

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Employment & Appeals Committee **DATE:** 3rd April 2013
CONTACT OFFICER: Julie Bell and Surjit Nagra, HR Business Partner
(For all enquiries) (01753) 875611 / 5727
WARD(S): All

PART I For Information

Use of Suspensions - Update

1 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this is to provide the additional information that was requested by the members of the Employment and Appeals Committee at the last meeting on 24th January on how the suspension process is applied in disciplinary cases.

2 Recommendation(s) / Proposed Action

The Committee is requested to note the report.

3 Other Implications

(a) Financial

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

(b) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

There are no Human Rights and other Legal Implications.

(c) Equalities Impact Assessment

The suspension process is contained within the Disciplinary Policy and Procedure. The Policy had an Equality Impact Assessment undertaken when it was reviewed.

It is considered that there are no disproportionate impacts on any specific groups of staff. When an allegation of misconduct occurs which is deemed to be gross / serious misconduct then consideration is given to suspending the employee in relation to the nature of the allegation.

(d) Workforce

The provision of the suspension process promotes and supports the Council's wishes to protect the employee and the organisation in cases where there are allegations of gross / serious misconduct whilst a formal investigation is being undertaken.

4. **Conclusion**

Members of this committee were presented with data on suspensions for the period between January 2012 to January 2013 at the last meeting and after discussions it was felt that a longer time period covering 18 – 24 months should be presented/

This report covers the time period February 2011 to January 2013 (total of 24 months).

In the 24 months to Jan 13 a total of 14 employees have been suspended. Of the four cases in the period Feb 11 to Jan 12 the average length of suspension of these cases equated to 23 weeks. The shortest suspension period was 10 weeks and the longest was for 32.5 weeks. None of these suspensions were related to safeguarding concerns.

5 **Supporting Information**

5.1 **Background**

5.2 Suspension, or the temporary removal from work is used in the Council where allegations of serious misconduct are made against an employee, and it is considered that in the best interests of the investigation, or the employee, that the employee should be away from the workplace while the matter is being investigated. Further it will be used if one or more of the following are believed to apply if the employee continued to work normally:

- (a) Other employees may be persuaded or coerced into making false statements.
- (b) Other employees may feel constrained from co-operating fully with inquiries.
- (c) Further thefts or misdemeanours may be committed.
- (d) Evidence may be destroyed or tampered with.
- (e) It will not be possible to conduct a full and fair investigation.

5.3 Suspensions are used in cases where allegations which, if proven, will constitute serious misconduct and potentially lead to dismissal. It should be noted that employees can be dismissed for a first offence (if proven as gross misconduct) and a failure to suspend may imply (e.g. to an Employment Tribunal) that the alleged offence had not been treated with sufficient seriousness in its early stages, making the penalty unreasonable and unfair.

5.4 At Slough where an incident has occurred or an allegation has been made a preliminary investigation is undertaken. This preliminary investigation is used to identify whether a formal investigation is required. If this is required then suspension is considered using the above mentioned factors..

5.5 During the discussions of whether to suspend an employee or not, managers are also required to see whether there is a viable alternative to the suspension e.g. a temporary transfer to another location or post. However, this will be depend on the seriousness and nature of the incident. A decision to suspend must be approved by a Strategic Director or their nominated deputy.

- 5.6 A suspension from work is therefore a precautionary measure (or neutral act) and does not imply guilt. For this reason employees are suspended on full pay inclusive of contractual allowances. The only occasion where this may not be the case is where an employee has refused suitable alternative employment within the Council as a viable alternative.
- 5.7 Employees are informed in writing of the reasons for suspension and the nature of the allegations. It is agreed with the employee what will be communicated to the employee's colleagues regarding the reason for the absence from the workplace.
- 5.8 A Contact Officer is nominated who will undertake contact with the suspended employee during the period of suspension. . This is a neutral role and the Contact Officer may be asked to pass on information regarding the progress of the investigation, as well as any update on team or organisational changes.
- 5.9 All suspensions are regularly reviewed, and if they need to continue beyond the period of the investigation, the employee is informed.
- 5.10 The length of any suspensions is dependent on the nature of the allegations and the complexity of the investigation required. Suspensions should be for the minimum period necessary and are kept under review for this reason. In cases where the police are also involved their investigation has primacy and this can lead to an extended period of suspension, whilst the criminal proceedings are concluded. In some cases investigation into Safeguarding allegations will also be carried out by external agencies.

6 Background Papers

None.