

GUIDANCE ON THE ROLE OF SUPPORT OFFICER

INTRODUCTION

Being the subject of an investigation, particularly one with possible disciplinary consequences, can be daunting and stressful for an employee, especially in circumstances where the employee concerned has been suspended from work or temporarily transferred to work in a different section or work place. For the employee who has not been suspended from work (eg who either remains in post or may have been given alternative duties) it can also be a difficult and stressful time.

Recognising the above, the role of Support Officer has been devised to provide support to employees under investigation. In cases where an employee has not been suspended from work, the substantive manager of the employee may be able to carry out the Support Officer role, ie keep the employee aware of progress with the investigation. However, this is likely to be the exception rather than the norm and thought must be given to what is the best arrangement in a particular case.

It can also be difficult for the employee who raised the issue being investigated, eg who may have submitted a Dignity at Work complaint. Therefore, it is good practice to decide whether or not (having regard to the circumstances of a particular case) it is also appropriate to identify a Support Officer to support other affected employees. In the case of an employee who has submitted a Dignity at Work complaint, for example, there is provision for such a person to be allowed time off from work if this is considered appropriate. In such an event it may also be considered appropriate to identify a Support Officer for the employee concerned.

As Support Officers are most commonly used where employees are suspended from work, the following guidance concentrates on this situation. However, the guidance illustrates the Support Officer role for application in other circumstances, as identified above.

THE ROLE

- At the time of suspension from work, the suspended employee is provided with the name and contact details of a nominated Support Officer, as part of the written confirmation of the suspension. The employee is also asked to confirm that the nominated Support Officer is acceptable to them as it is important the employee feels comfortable with the Support Officer.
- The Support Officer provides support to the suspended employee primarily (but not exclusively) during the investigation. This support does not include the provision of advice (or opinion) to the employee on the matter under investigation and/or assistance with the preparation of the employee's case.
- The Support Officer role is additional to the other support facilities available to suspended employees. These include free access to the Council's confidential Employee Support and Counselling Service and any support arrangements employees may arrange themselves; notably trade union support.

- The Support Officer maintains regular contact with the suspended employee to inform them of the progress of the investigation. To this end the Support Officer will be kept up to date with progress with the investigation.
- The Support Officer will look to make regular contact with the suspended employee and will maintain a record of the contact with the employee. [A Log of Progress Reports template](#) is available to the Support Officer for this purpose. The Support Officer role is, therefore, a pro-active role as opposed to a predominantly passive and reactive supporting role.
- The Support Officer will be an appropriate person, as identified by management and must not be connected to the investigation or the suspended employee.
- At any investigation interview, a suspended employee has the right to be accompanied by a Council work colleague or recognised trade union officer/representative.
- If the suspended employee is not in a trade union they may ask for the Support Officer to accompany them as an alternative to a Council work colleague, if this is preferred. However, in this capacity the Support Officer will act as “silent support” only, ie. they will not take part in the interview or ask questions on behalf of the employee, other than to seek clarification of any points as necessary. Additionally, it will be for the Support Officer to decide whether they wish to undertake this particular role as it is considered to be outside of the normal Support Officer role.
- If the Support Officer is either unwilling or unable to accompany the suspended employee, during any investigatory interview, the employee concerned can re-consider the choice of a Council work colleague to accompany them instead.
- Should the matter under investigation progress to a formal Disciplinary Hearing, the Support Officer will not be permitted to provide support to the employee concerned, at the hearing; even in a “silent” capacity. Only an employee’s recognised trade union officer/representative or Council work colleague will be allowed to provide support at such times. They will be allowed to ask questions during the hearing, address the hearing on the employee’s behalf and be given reasonable time to confer privately with the employee. However, they will not be allowed to answer questions on the employee’s behalf.

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