

CITY OF CARDIFF COUNCIL
LOCAL RESOLUTION PROTOCOL
STANDARDS AND ETHICS COMMITTEE
HEARINGS PANEL PROCEDURE

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The City of Cardiff Council has adopted a Local Resolution Protocol. The purpose of the Protocol is to enable minor “member on member” allegations of breaches of the Members’ Code of Conduct to be dealt with at a local level rather than being referred to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.
- 1.2. In accordance with the Protocol a Sub-Committee of the Standards and Ethics Committee has been formed to carry out hearings in relation to alleged breaches. This Sub-Committee is referred to in this document as the “**Hearings Panel**”.
- 1.3. This document sets out how matters may be referred to the Hearings Panel and the Procedure that the Panel shall adopt in relation to matters that are referred to it.
- 1.4. In this document references to the Monitoring Officer shall include references to their Deputy or other officer appointed for the purposes of the Protocol.

2. Stage 1 (Initiation of a Complaint)

- 2.1. Any Member who wishes to make a complaint under the Protocol should send their complaint in writing to the Monitoring Officer within three months of the event which has given rise to the complaint; or within three months of the substance of the complaint coming to the attention of the Member submitting the complaint.
- 2.2. The Monitoring Officer will advise the Complainant whether the complaint falls within the Protocol or whether the Complainant should consider referral to the Ombudsman.
- 2.3. If the Monitoring Officer determines that the complaint falls within the Protocol he/she will advise the Respondent of the complaint and will seek an informal resolution of the matter (although see paragraph 2.4 below). The parties should note that details of attempts to achieve an informal resolution may be referred to at any subsequent hearing by the Hearings Panel.
- 2.4. The complaint may be referred to a meeting of the Hearings Panel if:

- a. the Monitoring Officer is of the view that making informal attempts to mutually resolve the matter is inappropriate; or
- b. having made attempts to mutually resolve the matter, the Complainant asks the Monitoring Officer to refer the matter to the Hearings Panel.

2.5. In such cases the Monitoring Officer will make arrangements to convene a meeting of the Hearings Panel and to refer that matter to it.

2.6. The Monitoring Officer may choose not to deal with the complaint personally at Stage 1 in order to be able to advise the Hearings Panel under Stage 2, in which case the Deputy Monitoring Officer or other officer nominated for the purpose will provide advice to the parties under Stage 1 and seek informal resolution.

Alternatively if the Monitoring Officer deals with the complaint at Stage 1 the Deputy Monitoring Officer or other officer nominated for the purpose will advise the Hearings Panel at Stage 2.

3. Stage 2 (Referral to the Hearings Panel)

The steps required in paragraphs 3.1 and 3.2 are compulsory.

3.1. The Complainant will provide the Monitoring Officer with written details of their complaint to include:

- i a written account of the conduct that has given rise to the complaint;
- ii a list of any witnesses whom the Complainant wishes to call to appear before the Hearings Panel;
- iii a list and copies of any documents that the Complainant wishes to draw to the attention of the Hearings Panel; and
- iv details of the paragraphs of the Members' Code of Conduct that are alleged to have been breached.

3.2. The Monitoring Officer will give the Respondent a copy of the documents referred to in paragraph 3.1 above. The Respondent will give the Monitoring Officer written details of their response to the allegations to include:

- i written details of the Respondent's response to the facts as alleged by the Complainant;
- ii a list of any witnesses whom the Respondent wishes to call to appear before the Hearings Panel; and
- iii a list and copies of any documents that the Respondent wishes to draw to the attention of the Hearings Panel.

3.3. Prior to the hearing the Monitoring Officer will arrange for the documents referred to in paragraphs 3.1 and 3.2 to be made available

to the Panel Members, the Complainant, and the Respondent. If the Monitoring Officer believes it appropriate in the circumstances the Monitoring Officer will also provide a Report in relation to any investigations into or attempts to settle the complaint or any other matter that the Monitoring Officer believes to be relevant to the deliberations of the Hearing Panel.

- 3.4. If a matter involves cross allegations with two or more Members making allegations of breaches of the Code against each other, the Monitoring Officer (in consultation with the Chair) may convene one Hearing to deal with all such allegations simultaneously. In such circumstances the Monitoring Officer may amend the requirements of paragraphs 3.1 – 3.3 to ensure that a fair opportunity to present and respond to complaints is afforded to each Member prior to the Hearing.

4. Legal Advice and the Monitoring Officer's Role at Hearings

- 4.1. The Monitoring Officer, Deputy Monitoring Officer, or other officer nominated for the purpose shall be in attendance at hearings to advise the Hearings Panel.
- 4.2. If the Monitoring Officer has investigated a complaint, he/she may attend a hearing in his/her role as the person who has investigated the complaint and will not be present to provide legal advice to the Hearings Panel. In such cases, the Deputy Monitoring Officer or another of the Authority's lawyers will be present to advise the Hearings Panel.
- 4.3. The Hearings Panel may take legal advice from its advisor at any time before or during the hearing or while the outcome is being considered.

5. Attendance and Representation at Hearings

- 5.1. If Members who are party to the complaint do not wish to attend the hearing or fail to attend the hearing the hearing may proceed in their absence.
- 5.2. Members may be represented or accompanied during the hearing by another Member, or any other person if they so desire. However when making a decision on representation Members should bear in mind that Local Resolution is intended to provide a relatively informal forum to resolve relatively minor complaints.
- 5.3. Members are responsible for meeting their own costs of any representation.

6. Composition and Decisions of the Hearings Panel

- 6.1. The Hearings Panel shall be composed of three independent members of the Standards and Ethics Committee. Alternatively the Standards and Ethics Committee may also resolve to co-opt suitably experienced independent persons to serve as members on the Hearings Panel.
- 6.2. The Hearings Panel shall appoint one of their number to serve as Chair for each hearing.
- 6.3. Except for decisions that are expressed in this Procedure to be taken by the Chair, any decision of the Hearings Panel shall be made on the basis of a simple majority vote.

7. General Powers of the Hearings Panel in relation to this Procedure

- 7.1. The Chair may agree to vary this procedure in any particular instance where he/she is of the opinion that such a variation is necessary in the interests of fairness. The Chair may also vary this procedure in the interests of ensuring an efficient hearing (provided that such variation does not have any detrimental impact on the fairness of the proceedings).
- 7.2. Panel members may ask any questions they wish to anyone taking part in the Hearing.
- 7.3. The Panel may also seek the attendance of a particular person or the production of specific documentation where they are of the view it would assist their deliberations.

8. Introductions

- 8.1. At the start of the hearing the Chair shall introduce each of the Members of the Hearings Panel and everyone involved in the hearing. The Chair shall then explain the procedure that the Panel is to follow in conducting the hearing and should obtain confirmation from everybody taking part in the hearing that they have understood the procedure.

9. Additional Information

- 9.1. If a party wishes to present additional information to the Panel that was not included in the written material that they produced for circulation prior to the hearing they should apply to the Panel for permission to do so before the commencement of the formal part of the hearing.
- 9.2. It will assist if the Legal Advisor and the other party have been provided with details of the late information as early as possible but at least two days before the commencement of the hearing. The Panel retains sole discretion whether to permit the late introduction of

information but shall always seek to ensure that neither party is prejudiced and all parties are able to present evidence which is relevant to the matters before the Panel.

10. Order of Procedure at the Hearing

- 10.1. After the introductions and any other preliminary matters the Complainant may address the Hearings Panel and may be questioned by members of the Panel.
- 10.2. Any witnesses that the Claimant wishes to call may address the Hearings Panel and may be questioned by members of the Panel.
- 10.3. The Respondent may address the Hearings Panel and may be questioned by members of the Panel.
- 10.4. Any witnesses that the Respondent wishes to call may address the Hearings Panel and may be questioned by members of the Panel.
- 10.5. The Complainant may address the Hearings Panel with any closing remarks.
- 10.6. The Respondent may address the Hearings Panel with any closing remarks.
- 10.7. The Hearings Panel will retire to deliberate in private.

11. The Hearings Panel's Deliberations

- 11.1. When it deliberates the Hearings Panel will make any necessary findings about the facts. It will then consider whether the Respondent failed to follow the Members' Code of Conduct.
- 11.2. If the Hearings Panel determines that the Respondent has not breached the Members' Code of Conduct it shall dismiss the complaint, but it may make general recommendations or remarks to the Members involved or to all Members.
- 11.3. If the Hearings Panel determines that the Respondent has failed to follow the Code it shall consider what sanction, if any, to impose. The sanctions available to the Panel under the Local Resolution Protocol are as follows:
 - (i) A statement that the complaint has substance but no further action is required
 - (ii) Referral of the Respondent for training on a particular topic.
 - (iii) A private or public written warning. If public, that warning shall be announced and circulated at the next meeting of Council.

(iv) Censure of the Respondent at the next meeting of Council.

(v) Referral to the Public Services Ombudsman for investigation if the complaint is considered to be deserving of more serious sanctions than the Hearings Panel has the power to impose.

In making a determination as to sanction the Hearings Panel may consider any factor that they consider to be relevant, including:

- i the severity of the offence;
- ii the level of remorse that the Respondent has shown and any apologies that they have made; and
- iii whether there is an indication of the behaviour being repetitious or whether the Respondent has previously been found to have committed similar offences.

11.4. Once a decision has been reached by the Hearings Panel the parties may re-convene and the Chair will announce the decision orally.

12. The Written Decision

12.1. The Panel will issue a written decision shortly after the end of the Hearing. The written decision shall be published on the Authority's website not later than 14 days after the date of the Hearing for a period of 21 days.