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Model hearing procedures for the standards committee

The model hearing procedures below aim to give standards committees a consistent approach to determining matters locally. These procedures are not compulsory, but authorities should make sure that any procedures they do use are consistent with the principles in this guidance.

Standards committees need to have an efficient and effective hearing process. This will help committees deal with all the issues that need to be resolved in a way that is fair to the member. It will also reduce the prospects of any successful appeal.

The model procedure below is intended to give standards committees a consistent approach to determining matters locally.

The model procedures are not compulsory. However, authorities should make sure that any procedures they use are consistent with the principles in this guidance.

Interpretation

- 1) 'Subject member' means the member of the authority who is the subject of the allegation being considered by the standards committee, unless stated otherwise. It also includes the member's nominated representative.
- 2) 'Investigator' means the monitoring officer or ethical standards officer and includes their nominated representative.

- 3) 'Committee' also refers to a sub-committee.

- 4) 'Legal adviser' means the officer responsible for providing legal advice to the standards committee. This may be the monitoring officer, another legally qualified officer of the authority, or someone appointed for this purpose from outside the authority.

Representation

- 5) The subject member may be represented or accompanied during the meeting by a solicitor, counsel or, with the permission of the committee, another person.

Legal advice

- 6) The committee may take legal advice, in private if necessary, from its legal adviser at any time during the hearing or while they are considering the outcome. The substance of any legal advice given to the committee should be shared with the subject member and the investigator if they are present.

Setting the scene

- 7) After all the members and everyone involved have been formally introduced, the chair should explain how the committee is going to run the hearing.

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Preliminary procedural issues

- 8) The committee should then resolve any issues or disagreements about how the hearing should continue, which have not been resolved during the pre-hearing process.

Making findings of fact

- 9) After dealing with any preliminary issues, the committee should then move on to consider whether there are any significant disagreements about the facts contained in the investigator's report.

- 10) If there is no disagreement about the facts, the committee can move on to the next stage of the hearing.

- 11) If there is a disagreement, the investigator, if present, should be invited to make any necessary representations to support the relevant findings of fact in the report. With the committee's permission, the investigator may call any necessary supporting witnesses to give evidence. The committee may give the subject member an opportunity to challenge any evidence put forward by any witness called by the investigator.

- 12) The subject member should then have the opportunity to make representations to support their version of the facts and, with the committee's permission, to call any necessary witnesses to give evidence.

- 13) At any time, the committee may question any of the people involved or any witnesses, and may allow the investigator to challenge any evidence put forward by witnesses called by the member.

- 14) If the subject member disagrees with most of the facts, it may make sense for the investigator to start by making representations on all the relevant facts, instead of discussing each fact individually.

- 15) If the subject member disagrees with any relevant fact in the investigator's report, without having given prior notice of the disagreement, they must give good reasons for not mentioning it before the hearing. If the investigator is not present, the committee will consider whether it would be in the public interest to continue in their absence.

After considering the member's explanation for not raising the issue at an earlier stage, the committee may then:

- continue with the hearing, relying on the information in the investigator's report
- allow the subject member to make representations about the issue, and invite the investigator to respond and call any witnesses, as necessary

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- postpone the hearing to arrange for appropriate witnesses to be present, or for the investigator to be present if they are not already

- 16) The committee will usually move to another room to consider the representations and evidence in private.
- 17) On their return, the chair will announce the committee's findings of fact.

Did the subject member fail to follow the Code of Conduct?

- 18) The committee then needs to consider whether, based on the facts it has found, the subject member has failed to follow the Code.
- 19) The subject member should be invited to give relevant reasons why the committee should decide that they have not failed to follow the Code.
- 20) The committee should then consider any verbal or written representations from the investigator.
- 21) The committee may, at any time, question anyone involved on any point they raise on their representations.
- 22) The subject member should be invited to make any final relevant points.
- 23) The committee will then move to another room to consider the representations.

- 24) On their return, the chair will announce the committee's decision as to whether the subject member has failed to follow the Code.

If the subject member has not failed to follow the Code of Conduct

- 25) If the committee decides that the subject member has not failed to follow the Code, the committee can move on to consider whether it should make any recommendations to the authority.

If the subject member has failed to follow the Code of Conduct

- 26) If the committee decides that the subject member has failed to follow the Code, it will consider any verbal or written representations from the investigator and the subject member as to:
- whether the committee should apply a sanction
 - what form any sanction should take
- 27) The committee may question the investigator and member, and take legal advice, to make sure they have the information they need in order to make an informed decision.
- 28) The committee will then deliberate in private to consider whether to impose a sanction on the subject member and, if so, what sanction it should be.

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- 29) On their return, the chair will announce the committee's decision.

Recommendations to the authority

- 30) After considering any verbal or written representations from the investigator, the committee will consider whether it should make any recommendations to the authority, with a view to promoting high standards of conduct among members.

The written decision

The committee will announce its decision on the day and provide a short written decision on that day. It will also need to issue a full written decision shortly after the end of the hearing. It is good practice to prepare the full written decision in draft on the day of the hearing, before people's memories fade.