance, unless otherwise agreed.

Informal stage

- 1 Employees should aim to resolve most grievances quickly and informally by discussing them with their line manager. Where the grievance is a complaint against the line manager with whom the grievance would normally be raised, the employee can approach that person's manager or another manager at the same or similar level of authority. If employees are not satisfied with the outcome of this initial informal stage, they may move to the next stage of a formal hearing.

Formal stage

2. If a grievance cannot be settled informally, it should then be raised formally in writing with the appropriate level of management. Normally, this will be the line manager. Again, where the grievance is a complaint against the line manager with whom the grievance would normally be raised, the employee can approach that person's manager or another manager at the same or similar level of authority.

3. On receiving a formal grievance, a manager should invite the employee to a meeting which should be held in good time¹ and inform them that they have the right to be accompanied by a representative (which could be either their union representative or a fellow employee). They should agree a time and place for the meeting with the employee. It is important that the meeting is not interrupted and that the employee feels their grievance is being treated seriously and in confidence. If an employee's representative cannot attend on a proposed date, the employee can suggest another date so long as it is reasonable and is not more than seven days after the date originally proposed by the manager. This seven-day time limit may be extended by mutual agreement.
4. The employee will be given a full opportunity to explain their complaint and say how they think it should be settled. If a point is reached in the meeting where it is not clear how to deal with the grievance or further investigations are necessary the meeting should be adjourned to get advice or make further investigations. The manager should give the grievance careful consideration before responding.
5. Where the manager who would normally deal with the grievance cannot be available, another manager should be appointed to hear the grievance.
6. The manager should respond in writing to the employee's grievance in good time explaining the reason for their decision and should let the employee know that they can appeal against the manager's decision if they are not satisfied with it.

Appeal stage

7. If the employee informs their manager in good time and in writing that they are unhappy with the decision after the formal grievance hearing, the manager should arrange for an appeal hearing to be conducted in good time. The appeal will be to a manager at a more senior role who has the practical authority to review and change the original decision. This level of authority may depend on the nature of the decision e.g. whether it simply involved application of existing policy or was a decision introducing or changing policy. The employee should be given a written decision and explanation on their appeal as soon as possible and in good time.
8. In addition, as noted in the preamble above, serious cases such as allegations of bullying, harassment, racism or other unlawful discrimination which suggest major problems, for example of culture or management style, will (where the matter remains unresolved) require a further hearing to be conducted by the corporate level of the employing authority which is appropriate to the issue. For example, the appropriate level will be that which both appreciates the wider importance and significance of the issue and has the authority to deal with it.
9. As with the previous stage, the employee should be given a written decision and explanation on their appeal as soon as possible and in good time.

Special considerations

10. Where either the authority or the recognised union determine that the matter is a collective issue, it may, at any stage, be transferred to stage one of the local negotiation procedure set out in Part C of Section 5.

¹ Throughout this guidance and procedure "in good time" means as soon as possible and in any case within 7 days unless otherwise agreed.

11. Complaints about discrimination, bullying and harassment in the workplace are sensitive issues. As indicated above, these should merit special attention and it may be helpful for separate procedures, which must meet the relevant statutory requirements, to be developed.
12. It is important to ensure that everyone in the organisation understands the grievance procedures, including the statutory requirements and that managers and employee representatives are trained in their use. Employees must be given a copy of the procedures or have ready access to them, for instance on a noticeboard, and they should be included as part of the induction process.
13. Managers and union representatives should take the time to explain the detail of grievance procedures to employees.

Keeping records

14. It is important, and in the interests of both parties, to keep written records during the grievance process. Records should include:
 - the nature of the grievance raised;
 - a copy of the written grievance
 - the manager's response;
 - action taken;
 - reasons for action taken;
 - whether there was an appeal and, if so, the outcome; and
 - subsequent developments.
15. Copies of meeting records should be given to the employee including any formal minutes that may have been taken. In certain circumstances (for example to protect a witness) some information may be withheld.

Other legal considerations

1. It is important that employers and employees follow the statutory grievance procedure where it applies. The employee should (subject to the exemptions described in Annex C to the ACAS Code) at least have raised the grievance in writing and waited 28 days before presenting any tribunal claim relating to the matter. A premature claim will be automatically rejected by the tribunal although (subject to special time limit rules) it may be presented again once the written grievance has been raised. Furthermore if a grievance comes before an employment tribunal and either party has failed to follow the procedure then the tribunal will normally adjust any award by 10 per cent or, where it feels it just and equitable to do so, by up to 50 per cent, depending on which party has failed to follow the procedure. In exceptional cases compensation can be adjusted by less than 10 per cent or not at all.
2. Wherever possible a grievance should be dealt with before an employee leaves employment. A statutory grievance procedure (“the modified grievance procedure” described in Annex B to the ACAS Code) applies where an employee has already left employment, the standard procedure has not been commenced or completed before the employee left employment and both parties agree in writing that it should be used instead of the standard statutory procedure. It is recommended that the modified procedure described in Annex B is used in such cases. Under the modified procedure the employee should write to the employer setting out the grievance as soon as possible, and not later than three months, after leaving employment and the employer must write back setting out its response within five working days unless otherwise agreed.
3. It should be noted that the appeal stage is part of the statutory procedure and if the employee pursues an employment tribunal claim the tribunal may reduce any award of compensation if the employee did not exercise the right of appeal.
4. Individuals also have the right to raise very serious grievances under the provisions of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998. This Act provides protection to employees who raise concerns about certain kinds of wrongdoing in accordance with its procedures.
5. Records should be treated as confidential and kept in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998, which gives individuals the right to request and have access to certain personal data.

DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURE

Introduction

1. This procedure applies in cases of conduct, unsatisfactory work performance and poor attendance. For further details please refer to the guidance. The guidance covers the scope of the procedure; the requirement to undertake an appropriate investigation; the stages of the procedure; the sanctions available to the employer; the rights of the employee; and the appeal mechanism; etc.
2. The basis of this procedure is that the principle of natural justice applies, at every stage, in a framework which also ensures fairness for both employees and managers. A guiding principle of the procedure is to obtain improvement and remedy problems.
3. Employees have a statutory right to be accompanied by a fellow employee or trade union official at all formal stages of the procedure.

Informal stage

4. This is an informal discussion with the line manager. The separate formal stages of initiating action, investigation, hearing and decision are not relevant at this stage. The informal approach means that minor problems should be dealt with quickly and confidentially. The line manager will speak to the employee about their conduct, attendance or performance and may put this in writing although it would not form part of the disciplinary record.
5. At the informal stage the manager should ensure that employees are clear of the expected outcomes and the process by which they will be achieved.

First formal stage

6. An employee's line manager, at Watch Manager level or above, may initiate the disciplinary process and investigate. Where, following a disciplinary meeting, the employee is found guilty of misconduct; the usual first step would be to give them a warning.
7. A warning must give details and an explanation of the decision. It should warn the employee that failure to improve or modify behaviour may lead to further disciplinary action, and advise them of their right of appeal. A warning should be disregarded for disciplinary purposes after six months.
8. Where the issue is one of unsatisfactory performance or unsatisfactory attendance, please refer to the guidance.
9. A warning may only be given to an employee by their Station Manager or above.

Second formal stage

10. Where there is a failure to improve or change behaviour in the timescale set at the first formal stage, or where the offence is sufficiently serious, the sanction may be no greater than a final written warning. This sanction may only be issued after a further investigation and hearing.
11. A final written warning must give details and an explanation of the decision. It should warn the employee that failure to improve or modify behaviour may lead to dismissal or

to some other sanction, and advise them of their right of appeal. A final written warning should be disregarded for disciplinary purposes after eighteen months. Where a lesser sanction is issued, the same right of appeal applies.

12. A final written warning may only be given to an employee by their Group Manager (or equivalent) or above.

Third formal stage

13. Where employees continually fail to improve, or where the offence is sufficiently serious, there should be an investigation and hearing. The sanctions available may include dismissal. Alternatively, the outcome may be a sanction less than dismissal (see guidance for details). Employees must be told they have the right to appeal and details of the appeals process.
14. Any sanction up to dismissal may only be given to an employee by their Area/Brigade Manager.

Gross misconduct

15. Acts which constitute gross misconduct, are those resulting in a serious breach of contractual terms and thus potentially liable for summary dismissal. It is still important to establish the facts before taking any action. Please refer to the guidance for further information.

General issues

16. Other general issues to be aware of include the following:
 - Grievance during a disciplinary procedure.
 - Disciplinary action against trade union representatives.
 - Criminal offences.
 - Suspension.

Further details are given in the Guidance.

DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURE GUIDANCE

1. Introduction

1.1 Preamble

1. The disciplinary procedures will be made available to all employees, for instance on a notice board and in the staff handbook and will be referred to in contracts of employment. Management will do all they can to ensure that every employee knows and understands the procedures, including those employees whose first language is not English or who have trouble reading. This will be done as part of each employee's induction process.
2. The procedure, which reflects and improves on the statutory provisions and the ACAS Code on Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures, is designed to help and encourage all employees to achieve and maintain standards of conduct, attendance and job performance. The aim is to ensure consistent and fair treatment for all employees in the organisation. Disciplinary procedures are a legal requirement in certain circumstances (see Appendix A).

3. The procedure should be supplemented locally by more detailed guidance, for example on the conduct of hearings. Every effort should be made to jointly agree such guidance.
4. All managers, at every level, who may be involved in disciplinary action shall be fully trained and competent in the operation of the procedure. Responsibility for the appropriate level of disciplinary action must be in accordance with the relevant role map, the role of the manager and levels of delegated authority.
5. The basis of this procedure is that the principle of natural justice both applies, and is clearly seen to apply, at every stage. The aim is to ensure that appropriate action can be taken without unnecessary delay, but in a framework which also ensures fairness for both employees and managers.
6. The guiding principle of the procedure is that, in every case except dismissal, the aim is to obtain improvement and remedy problems. Each case shall be treated on its merits in the light of the particular circumstances involved.
7. On issues of conduct the procedure may be initiated at any stage depending on the seriousness of the case. Where issues concern unsatisfactory performance and/or attendance the stages in the procedure would normally be followed in sequence and account should be taken of the Personal Development Record (PDR).
8. On issues of incapacity at work brought on by mis-use of alcohol or drugs, separate remedial procedures should be considered as an alternative.

1.2 Scope

9. This guidance covers the scope of the procedure (conduct, attendance and job performance); the requirement to undertake an appropriate investigation; the stages of the procedure; the sanctions available to the employer; the rights of the employee; and the appeal mechanism; etc.
10. The disciplinary procedure is designed to cover behaviour which is contrary to that necessary for ensuring a safe and efficient workplace, and for maintaining good employment relations. Such behaviour could include, but is not limited to:
 - bad behaviour, such as fighting or drunkenness
 - unsatisfactory work performance
 - harassment, victimisation or bullying
 - misuse of company facilities (for example e-mail and internet)
 - poor timekeeping
 - unauthorised absences
 - repeated or serious failure to follow instructions
11. Acts which constitute gross misconduct are those resulting in a serious breach of contractual terms. Examples of gross misconduct might include:
 - theft or fraud
 - physical violence or bullying
 - deliberate and serious damage to property
 - serious misuse of the Authority's property or name
 - deliberately accessing pornographic, offensive or obscene material
 - unlawful discrimination or harassment
 - bringing the Authority into serious disrepute
 - serious incapacity at work brought on by misuse of alcohol or illegal drugs
 - causing loss, damage or injury through serious negligence
 - a serious breach of health and safety rules
 - a serious breach of confidence

1.3 Time limits

12. Time limits applicable to the different stages of the procedure are set out in the guidance below. These may be varied by mutual agreement.

1.4 Initiating formal disciplinary action

13. For apparent cases of misconduct, where, in the judgement of the line manager the issue is one which would not result in a formal sanction greater than a written warning, the disciplinary procedure may be initiated by the line manager, who will ensure that an investigation will be conducted by themselves or another appropriate manager.
14. Where, in the line manager's judgement, the sanction could be greater than a written warning, the procedure should be initiated by a manager not lower than the Station Manager who will ensure that an investigation will be conducted by themselves or another appropriate manager.
15. Where there are issues of performance including poor attendance, account should be taken of the outcome of the review of the PDR, which is designed to offer support and assistance. In these cases the disciplinary process should only be used where actions to remedy unsatisfactory performance, based on the developmental PDR, are not proving effective.

1.5 Investigation

16. An investigation should be carried out to establish the facts promptly. It is important to keep a written record for later reference. Having established the facts, the manager will decide whether to drop the matter or deal with it in accordance with the procedure, which may include reference back to the informal stage. Where necessary technical expertise relevant to the case should also be made available.
17. Where the employee is to be interviewed as part of an investigation they should be advised of the purpose of the meeting in advance and that they may be accompanied. When making these arrangements this should not frustrate the investigation.

1.6 Information for the employee before a disciplinary hearing

18. In advance of any disciplinary hearing the manager will write to the employee. The letter should contain enough information for the employee to fully understand the case against them with all relevant details (e.g. dates, times, location, etc.) and the reasons why this is not acceptable. If the employee has difficulty reading, or if English is not their first language, the manager should explain the content of the letter to them orally. The letter should also invite the employee to a hearing at which the problem can be discussed, and it should inform the employee of their right to be accompanied at the meeting (see Para 1.10). The employee will be given copies of any documents that will be produced at the hearing.
19. At all stages employees shall be fully informed.

1.7 Hearings

20. The timing and location of the hearing should where practicable be agreed with the employee and/or their representative. The length of time between the written notification and the hearing should be long enough to allow the employee and/or their representative to prepare and shall in any event be not less than:

seven days for first formal stage
ten days for the second stage
twenty-one days for the third stage

21. The manager should hold the hearing in a private location and ensure both that there will be no interruptions, and that the employee feels the issue is being treated confidentially.
22. At the hearing, the process will be explained to the employee. The case against the employee will be stated including the evidence. The employee and/or their representative will be given every opportunity to set out their case and answer any allegations that have been made. The employee will also be allowed to ask questions, present evidence and/or information, call witnesses, and character witnesses where appropriate and be given an opportunity to raise points about any information provided by witnesses.
23. An employee and/or their representative who cannot attend a hearing should inform the manager in advance, as soon as possible. If the employee fails to attend through circumstances outside their control, and unforeseeable at the time the hearing was arranged (e.g. illness), the manager should arrange another hearing. A decision may be taken at a hearing in the employee's absence if they fail to attend the rearranged hearing without good reason. An employee's representative may attend on their behalf, if the employee is unable to attend. If an employee's representative cannot attend on a proposed date, the employee has a statutory right to suggest another date so long as it is reasonable and is not more than seven days after the date originally proposed by the employer. This seven-day time limit may be extended by mutual agreement.

1.8 Decision on outcome and action

24. Following the hearing the manager must decide whether action is justified or not. Where it is decided that no action is justified the employee should be informed. Where it is decided that action is justified the manager will need to consider what form this should take. Before making any decision the employer should take account of the employee's disciplinary and general record, length of service, actions taken in any previous similar case, the explanations given by the employee and other relevant factors. The intended action must be reasonable under the circumstances.
25. Examples of actions the manager might choose to take are set out in paragraphs 2.2 to 2.5. It is normally good practice to give employees at least one chance to improve their conduct or performance before they are issued with a final written warning. However, if an employee's misconduct or unsatisfactory performance – or its continuance – is sufficiently serious, for example because it is having, or is likely to have, a serious harmful effect on the organisation, it may be appropriate to move directly to a final written warning. In cases of gross misconduct, the employer may decide to dismiss even though the employee has not previously received a warning for misconduct.
26. Following the meeting/hearing the decision should be confirmed in writing as soon as possible, within seven days. The decision shall include a description of the nature of the issue, any required remedial action and the timescale for improvement. Except in cases of dismissal, where the issues relate to performance and in other cases where appropriate the decision shall include the following:
 - the improvement that is required
 - the timescale for achieving this improvement
 - a review date
 - all support the employer will provide to assist the employee

27. Employees should also be informed that if there is no improvement, further stages, leading ultimately to dismissal, may be invoked.

1.9 Level of management

28. The lowest levels of line management who can take action within the procedure is in accordance with the role maps. The lowest level at the informal stage would be the crew manager. Subject to training, competence, and levels of delegated authority, the formal stages are as follows:

	Investigation	Conduct hearing/take action
Formal stage 1	Watch Manager	Station manager*
Formal stage 2	Station Manager	Group Manager
Formal stage 3	Group Manager	Area/Brigade Manager

* In cases of unsatisfactory performance and absence it is appropriate for a Watch Manager to inform the employee that a failure to improve could lead to disciplinary action being taken.

29. Where the manager who would normally deal with the issue cannot be available, or, there may be a conflict of interest, another manager at the same or higher level, should be appointed to deal with the case. Where the procedure has reached the second formal stage or higher, the hearing should be conducted by a manager who is not the investigating manager but is at the same or higher level. The investigating manager would normally present the management case at the second and third formal stages.

1.10 Representation

30. Employees have a statutory right to be accompanied by a fellow employee or trade union official of their choice at all formal stages of the procedure.
31. In addition, it is good practice for employees to be provided with the opportunity to be accompanied at the investigation stage although this should not frustrate the process.
32. Fellow employees or trade union officials do not have to accept a request to accompany an employee, and they should not be pressurised to do so.
33. An employee or lay trade union official who has agreed to accompany a colleague employed by the same employer is entitled to take a reasonable amount of paid time off to fulfill that responsibility. This should cover the hearing and allow time for the representative to familiarise themselves with the case and confer with the employee before and after the hearing. A request for reasonable paid time off by a trade union official to accompany an employee employed by another fire authority in the same region shall be given due consideration by the respective employers.
34. Employers should cater for an employee's disability at a meeting/hearing, they should also cater for a representative's disability, for example providing for wheelchair access if necessary.
35. Before the meeting/hearing takes place, the employee will tell the manager who they have chosen as a representative.
36. The representative should be allowed to address the meeting/hearing in order to:
- put the employee's case
 - sum up the employee's case
 - respond on the employee's behalf to any view expressed at the hearing

37. The representative can also confer with the employee during the meeting/hearing and participate as fully as possible in the meeting/hearing, including asking witnesses questions. The representative has no right to answer questions on the employee's behalf, or to address the hearing if the employee does not wish it, or to prevent the employer from explaining their case.

2. Stages of disciplinary action

2.1 Informal stage

38. Cases involving minor misconduct or unsatisfactory performance or attendance are usually best dealt with informally by the line manager. A quiet word is often all that is required. The informal approach means that minor problems can be dealt with quickly and confidentially. Where issues involve performance, or in some cases attendance, supportive action, reference to the PDR and specialist advice may be more appropriate.
39. At this informal stage the manager should ensure that employees understand the position, if necessary by giving them a written note. This would not form any part of their disciplinary record but it would be filed on their Personal Record File.
40. There will, however, be situations where matters are more serious or where an informal approach has been tried but isn't working. At this point it may be appropriate to enter the formal stages of the procedure.

2.2 First formal stage

41. The employee's line manager will investigate the matter. If required a meeting/hearing may be held at which the relevant manager will make a decision. The employee has the right to be represented and present their case in response to management.
42. Where, following a disciplinary hearing an employee is found guilty of misconduct, the usual first step would be to give them a warning setting out the nature of the misconduct and the change in behaviour required.
43. The employee should be informed that the warning is part of the formal disciplinary process and what the consequences will be of the failure to change behaviour. The consequences could be a final written warning and ultimately, dismissal. The employee should also be informed that they may appeal against the decision. A record of the warning should be kept, but it should be disregarded for disciplinary purposes after six months.
44. Where there are issues of performance, account should be taken of the review of the employees PDR, which is designed to offer support and assistance whenever possible. The disciplinary process should only be used where actions to remedy unsatisfactory performance, based on the developmental PDR, are not proving effective. An employee who is found to be performing unsatisfactorily should be given a written note detailing the following:
 - the performance problem
 - the improvement that is required
 - the timescale for achieving this improvement
 - a review date
 - all support the employer will provide to assist the employee

45. The employee should be informed that failure to improve could lead to disciplinary action being taken. A copy of the note should be kept and used as the basis for monitoring and reviewing performance over a specified period e.g. six months.
46. When dealing with absence from work, it is important to determine the reasons why the employee has not been at work. If there is no acceptable reason, the matter should be treated as a conduct issue and dealt with as a disciplinary matter.
47. If the absence is due to genuine (including medically certified) illness, the issue becomes one of performance, and the employer should take a sympathetic and considerate approach. When thinking about how to handle these cases, it is helpful to consider:
 - how soon the employee's health and attendance will improve;
 - whether alternative work is available;
 - the effect of the absence on the organisation;
 - how similar situations have been handled in the past; and
 - whether the illness is a result of disability in which case the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 will apply.
48. The employee should be informed that failure to improve could lead to disciplinary action being taken. A copy of the note should be kept and used as the basis for monitoring and reviewing performance over a specified period e.g. six months.

2.3 Second formal stage

49. Where there is a failure to improve or change behaviour in the timescale set at the first formal stage, the employee may be issued with a final written warning – but only after a further investigation and hearing. Alternatively where the offence is sufficiently serious, action may be initiated at this stage. The final written warning will give details and an explanation of the decision. It should warn the employee that failure to improve or modify behaviour may lead to dismissal or to some other sanction, and advise them of their right of appeal against the final written warning which should be disregarded for disciplinary purposes after eighteen months. Where a lesser sanction is issued, the same right of appeal applies.
50. A final written warning may only be given to an employee by their group manager or above.

2.4 Third formal stage

51. Where employees fail to improve, or where the offence is sufficiently serious, following an investigation and hearing, employees may be dismissed by their [Area Manager/Brigade Manager/Members of the Employing Authority]. Employees must be told they have the right to appeal and details of the appeals process.
52. Alternatively where there has been a failure to improve as required or, in exceptional cases, at the first offence, following the investigation and hearing, a decision may be made by their Area or Brigade manager to award a sanction less than dismissal, or in serious cases, as an alternative to dismissal. These sanctions are:
 - A warning.
 - Demotion (either within role or no more than one role; a demotion of more than one role can only be done with the agreement of the employee).
 - Disciplinary transfer (which should involve no loss of remuneration and unless the employee agrees otherwise should be within the same duty system).
 - Loss of pay up to a maximum of thirteen days.

2.5 Gross misconduct

53. If a manager considers an employee guilty of gross misconduct, and thus potentially liable for summary dismissal, it is still important to establish the facts before taking any action. A short period of suspension with full pay may be helpful or necessary, although it should only be imposed after careful consideration and should be kept under review. It should be made clear to the employee that the suspension is not a disciplinary action and does not involve any prejudgement (see paragraph 3.5 below on suspension).
54. It is a core principle of reasonable behaviour that employers should give employees the opportunity of putting their case at a disciplinary hearing before deciding whether to take action. This principle applies as much to cases of gross misconduct as it does to ordinary cases of misconduct or unsatisfactory performance.
55. A simplified briefing note for the discipline procedure can be found at Appendix B.

3. General issues

3.1 Appeals

56. Employees who have had disciplinary action taken against them will be given the opportunity to appeal. Employees will be allowed to appeal no later than seven days after they have been informed of the decision.
57. The appeal shall be heard by a higher level of manager. Arrangements for the final appeal stage against dismissal should be determined locally but be consistent with the principle that the corporate level involved should be higher than the level which heard the previous stage.
58. Where an employee appeals against disciplinary action taken against them they must put their grounds of appeal in writing. The grounds of appeal will normally be one or more of the following:
 - There was a defect in the procedure.
 - The issue is not proven on the balance of probabilities.
 - The disciplinary sanction was too severe.
 - New evidence has come to light since the hearing which will have an impact on the Decision.
59. Normally the Appeal Manager will conduct the appeal hearing as a rehearing (in full or part), where this is required. Otherwise the appeal hearing will be conducted as a review. A rehearing would normally be required in the following instances (this is not necessarily an exhaustive list):
 - There was a procedural defect at the original hearing such that the hearing was Unfair.
 - New evidence has come to light which needs to be heard in full.
 - There is a dispute about evidence given by one or more witnesses at the original hearing. In these cases it may be necessary to rehear the witness evidence at the appeal.
60. Where the appeal hearing is conducted as a review, the Appeal Manager will have available all the documents presented to the original hearing. They will also have a copy of the record of the hearing, the letter confirming the outcome of the original disciplinary hearing, the letter of appeal and all other relevant information. The Appeal Manager will reach findings based on the documentation and the submissions at the appeal hearing from the parties.

61. At the appeal hearing the employee and/or their representative will first put their case by explaining the grounds of appeal and presenting any relevant evidence. The management case will then be put, responding to the grounds of appeal, normally by the manager who conducted the original hearing. Relevant witnesses may be brought by either side, and be questioned by all parties.
62. The outcome of the appeal will be either:
 - The case against the employee is upheld (in whole or part); the sanction will then be the same or a lesser penalty.
 - The case against the employee is not upheld.
63. At the final appeal against dismissal, if the employer's representative is legally qualified, the employee's representative may, if the employee wishes, also be a legal representative.
64. In cases of gross misconduct dismissal will be summary following the hearing. If the employee is reinstated on appeal, pay will be reinstated and backdated.
65. In other cases of dismissal, employees shall be given contractual notice of dismissal following the hearing. Every effort will be made to conclude any appeal process within the notice period. Where it has not been possible to conclude the appeal process within the notice period, notice may be extended for a reasonable period with a view to concluding the appeal process within the notice period. If the dismissal is not upheld on appeal, the employee will be reinstated.
66. In cases of sanctions other than dismissal, the sanctions should not be implemented until any appeal process has been concluded.

3.2 Where a grievance is raised during a disciplinary procedure

67. In the course of a disciplinary process, an employee might raise a grievance that is related to the case. If this happens, the manager should consider suspending the disciplinary procedure for a short period while the grievance is dealt with. Depending on the nature of the grievance, the manager may need to consider bringing in another manager to deal with the disciplinary process (see ACAS Code Para 33 and 34).

3.3 Disciplinary action against trade union representatives

68. Disciplinary action against a trade union representative can lead to a serious dispute if it is seen as an attack on the union's functions. Normal standards apply but, if disciplinary action is considered, the case should be discussed, after obtaining the employee's agreement, with a senior trade union representative or permanent union official.

3.4 Criminal offences

69. If an employee is charged with, or convicted of, a criminal offence not related to work, this is not in itself reason for disciplinary action. The manager should establish the facts of the case and consider whether the matter is serious enough to warrant starting the disciplinary procedure. The main consideration should be whether the offence, or alleged offence, is one that makes the employee unsuitable for their type of work. Similarly, an employee should not be dismissed solely because they are absent from work as a result of being remanded in custody.

3.5 Suspension

70. It is impossible to predict the full range of circumstances which will arise in disciplinary cases. Emphasis will always be on a speedy and fair resolution. In some cases it may be appropriate to suspend an employee from the workplace while an investigation or preparation for a disciplinary hearing takes place.
71. If an employee is to be suspended they should be informed of the reasons for the suspension, that suspension is not disciplinary action, and that they will be asked to return to work for an investigative meeting or disciplinary hearing as soon as possible. It is also appropriate at this stage to discuss any conditions which will apply during the period of suspension, for example, communications channels, availability to attend meetings, facilities to meet with their representative, etc.
72. Where an employee is suspended they will receive full pay unless they commence sick leave in which case their pay will be in accordance with the rules of the sick pay scheme.
73. Full pay for those employees on the retained duty system will be calculated on the basis of their retained payments averaged over a twelve-week period.

Other legal issues

1. It should be noted that the appeal stage against dismissal or other serious sanction short of dismissal is part of the statutory procedure and if the employee pursues an employment tribunal claim the tribunal may reduce any award of compensation if the employee did not exercise the right of appeal.
2. Managers and employees will normally be expected to go through the dismissal and disciplinary procedure unless they have reasonable grounds to believe that by doing so they might be exposed to a significant threat, such as violent, abusive or intimidating behaviour, or they will be harassed. There will always be a certain amount of stress and anxiety for both parties when dealing with any disciplinary case, but this exemption will only apply where the employer or employee reasonably believes that they would come to some serious physical or mental harm; their property or some third party is threatened or the other party has harassed them and this may continue.
3. Equally, the procedure does not need to be followed if circumstances beyond the control of either party prevent one or more steps being followed within a reasonable period. This will sometimes be the case where there is a long-term illness or a long period of absence abroad but in the case of managers, wherever possible they should consider appointing another manager to deal with the procedure.

A SIMPLIFIED BRIEFING NOTE FOR THE DISCIPLINE PROCEDURE

This note is for guidance only. It does not form part of the disciplinary procedure or the employment contract of any person covered by the Grey Book. It is not to be used as an aid to interpreting the meaning of the procedure itself. The procedure must be referred to and used if any issues come up that are covered by it.

First formal stage

Initiate

1. This stage should be used in performance/attendance cases where informal support and action based on the Personal Development Records (PDR) has not resolved the problem. This stage should also be used in cases of conduct where the nature of the alleged offence may warrant a sanction no greater than a warning.
2. This stage should be conducted at Watch/Station Manager level or higher. Should the employee's line manager be at Watch/Station Manager level or above, this stage will be initiated at a higher level of line manager, see paragraphs 1.4 and 1.9 of the guidance.

Investigate

3. The Watch/Station Manager or higher shall:
 - Initiate, conduct or delegate an appropriate investigation.
 - The employee shall be notified in writing immediately of the investigation and the nature and details of the case. However in exceptional circumstances that notification may be delayed.
 - Keep a record.
 - Ensure the investigation is completed in good time.

4. Upon completion of the investigation the Watch/Station Manager or higher shall notify the employee of the outcome of the investigation and decide from the following what action to take:
 - Drop the matter
 - Deal with the matter on an informal basis
 - Proceed to a stage 1 hearing
 - Refer the case to the stage 2 or 3 process

Hearing

5. The employee shall be given a minimum of seven days' notice of a hearing. The letter should contain enough information for the employee to fully understand the case against them with all relevant details and the reasons why this is unacceptable. The notification should also include copies of all the evidence/information relevant to the hearing. The employee will be advised of their right to be accompanied at the hearing.
6. The Station Manager or higher shall preside at the hearing and shall first explain the process, the case against the employee and go through the evidence/information that has been gathered.
7. The Station Manager or higher shall consider the employee's case in full.
8. At the conclusion of the hearing the Station Manager or higher shall decide from the following what action to take:
 - Drop the matter.
 - Deal with the matter on an informal basis.
 - Take appropriate action, which will depend in particular on whether the issue is one of conduct, performance or attendance.
 - In conduct cases a warning may be issued which may remain on the employee's record for six months.

Decision

9. The employee shall receive the decision of the hearing in writing. This should be as soon as possible after the conclusion of the hearing and in any event within seven days.
10. Where a warning is issued the Station Manager or higher shall inform the employee, in writing, of the decision. At the same time the employee will also be advised of the appeal process.
11. The employee should appeal within seven days of receiving the warning. The notice of appeal must be in writing and should specify one or more of the grounds of appeal set out in paragraph 3.1 of the Guidance.
12. The appeal hearing shall be arranged at the next level. The employee shall be given not less than 10 days notice of the appeal hearing.

Second formal stage

Initiate

1. This stage should be used in performance/attendance cases where support and action based on the PDR has not resolved the problem. This stage should also be used in

cases of conduct where the nature of the alleged offence may warrant a sanction no greater than a final written warning.

2. This stage should be conducted at Group Manager level or higher. Should the employee's line manager be at Group Manager level or above this stage will be initiated at a higher level of line manager, see paragraphs 1.4 and 1.9 of the Guidance.

Investigate

3. The Group Manager or higher shall:
 - Initiate, conduct or delegate an appropriate investigation.
 - The employee shall be notified in writing immediately of the investigation and the nature and details of the case. However in exceptional circumstances that notification may be delayed.
 - Keep a record.
 - Ensure the investigation is completed in good time.
4. Upon completion of the investigation the Investigating Manager shall notify the employee of the outcome of the investigation and decide from the following what action to take:
 - Drop the matter.
 - Deal with the matter on an informal basis.
 - Refer the matter to a stage 1 hearing.
 - Proceed with a stage 2 hearing.
 - Proceed with a stage 3 hearing.

Hearing

5. The employee shall be given a minimum of ten days' notice of a hearing. The letter should contain enough information for the employee to fully understand the case against them with all relevant details and the reasons why this is unacceptable. The notification should also include copies of all the evidence/information relevant to the hearing. The employee will be advised of their right to be accompanied at the hearing.
6. A Group Manager or higher (independent of the Investigating Manager) shall preside at the hearing.
7. The management case against the employee will be presented, normally by the Investigating Manager.
8. The employee and/or their representative will present the employees case.
9. The Presiding Manager shall consider the evidence/information presented.
10. At the conclusion of the hearing the Presiding Manager shall decide from the following what action to take:
 - Drop the matter.
 - Deal with the matter on an informal basis.
 - Take appropriate action, which may include a sanction no greater than a final written warning (to remain on the employee personal record file for no longer than eighteen months), or a lesser sanction.

Decision

11. The employee shall receive the decision of the hearing in writing. This should be as soon as possible after the conclusion of the hearing and in any event within seven days.
12. Where a final written warning or other sanction is issued, the Presiding Manager shall inform the employee, in writing, of the decision. At the same time the employee will also be advised of their rights of appeal.
13. The employee should appeal within seven days of receiving the warning. The notice of appeal must be in writing and should specify one or more of the grounds of appeal set out in paragraph 3.1 of the guidance.
14. The appeal hearing shall be arranged at the next level. The employee shall be given not less than ten days' notice of the appeal hearing.

Third formal stage

Initiate

1. This stage should be used in all cases where the employee is subject to a final written warning and/or where the alleged offence is sufficiently serious that it may warrant dismissal or other sanction short of dismissal.
2. This stage should be conducted at Area Manager level or higher. Should the employee's line manager be at Area Manager level or above this stage will be initiated at a higher level of line manager, see paragraphs 1.4 and 1.9 of the guidance.

Investigate

3. The Area/Brigade Manager shall:
 - Initiate, conduct or delegate an appropriate investigation.
 - The employee shall be notified in writing immediately of the investigation and the nature and details of the case. However in exceptional circumstances that notification may be delayed.
 - Keep a record.
 - Ensure the investigation is completed in good time.
4. Upon completion of the investigation the Investigating Manager shall notify the employee of the outcome of the investigation and decide from the following what action to take:
 - Drop the matter.
 - Deal with the matter on an informal basis.
 - Refer the matter to a stage 1 or 2 hearing as appropriate.
 - Proceed with a stage 3 hearing.

Hearing

5. The employee shall be given a minimum of twenty-one days' notice of a hearing. The letter should contain enough information for the employee to fully understand the case against them with all relevant details and the reasons why this is unacceptable. The notification should also include copies of all the evidence/information relevant to the hearing. The employee will be advised of their right to be accompanied at the hearing.

6. An Area/Brigade Manager or higher (independent of the Investigating Manager) shall preside at the hearing.
7. The management case against the employee will be presented, normally by the Investigating Manager.
8. The employee and/or their representative will present the employees case.
9. The Presiding Manager shall consider the evidence/information presented.
10. At the conclusion of the hearing the Presiding Manager shall decide to:
 - Drop the matter.
 - Deal with the matter on an informal basis.
 - Take appropriate action, which may include dismissal or other action short of dismissal.

Decision

11. The employee shall receive the decision of the hearing in writing. This should be as soon as possible after the conclusion of the hearing and in any event within seven days.
12. Where the employee is dismissed or an alternative disciplinary sanction is issued the Presiding Manager shall inform the employee, in writing, of the decision. At the same time the employee will also be advised of the appeal process.
13. The employee should appeal within seven days of receiving the warning. The notice of appeal must be in writing and should specify one or more of the grounds of appeal set out in paragraph 3.1 of the Guidance.
14. The appeal hearing shall be arranged at the next level. The employee shall be given not less than ten days' notice of the appeal hearing.

PART C - LOCAL CONSULTATION AND NEGOTIATION

MODEL CONSULTATION AND NEGOTIATION PROCEDURES

Context

These procedures are intended to establish relationships and interactions that promote joint solution seeking to resolve differences between management and recognised trade unions that may arise from time to time.

CONSULTATION PROCEDURE

1. This procedure shall be used for matters that do not require collective agreement and should cover at least those issues described in the European Union Information and Consultation Directive and the arrangements for consultation should as a minimum follow the United Kingdom Regulations fall-back provisions.

Commencement

2. Consultation shall commence at the earliest opportunity and shall take place prior to final decisions having been taken. As far as practicable, all relevant, non-confidential, information will be made available to the recognised trade unions to enable meaningful consultation to take place.
3. Consultation will take place at the level in the organisation affected by the issues in question. Matters of a corporate nature will be dealt with corporately.

Purpose

4. Consultation between the fire and rescue authority and recognised trade unions shall be conducted with a view to reaching agreement. To this end the authority shall give consideration to all issues raised with them and will give reasons when it is unable to agree to any proposals put forward by the recognised trade unions.
5. The parties shall work jointly to resolve issues identified in the course of consultation and ensure that consultation is carried out effectively.

Conclusion

6. Consultation will be concluded at the point either when there is agreement or when the issues not agreed have been fully responded to. All parties agree to adhere to any prearranged timetable for completion of discussions.

Third party assistance

7. Where one party considers that external assistance may be beneficial it may seek the agreement of all other parties to this approach. No party would unreasonably refuse a request.

NEGOTIATION PROCEDURE

1. This procedure shall be used for all matters that are the subject of collective negotiation and agreement between the fire and rescue authority and recognised trade unions. The objective of the procedure is to resolve issues jointly. Individual issues should be dealt with through the grievance procedure.

Application

2. Issues shall be dealt with at the appropriate level but issues of a corporate nature should be dealt with at the corporate level in the first instance.
3. Any issue should be able to be pursued to a corporate level for resolution.
4. All parties should have the requisite information needed to deal with any issue.
5. All parties will use their best endeavours to ensure compliance with the timetables set out in the procedure unless otherwise jointly agreed.
6. Notwithstanding these formal procedures each party should give early notification to the other party that an issue has arisen and maintain a continuous informal dialogue and exchange of information on relevant issues.
7. External assistance may be used to facilitate the negotiating process where the parties agree that this would be helpful.

Stage 1

8. Other than for issues that arise initially at corporate level, the fire authority and/or recognised trade unions shall notify the other party of an issue that has arisen which falls within the purview of this procedure.
9. Where requested a meeting shall be arranged within ten working days to deal with the issue(s). As far as practicable any supporting information will be made available to all parties prior to the meeting taking place.
10. If no solution is found within ten working days the parties shall decide whether or not to continue discussion at this stage, refer to the next stage or end the discussion. Any party may refer the matter under negotiation to the next stage.

Stage 2

11. The fire and rescue authority and/or recognised trade unions shall notify the other parties of an issue of a corporate nature which comes within the purview of this procedure or which has been referred from a previous stage in this procedure.
12. Where requested, a negotiating meeting at a level appropriate to the issue shall be arranged within ten working days to deal with the issue(s) raised. As far as practicable all parties will be provided with relevant information prior to the meeting taking place.
13. If no solution is found within ten working days of the meeting the parties shall decide whether or not to continue or conclude the discussion.
14. Where one party considers that external assistance may assist in resolving an issue at corporate level it may request the agreement of the other parties to this approach, and

no party will unreasonably withhold agreement to such a request. Such a request shall be made within five working days of completion of discussion at the corporate stage.

15. In such circumstances the parties may jointly agree to refer the issue to:
 - (1) the NJC Joint Secretaries; and/or
 - (2) ACAS; and/or
 - (3) the NJC Resolution Advisory Panel (which shall comprise an Independent Chair and the Joint Secretaries)to assist the parties further with their negotiations.
16. The above should be completed within twenty working days of the request for external assistance being made.

Arbitration

17. If a difference remains unresolved, subject to agreement of the parties and agreed terms of reference, an issue may be referred to ACAS (in Northern Ireland, the Labour Relations Agency) for settlement by arbitration.

General

18. While an issue is subject to discussion/resolution under this negotiating procedure neither side will seek to take any collective action or introduce change.
19. Any difference over the application of paragraph 18 will be resolved by reference to the Independent Chair of the Resolution Advisory Panel. Submissions and the decision will be by correspondence and will be completed within ten working days of the reference being made.