

PEOPLE AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Rules and Regulations Guidance and Procedures

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Working on behalf of



Northumberland
County Council

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2	March 2026	Updated to reflect changes to Whistleblowing legislation – Sexual Harassment becomes a protected disclosure from 6 th April 2026. This means that workers who raise concerns that sexual harassment has occurred, is occurring, or is likely to occur are likely to have made a protected disclosure for the purposes of whistleblowing law.

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1. Code of Conduct

1.1 Operational Summary

All colleagues must be clear about the standards of conduct which are expected of them whilst employed by Advance Northumberland.

These procedures provide a guide to all colleagues on what Advance Northumberland considers appropriate in relation to conduct. The procedures also embrace the seven principles of public life which were drawn up by the Nolan Committee and endorsed by Parliament.

The principles of public life apply to anyone who works as a public officeholder. This includes all those who are elected or appointed to public office, nationally and locally, and all people appointed to work in the civil service, local government, the police, courts and probation services, and in the health, education, social and care services.

Whilst we are an arms-length organisation, owned by Northumberland County Council, and our colleagues are not “public officeholders”, we believe these principles should still apply to Advance Northumberland colleagues, as far as reasonably practicable, acknowledging the specific and separate nature of being a private limited company.

1.2 The Seven Principles of Public Life

Selflessness - Acting solely in terms of the public interest.

Integrity - Avoiding placing yourself under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence you in your work. You should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for yourself, your family, or your friends. You must declare and resolve any interests and relationships as detailed in the Code of Conduct.

Objectivity - Act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.

Accountability - Be accountable to the public for your decisions and actions and submit yourself to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

Openness - Act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.

Honesty - Act with honesty and be truthful.

Leadership - Exhibit these principles in your own behaviour. Actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

1.3 What it means for our colleagues

Managers / Supervisors – are responsible for ensuring adequate dissemination and implementation of the procedures.

All colleagues – are responsible for reading and adhering to the procedures.

2. Scope

2.1 This Code applies to all colleagues of the Company and others working within it regardless of the basis of the employment including:-

- secondments (both to and from the Company),
- temporary assignments (both to and from the Company), Apprentices, Work Placements and Trainees,
- full-time, part-time, casual, seasonal colleagues and volunteers
- colleagues acting as members of companies or voluntary organisations,

2.2 Executive Directors, should this procedure be applied, would be referred to the Chairman of the Board

2.3 The Code also extends to additional or dual employment that has been secured as a result of working for Advance Northumberland.

2.4 Inevitably some of the issues covered by the Code will affect senior, managerial and professional colleagues more than it will others - but the basic principles apply to everyone.

3. Standards

3.1 General Principles

As an arms-length organisation, owned by Northumberland County Council, the public is entitled to expect the highest standards of conduct from all colleagues, whilst acknowledging the specific and separate nature of being a private limited company. The role of our colleagues is to serve the Company in providing advice, implementing its policies, and delivering services to the local community. In performing their duties, they must act with integrity, honesty, impartiality and objectivity.

3.2 Accountability

All colleagues are accountable to and owe a duty to the Company. They must act in accordance with the principles set out in this Code, recognising the duty of all colleagues to discharge their role reasonably and according to the law.

3.3 Political Neutrality

All colleagues must follow every lawfully expressed policy and procedure of the Company and must not allow their own personal or political opinions to interfere with their work.

3.4 Mutual Respect

Mutual respect between colleagues and customers is essential to a successful organisation and working relationships should be kept on a professional basis.

All colleagues should deal with other colleagues, customers and business contacts in an efficient and sympathetic way and without bias.

3.5 Dignity at Work

All colleagues must comply with policies and procedures relating to equality and diversity issues, as agreed by the Company, in addition to the requirements of the law.

3.6 Stewardship

All colleagues must ensure that they use Company funds entrusted to them in a responsible and lawful manner, and must not utilise property, vehicles or other facilities of the company for personal use unless expressly authorised to do so.

3.7 Personal Interests

Whilst colleagues' private lives are their own concern, they must not allow their private interests to conflict with their employment. They must not misuse their position or information acquired in the course of their employment to further their private interests, or the interests of others. In particular, they must comply with:

- (1) the Company's rules on the registration and declaration of financial and non - financial interests,
- (2) the Company's procedure on the declaration of hospitality or gifts offered to or received by colleagues, from any person or organisation doing or seeking to do business or otherwise benefiting or seeking to benefit from a relationship with the company. Colleagues must not accept benefits from a third party unless authorised to do so by the Chief Executive Officer, in accordance with our Gifts and Hospitality Policy and Procedures.

3.8 Whistleblowing

In the event that a colleague becomes aware of activities which they believe to be illegal, improper, unethical or otherwise inconsistent with this Code, they should report the matter. This should be done in accordance with the colleague's rights under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, and with the Company's confidential reporting procedure, or any other procedure designed for this purpose as outlined within the Company's Whistleblowing Procedures.

The Company also has an independent confidential service where colleagues can raise concerns. The hotline does not replace the internal reporting procedures but is used alongside them to provide an alternative for any colleague who, for a number of reasons, may not wish to use the internal options. All reports made will be strictly confidential and callers can remain anonymous if they wish to do so.

Reports can be made by calling Safecall free of charge, 24 hours a day, by telephone on 0800 9151571 or on the website – www.safecall.co.uk/report

3.9 Treatment of Information

Openness in the dissemination of information and decision making should be the norm in the Company. However, certain information may be confidential or sensitive and therefore not appropriate for a wide audience. Where confidentiality is necessary to protect the privacy or other rights of individuals or bodies, information should not be released to anyone other than a board member, colleague or other person who is entitled to receive it or who needs to have access to it for the proper discharge of their functions. Nothing in this Code can be taken as overriding existing statutory or common law obligations to keep certain information confidential, or to divulge certain information.

3.10 Appointment of Staff

All colleagues involved in the recruitment and appointment of team members must ensure that appointments are made on the basis of merit. In order to avoid any possible accusation of bias, such colleagues must not be involved in any appointment, or any other decisions relating to discipline, promotion or pay and conditions for any other colleague, or prospective colleague, to whom they are related, or with whom they have a close personal relationship outside work. Colleagues should notify their line manager if they are aware of an application from such an individual at the earliest opportunity so as to avoid embarrassment.

4 Guidance on Standards

4.1 Loyalty

It is a fundamental implied term of Advance Northumberland contracts of employment that colleagues are loyal to the Company.

Generally speaking, colleagues must not actively criticise or challenge the policies, procedures or decisions of the Company or its managers in public. However, it is perfectly legitimate for you to use the methods of

protest and persuasion that any citizen can use such as letters of complaint, approaches to your local councillor, attendance at protest meetings or writing to the press. What you must not do is to use "inside information" which is not available to the public at large or to capitalise on your position in the Company if you make statements intended to be published to the public at large. Neither must you deliberately set out to publicly embarrass or undermine your managers, your Directorate or the Company.

4.2 Personal Behaviour

At all times, colleagues are ambassadors for the Company, and their behaviour should reflect that. Any behaviour that could be seen to bring the Company into disrepute could lead to disciplinary action being taken.

The consumption of alcohol or non-prescription drugs during the working day (including lunch breaks) or before commencing work is strictly prohibited as even small quantities have an adverse effect on work performance and the reputation of the Company. If anyone is suspected of being incapable of properly performing their official duties by reason of alcohol or drugs, they will be required to undergo Drugs and Alcohol testing. If a test is positive or non-negative, the individual will be suspended from work, pending the outcome of further laboratory tests. If the test proves positive, this could lead to disciplinary action, including dismissal, being taken. The Company has an Alcohol and Drugs Policy that has testing regimes including random, just cause and post-accident. We will offer support for any colleague who seeks help with issues relating to drugs and alcohol use.

All colleagues must observe the statutory smoking ban and adhere with the Company's Smoke free Workplace guidance. The guidance states clearly where smoking is banned and those who breach the rules may be liable to disciplinary action. All colleagues are expected to report incidents where the procedure is being breached.

The Company accepts that social networking and use of the internet for other ways of recording personal thoughts is commonplace, but colleagues have a duty to represent the Company at all times. This means that colleagues should not post photos, videos or comments online that could bring the Company into disrepute, either through referring to the Company, Northumberland County Council or its clients directly, or by making comments that could be deemed to harm the public's image of the people that we employ. Further information regarding the expected behaviour of colleagues when using social media is available in the Social Media Policy and procedures.

4.3 Personal Appearance

In appearance as well as behaviour, colleagues should regard themselves as an ambassador for the Company and dress in clothing that is appropriate for their duties. We have Dress for your Day guidance, which is available on the intranet.

Any colleague required to wear specific items of clothing, hairstyles or jewellery in accordance with their ethnic background or faith, will have this accommodated, providing this does not pose a hazard to the health and safety of any person or contravene any legitimate or reasonable requirement of the Company.

Colleagues who are required to wear PPE as part of their role are expected to do so at all times.

4.4 Equality Issues

The Company is committed to tackling discrimination, ensuring this is reflected in how it treats its colleagues and how it delivers services. We endeavour to actively promote and champion equality in the community. All colleagues are entitled to expect fair and reasonable treatment by their colleagues, managers and board members. If any colleague feels that they have been unfairly treated, discriminated against or harassed, they are entitled to make use of the Company's Grievance Procedure.

All of our team members are also entitled to be treated with respect by clients, customers and members of the public, and be supported in this by the Company. In the same way, we expect our team members to treat their colleagues and members of the public fairly and with respect. Not only is it a criminal offence to harass another person on any ground, it is also a disciplinary offence within Advance Northumberland. It is the responsibility of each colleague to read and abide by our Dignity at Work Procedures, undertake the mandatory training and to be familiar with their legal duties under the Equality Act 2010.

4.5 Health and Safety Issues

In line with legal and contractual obligations, all colleagues are required to cooperate and ensure compliance with Corporate and Group Health & Safety Policies and objectives. This includes adherence to all identified safe working procedures and risk assessments. All colleagues are actively encouraged to familiarise themselves with Health and Safety documentation, especially risk assessments, attend any training identified as part of their role and raise any health and safety concerns with, in the first instance, their line manager.

Colleagues who use their own vehicle on Company business are responsible for ensuring that they are properly licensed to drive and that the vehicle in question is properly maintained, taxed, insured and has a current MOT certificate (where appropriate). The insurance policy must cover drivers for the use of the vehicle in connection with their employment (business use). On a regular basis drivers will have to produce satisfactory evidence that they and any vehicle used complies with prevailing statutory requirements in relation to driving and vehicle licensing, taxation and certification. If an individual or the vehicle are unable to meet the statutory requirements, then colleagues must notify their line manager immediately and must not use the vehicle on Company business. Failure to comply with these provisions is a disciplinary matter.

4.6 Outside Commitments

An individual's off-duty hours are their own personal concern; however, colleagues should not put themselves in a position where their duty and their private interests conflict. As a general rule, the Company will not attempt to preclude individuals from undertaking additional employment, but any such employment must not, in the view of the Company, conflict with or react detrimentally to the Company's interests, or in any way weaken public confidence in the conduct of the Company's business.

No secondary employment will be allowed if it results in a breach of the Working Time Regulations. If you are in any doubt about this you should seek advice from your Head of Department/Director or the People Team.

You are required to devote your whole-time service to the work of the Company and not engage in any other business or take up any other additional appointment (paid or unpaid) without the express consent of the Company. Colleagues should check with their manager to ensure that any other employment they propose to undertake does not conflict with their employment with the Company and/or with the provisions of the Working Time Regulations which are explained in the Company's Working Time Procedures. This provision applies to part-time and full-time employees.

If individuals engage in any paid or unpaid secondary employment or business, they must not use or mention their employment with the Company, to gain business or trade for that secondary employment.

Colleagues must not engage in any secondary employment or business on Company premises at any time. To do so could be interpreted as gaining a pecuniary advantage by way of your employment and that is illegal.

Colleagues engaged in secondary employment must not park any vehicle on Company property if it can be identified as being a vehicle used for that employment or if it contains any visible materials relating to that

secondary employment. If the vehicle otherwise satisfies the foregoing conditions it must also be suitable and available for use in your official capacity if you are required to use a vehicle in your employment with the Company.

Colleagues must not store any items connected with any secondary employment or any personal items (except those which are used in connection with your official duties) on Company property.

4.7 Intellectual Property

All creative designs, writings and drawings produced by individuals in the course of their duties are the property of the Company.

All inventions made by colleagues remain the property of the Company if made during the course of normal duties. Normal duties are those described in an individual's terms of employment, role profile and those arising from an instruction from a manager or other authorised representative of the Company.

This means that colleagues are not free to disclose, publish or otherwise use the work they produce for the Company for personal gain or benefit unless they have express, prior approval from their Head of Department/Director.

Fees for giving lectures or writing articles may only be retained by colleagues where these activities are not integral to their employment or position with the Company and they are conducted in the individual's own time.

4.8 Personal Interests

All colleagues must declare any financial and/or non-financial interests which could conflict with the Company's interests. This information is collected on commencement of employment and then annually via the People Team, using the "DECLARATION OF INTERESTS AND MEMBERSHIPS" form on Cezanne.

The information supplied above will not affect a person's position in the Company. The information will normally be made available only to the People Team. However, where a relevant complaint or query is made, the Executive Director of Governance and Sustainability will also have access to the information so that a proper response can be made to the complaint or query.

4.9 Use of Company Property and Information

The general rule is that colleagues must only use Company property for work purposes and the paragraphs below set out this requirement in more detail.

Colleagues who are involved in the tendering process or dealing with contractors should be clear on the separation of client and contractor roles within the Company. Members of the Senior Leadership Team with both client and contractor responsibility, must be aware of the need for accountability and openness.

All colleagues must exercise fairness and impartiality when dealing with all customers, suppliers, other contractors and sub-contractors. Colleagues with any direct or indirect interest in the outcome of a tender must play no part in the selection of tenderers, contractors or subcontractors and such interests should be declared to your Head of Department/Director.

Team members who are privy to confidential information on tenders or costs for either internal or external contractors, must not disclose that information to any unauthorised party or organisation.

Colleagues should ensure that no special favour is shown to current or recent former colleagues or their partners, close relatives or associates in awarding contracts to businesses run by them or employing them in a senior or relevant managerial capacity.

4.10 Bribery Act 2010

Colleagues are warned that it is a serious criminal offence corruptly to receive or give any gift, loan, fee, reward or advantage for doing or not doing anything, or showing favour or disfavour to any person in their official capacity. If an allegation is made, the law is such that the onus is on individuals to demonstrate that any such rewards have not been corruptly obtained.

Any offers of a bribe must be reported immediately to the Executive Director of Governance and Sustainability.

There are several offences under the Bribery Act 2010 including:

- Bribing - where a person offers, promises or gives a financial or other advantage to another person, with the intention of inducing them to perform improperly a relevant function or activity, or to reward a person for such improper performance.
- Receiving a bribe - Where a person requests, agrees to receive or accepts a financial or other advantage with the intention that, in consequence, a relevant function or activity should be performed improperly by themselves or another. It does not matter whether the advantage is direct or through a third party, or whether the benefit is for that person or another.
- Bribing a foreign official - Where a person with the intention of obtaining or retaining business, or an advantage in the conduct of business, bribes a foreign public official with the intention of influencing them in their capacity.

The offences under the Act carry a maximum of 10 years imprisonment and/or an unlimited fine for an individual. You should read and abide by any advice provided by the Company in relation to its Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy. All colleagues are expected to complete the Anti-Bribery e-learning module.

4.11 Hospitality

Colleagues should refer to the Gifts, Hospitality and Entertainment Procedures for detailed guidance on receiving offers of hospitality. In general, all employees should discuss hospitality with their Line Manager and / or Head of Department before responding to consider what is appropriate. All colleagues should be particularly sensitive to timing which could affect the offer of, or acceptance of hospitality.

Colleagues should only accept hospitality if there is a genuine need to impart information or represent the Company. Offers to attend purely social or sporting functions should be accepted only when these are part of the life of the community and where the Company should be represented. In such cases, these must be properly authorised by the Head of Department / Director, or if you are the Director, by the Chief Executive Officer.

All offers should be declared using the electronic Declarations of Hospitality and Gifts Form, available to all colleagues via the intranet.

Declarations are needed for all offers, whether they are accepted or declined. When hospitality has to be declined those making the offer should be politely thanked for the offer, but courteously informed that Advance Northumberland colleagues must be seen to be acting impartially and with integrity at all times, and for business reasons the offer must be refused.

4.12 Gifts

Colleagues are not permitted to accept significant gifts from service users, customers or suppliers. The Company allows small items of insignificant value to be kept by employees (e.g., pens, diaries etc.), but in

general, gifts should be politely and tactfully refused, with an explanation for the refusal. Under no circumstances should gifts of cash or gift vouchers be accepted. If it is not possible to do this without causing unnecessary offence or embarrassment, colleagues should accept the gift but speak to their Line Manager, or Head of Department as soon as possible to discuss what will happen to the item. An electronic declaration is also required and should be made no later than the next working day following receipt of the gift. Additional information on gifts is available in the Gifts, Hospitality and Entertainment Policy and Procedures and all colleagues should be aware of the contents.

5.0 DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES

5.1 Introduction

The Disciplinary Procedure is designed to deal with instances of misconduct and to provide a framework within which managers can work with colleagues to maintain satisfactory standards of conduct and to encourage improvement where necessary.

We expect all colleagues to work within the Company's various rules and procedures that may be in place from time to time and to behave at all times in line with the Company's values and standards. Failure to do so may lead to disciplinary action being taken under this procedure.

Examples of situations in which it may be necessary to invoke the disciplinary procedures are where it is alleged an employee has:

- 5.1.1 failed to adhere to rules, policies and procedures.
- 5.1.2 failed to respond adequately to one or more informal warnings regarding conduct.
- 5.1.3 acted (or omitted to act) in a manner that is considered to warrant formal disciplinary action; or
- 5.1.4 committed an act of discrimination or harassment.

This procedure is not intended to be used to deal with instances of poor performance, genuine ill health, or redundancy.

All disciplinary matters will be dealt with fairly and we will ensure that steps are taken to establish the facts and to give employees the opportunity to respond before taking any formal action.

The procedures apply to all colleagues regardless of length of service. It does not apply to workers, agency workers or self-employed contractors.

All colleagues are responsible for familiarising themselves with this procedure to ensure they are aware of the standard of conduct expected by the Company.

This procedure does not form part of any employee's contract of employment, and it may be amended at any time. We may also vary this procedure, as appropriate in any case.

It is acknowledged that disciplinary action can be a stressful experience for the individual involved, and you are advised of support facilities available to you. Welfare support is available from both the Occupational Health Department or via the Cash plan 24-hour helpline.

5.2 Informal procedure

Most conduct issues will be minor and can often be resolved informally by means of a discussion between the individual and the line manager.

These discussions should be held in private and as soon as reasonably practicable whenever there is cause for concern. In some cases, an informal verbal warning may be given, which will not form part of your disciplinary records.

Colleagues will be made aware of the improvement which is expected and that continued failure to meet the required standards may result in disciplinary action. In some cases, the manager may record the conversation on a file note. This will then be kept on your personal file or on the People system – Cezanne.

Formal steps will be taken under this procedure if the matter is not resolved, or if the seriousness of the allegation is such that informal discussion is not appropriate. Managers are encouraged to seek advice from the People Team before commencing formal disciplinary action.

5.3 Confidentiality

Disciplinary matters will be dealt with sensitively and take into consideration the privacy of any individuals involved. All colleagues must treat as confidential any information communicated to them in connection with an investigation or disciplinary matter. Any failure to do so may lead to disciplinary action as a result.

Any individual found to have made electronic recordings of any meetings or discussions held under this procedure, without prior authorisation, will be subject to disciplinary action.

5.4 Roles and responsibilities

Where possible the following roles should be undertaken by the following personnel although in exceptional cases this will not always be feasible:

Role	Individual
Investigation	Line manager or nominated person working at a similar level
Disciplinary hearing	Senior Manager, Head of Department, Member of the Senior Leadership Team, Executive Director
Appeal	Chief Executive Officer, other Executive Director, Non-Executive Director of Advance Northumberland

5.5 Investigations

The purpose of an investigation is to establish the facts relating to any disciplinary allegations against an individual, before deciding whether to proceed with a disciplinary meeting. The amount of investigation required will depend on the nature of the allegations and will vary from case to case. It may involve interviewing and taking statements from individuals and any witnesses, and/or reviewing relevant documents. No decision on disciplinary action will be taken until after a disciplinary meeting has been held.

The Company may hold an investigatory meeting with any individual, at which there is no right to representation, to gather further information prior to any disciplinary meeting.

All colleagues are expected to co-operate fully and promptly in any investigation. This will include informing us of the names of any relevant witnesses, disclosing any relevant documents to us and attending investigative interviews if required.

Once the investigation has been completed a report will be prepared with a recommendation as to whether formal disciplinary action should be considered. This report will be referred to a manager who will decide, with the support of the People team, whether to invite the individual to a formal disciplinary hearing.

5.6 Suspension

In some circumstances it may be necessary to suspend an individual from work. For example, if it is considered remaining in work could impede the investigation or poses a risk of further instances of

misconduct. The suspension will be for no longer than is necessary to investigate any allegations of misconduct, or so long as is otherwise reasonable while any disciplinary procedure is outstanding. Managers are encouraged to seek advice from the People Team before suspending an individual. We will confirm the arrangements of any suspension in writing. While suspended colleagues must not visit our premises or contact any of our clients, customers, suppliers, contractors or other colleagues, unless they have been authorised to do so by their line manager, or someone more senior in the Company. During a period of suspension, colleagues are expected to remain contactable and must be available to attend any investigatory or disciplinary hearings during their normal working hours.

Suspension of this kind is not a disciplinary penalty and does not imply that any decision has already been made about the allegations. Colleagues will continue to receive their full basic salary and benefits during the period of suspension.

5.7 Notification of a disciplinary meeting

Following any investigation, if we consider there are grounds for disciplinary action, colleagues will be required to attend a disciplinary meeting. We will inform the individual in writing of the allegations against them, the basis for those allegations, and what the likely range of consequences will be if we decide after the meeting that the allegations are true. We will also include the following where appropriate:

- 5.7.1 a copy of any relevant documents which will be used at the disciplinary meeting; and
- 5.7.2 a copy of any relevant witness statements, except where a witness's identity is to be kept confidential, in which case we will give as much information as possible while maintaining confidentiality.

We will give written notice of the date, time and place of the disciplinary meeting. The meeting will be held as soon as reasonably practicable, but individuals will be given a reasonable amount of time to prepare their case based on the information we have provided.

5.8 The right to be accompanied.

A colleague may bring a companion to any disciplinary meeting or appeal meeting under this procedure. Colleagues are entitled to be accompanied by either a trade union representative, trade union official or a work colleague. The colleague must inform the Company who their chosen companion is, in good time before the meeting.

If a companion is unavailable at the time a meeting is scheduled and will not be available for more than five working days afterwards, we may ask for a different companion to be chosen.

5.9 Procedure at disciplinary meetings

If a colleague or their companion cannot attend the meeting, we should be informed immediately. Colleagues must make every effort to attend the meeting, and failure to attend without good reason may be treated as misconduct in itself. If an individual fails to attend without good reason or are persistently unable to do so we may have to take a decision based on the available evidence.

At the disciplinary meeting we will go through the allegations and the evidence that has been gathered. Colleagues will be able to respond to those allegations and present any evidence of their own. A companion may make representations to us and ask questions but must not answer questions on behalf of the individual.

It will usually not be appropriate to call witnesses at a disciplinary hearing. In exceptional cases if it is considered necessary, advance notice must be given of the identity of the witness.

We may adjourn the disciplinary meeting if we need to carry out any further investigations such as re

interviewing witnesses in the light of any new points that have been raised at the meeting.

We will inform the individual in writing of our decision and our reasons for it following the disciplinary meeting. A decision will be based on "the balance of probabilities" and not "beyond reasonable doubt".

5.10 Misconduct

The following are examples of matters that will normally be regarded as misconduct and may result in the issue of a first written warning or final written warning for a first offence:

- Minor breaches of our policies or your contract of employment.
- Minor damage to, or unauthorised use of, our property.
- Poor timekeeping.
- Time wasting.
- Excessive use of our telephones, or your own telephone during work time, for personal calls.
- Excessive personal e-mail or internet usage.

This list is intended as a guide and is not exhaustive.

5.11 Gross misconduct

Gross misconduct is a serious breach of contract and includes misconduct which, in our opinion, is likely to prejudice our business or reputation or irreparably damage the working relationship and trust between us. Gross misconduct may result in dismissal without notice or pay in lieu of notice.

The following are examples of matters that are normally regarded as gross misconduct:

- Theft, or unauthorised removal of our property or the property of a colleague, contractor, customer, or member of the public.
- Fraud, forgery, or other dishonesty, including fabrication of expense claims and time sheets.
- Actual or threatened violence, or behaviour which provokes violence.
- Being absent without any explanation of your whereabouts (AWOL).
- Bullying, including through social media and electronic communications.
- Deliberate damage to our buildings, fittings, property or equipment, or the property of a colleague, contractor, customer, or member of the public.
- Serious misuse of our property or name.
- Deliberately accessing internet sites containing pornographic, offensive, or obscene material.
- Serious insubordination or repeated or serious failure to obey instructions.

- Discrimination, harassment, or victimisation.
- Bringing the organisation into serious disrepute.
- Being under the influence of alcohol, illegal drugs or other substances during working hours.
- Failure to participate in drugs and alcohol testing.
- Smoking on Company premises.
- Causing loss, damage or injury through serious negligence.
- Serious or repeated breach of health and safety rules or serious misuse of safety equipment. Including failure to wear correct PPE.
- Unauthorised use or disclosure of confidential information or failure to ensure that confidential information in your possession is kept secure.
- Accepting or offering a bribe or other secret payment.
- Conviction for a criminal offence that in our opinion may affect our reputation or our relationships with our staff, customers or the public, or otherwise affects your suitability to continue to work for us.
- Failure to disclose unspent criminal convictions.
- Possession, use, supply, or attempted supply of illegal drugs.
- Serious neglect of duties, or a serious or deliberate breach of your contract or operating procedures or statutory rules.
- Unauthorised use, processing, or disclosure of personal data.
- Making a covert recording, either video or audio, of any colleague or other third party on Company premises or during any work-related activity, without their prior consent or knowledge.
- Refusal to disclose any of the information required by your employment or any other information that may have a bearing on the performance of your duties.
- Giving false information as to qualifications or entitlement to work (including immigration status) to gain employment or other benefits.
- Working without valid entitlement to work in the UK.
- Serious misuse of our information technology systems (including misuse of developed or licensed software, use of unauthorised software and misuse of e-mail and the internet.
- Undertaking unauthorised paid or unpaid employment during your working hours.

- Failure to properly declare any potential conflicts of interest related to any of the Company's activities.

This list is intended as a guide and is not exhaustive.

5.12 Criminal offences

In the event that a colleague is suspected of a criminal offence connected with work, the matter will be reported to the police.

If the suspected offence involves irregularities related to the finances of the Company, the Chief Executive Officer shall also be informed by the Investigation Officer in accordance with Financial Regulations. It may be necessary to refer the case to Advance Northumberland Audit team prior to a disciplinary investigation being undertaken.

If appropriate, a disciplinary hearing will be held prior to the outcome of the police investigation and/or court proceedings, unless advice has been given not to by the police of the Crown Prosecution Service.

5.13 Driving

If driving is an essential part of a colleague's role within the Company, the colleague is responsible for ensuring they are fully licenced to drive. If at any time the colleague is unable to provide satisfactory evidence that complies with the statutory requirements in relation to driving, they must notify their line manager immediately. Failure to comply with these requirements is a serious disciplinary matter and may result in dismissal.

5.14 Resignation

Where a colleague resigns before a disciplinary matter is concluded, the Company reserves the right to conclude the process and if appropriate report the outcome to the relevant professional body.

5.15 Disciplinary sanctions

Once we have decided what the outcome of the disciplinary meeting is (i.e. whether or not the allegations are upheld and in what circumstances) we must then decide what sanction is appropriate in the circumstances. The usual sanctions for misconduct are set out below, although each case will be assessed on its own merits.

- **Stage 1 - First written warning:** will usually be appropriate for a first act of misconduct where there are no other live written warnings on your disciplinary record.
- **Stage 2 - Final written warning:** will usually be appropriate for misconduct where there is already an active written warning on your record; or misconduct that we consider sufficiently serious to warrant a final written warning even though there are no other active warnings on your record.
- **Stage 3 – Dismissal:** will usually only be appropriate for any misconduct during probationary period; a serious act of misconduct where there is an active written warning on record; further misconduct where there is an active final written warning on record; or any gross misconduct regardless of whether there are active warnings on record. In these circumstances the dismissal will be without notice or payment in lieu of notice.

5.16 Alternatives to dismissal.

In some cases, we may at our discretion consider alternatives to dismissal, which will usually be accompanied by a final written warning. Examples include:

- Demotion.
- Transfer to another department or job.
- A period of suspension without pay.

- Loss of seniority.
- Reduction in pay.
- Loss of future pay increment or bonus.
- Loss of overtime.

5.17 The effect of a warning

Written warnings will set out the nature of the misconduct, the change in behaviour required, the period for which the warning will remain active, and the likely consequences of further misconduct in that active period.

- A first written warning will usually remain active for 6 months
- A final written warning will usually remain active for 12 months.

However, where appropriate these time periods may be extended. A prolonged period of absence during the life of the warning may be a reason to extend.

After the active period, the warning will remain on your personnel file but will be disregarded in deciding the outcome of future disciplinary proceedings unless a further disciplinary issue arises before that date. In such a situation the warning will remain live until the conclusion of any further disciplinary process.

5.18 Appeals

If a colleague feels that disciplinary action taken against them is wrong or unjust they should appeal in writing, setting out full grounds of appeal, within 7 working days of the date on which they were informed of the decision.

If an individual is appealing against dismissal, the date on which dismissal takes effect will not be delayed pending the outcome of the appeal. However, if the appeal is successful, the employee will be reinstated with no loss of continuity of service or pay.

We will give written notice of the date, time and place of the appeal meeting.

The appeal meeting may be a complete re-hearing of the matter, or it may be a review of the fairness of the original decision in the light of your grounds of appeal, the procedure that was followed and any new information that may have come to light. This will be at our discretion depending on the circumstances of the case. In any event the appeal will be dealt with impartially.

Notes will be taken by a member of staff selected at our discretion.

We may adjourn the appeal meeting if we need to carry out any further investigations in the light of any new points that are raised.

Provided we have made reasonable attempts to arrange an in-person appeal meeting, we may decide to conduct the Appeal by way of written representation if appropriate.

Following the appeal meeting we may:

- confirm the original decision.
- revoke the original decision; or
- substitute a different penalty.

We will inform the individual in writing of our final decision as soon as possible following the appeal meeting. There

6.0 GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES

6.1 Introduction

The Grievance Procedure is designed to ensure that all Colleagues have access to a procedure to help deal with any grievances relating to their employment fairly and without unreasonable delay. We aim to investigate any formal grievance raised, hold a meeting to discuss it with the individual if required, inform them in writing of the outcome and give a right of appeal if they are not satisfied.

This procedure applies to all colleagues regardless of length of service.

This procedure does not form part of any colleague's contract of employment, and we may amend it at any time.

6.2 Using this procedure

Issues that could cause grievances may include:

- terms and conditions of employment.
- health and safety.
- work relations.
- bullying and harassment.
- new working practices.
- working environment.
- organisational change; and
- discrimination.

This Grievance Procedure should not be used to complain about dismissal or disciplinary action. If you are dissatisfied with any disciplinary action, you should submit an appeal under the Disciplinary Process and Procedure.

This procedure does not apply to grievances concerning two or more employees (collective grievances). These will be dealt with as appropriate to the facts of the case.

Written grievances will be placed on an individual's personnel file along with a record of any decisions taken and any notes or other documents compiled during the grievance process. These will be processed in accordance with our Data Protection Policy and Procedures.

6.3 Raising grievances informally

Most grievances can be resolved quickly and informally through discussion with the relevant line manager.

If an individual feels unable to speak to their manager, for example, because the complaint concerns the manager, then they should speak informally to a more senior manager. If this does not resolve the issue, they should follow the formal procedure below.

6.4 Formal written grievances

If a grievance cannot be resolved informally it should put it in writing and submitted to the line manager, indicating that it is a formal grievance. If the grievance concerns the line manager, it may be submitted to a

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more senior manager instead.

The written grievance should contain a brief description of the nature of the complaint, including any relevant facts, dates, and names of individuals involved. In some situations, we may ask for further information.

6.5 Investigations

It may be necessary for us to carry out an investigation into the grievance. The amount of any investigation required will depend on the nature of the allegations and will vary from case to case. It may involve interviewing and taking statements from any witnesses, and/or reviewing relevant documents.

Employees must co-operate fully and promptly in any investigation. This may include informing us of the names of any relevant witnesses, disclosing any relevant documents to us and attending interviews, as part of our investigation.

We may initiate an investigation before holding a grievance meeting where we consider this appropriate. In other cases, we may hold a grievance meeting before deciding what investigation (if any) to carry out.

6.6 Right to be accompanied

Colleagues may bring a companion to any grievance meeting or appeal meeting under this procedure. The companion may be either a trade union representative/official or a colleague. Colleagues must tell the person holding the grievance meeting who their chosen companion is, in good time before the meeting.

At the meeting, the companion may make representations to us and ask questions but should not answer questions on behalf of the employee. Individuals may talk privately with them at any time during the meeting.

If a chosen companion is unavailable at the time a meeting is scheduled and will not be available for more than five working days afterwards, we may ask that someone else is chosen.

6.7 Grievance meetings

We will arrange a grievance meeting, as soon as reasonably possible following receipt of a written grievance. The colleague and their companion (if any) should make every effort to attend grievance meetings. If the colleague or their companion cannot attend at the time specified, the colleague should inform us immediately and we will try, within reason, to agree an alternative time.

The purpose of a grievance meeting is to enable the colleague to explain their grievance and how they think it should be resolved, and to assist us to reach a decision based on the available evidence and the representations they have made.

After an initial grievance meeting, we may carry out further investigations and hold further grievance meetings as we consider appropriate. Such meetings will be arranged without unreasonable delay.

We will write, as soon as possible following the final grievance meeting, to inform the colleague of the outcome of the grievance and any further action that we intend to take to resolve the grievance. We will also remind individuals of their right of appeal. Where appropriate we may hold a meeting to give this information in person.

If the conclusion of the grievance investigation is that there may be grounds for disciplinary action against an individual, then the Disciplinary Procedures should be invoked and followed at that point.

6.8 Appeals

If the grievance has not been resolved to the satisfaction of the colleague, they may appeal in writing to the person stated in the grievance outcome letter, setting out their full grounds of appeal, within 5 days of the

date on which the decision was sent.

We will hold an appeal meeting as soon as reasonably practicable following receipt of a written appeal. This will be dealt with impartially by a manager who has not previously been involved in the case. Colleagues have a right to bring a companion to the meeting as set out above.

We will confirm our final decision in writing, as soon as reasonably practicable following the appeal hearing. This is the end of the procedure and there is no further right of appeal.

7. WHISTLEBLOWING

7.1 Procedural Aim

Advance Northumberland insists on honesty, integrity, inclusion, diversity, equity and fairness in all aspects of its business and expects the highest standards of professionalism and ethical conduct to be maintained in all its activities. The Company expects the same in its relationships with all those with whom it does business.

Advance Northumberland promotes a culture of openness and accountability.

The objectives of the Whistleblowing Procedure are as follows:

- To encourage colleagues to report suspected wrongdoing as soon as possible, with the knowledge that their concerns will be taken seriously and investigated as appropriate, and that their confidentiality will be protected wherever possible
- To provide colleagues with guidance on how to raise those concerns
- To reassure colleagues that they are able to raise genuine concerns made in the Public Interest, in good faith and without fear of reprisals, even if they turn out to be mistaken.

All workers have a contractual right and duty to raise genuine concerns they have with their employer about malpractice, financial impropriety, bribery or any other serious risks they consider to be in the public interest.

This procedure has been developed to ensure that the Company has a process for colleagues to raise any such concerns. It complies with the Public Interest Disclosures Act 1998 and good practice, which protects workers from being subjected to detriment by their employer because they have made a report.

7.2 Summary

This procedure gives an overview of Whistleblowing and public interest disclosure, a breakdown of responsibilities for colleagues and the support available to colleagues making such disclosures.

7.3 What it means for Colleagues

Directors, Heads of Service and Managers – are responsible for ensuring adequate dissemination and implementation of policies. They are also responsible for making service users aware of the existence of these procedures.

All Colleagues/Workers/Agency Staff – are responsible for reading the new/revised procedures to maintain current awareness of changes which impact on their roles. All workers should work to create a culture of openness and accountability.

7.4 Introduction

The Company welcomes suggestions from service users and colleagues about ways to ensure continuous development and improvement of services. There is an expectation that colleagues and others who deliver services on behalf of the Company will report any concerns about possible bad practice. This will usually be facilitated through normal management arrangements, however, where that is not possible, this procedure provides an avenue for reporting serious malpractice.

Colleagues are often the first to realise that there may be something seriously wrong within the Company. However, in some cases they may not express their concerns because they feel that speaking up would be disloyal. They may also fear harassment or victimisation. In these circumstances it may be easier to ignore the concern rather than report what may just be a suspicion of malpractice.

In line with that commitment the Company encourages colleagues, and others who it deals with, who have serious concerns about any aspect of the Company's work to come forward and voice those concerns. It is recognised that most cases will have to proceed on a confidential basis.

Reporting a concern ("Blowing the Whistle") can be done without fear of victimisation, subsequent discrimination or disadvantage. This procedure is intended to encourage and enable colleagues to raise serious concerns within the Company rather than overlooking a problem or reporting the matter outside of the Company.

The right to report a concern "blow the whistle" or speak up applies to all colleagues and those contractors working for the Company on its premises, for example, agency staff, builders, consultants etc. It also applies to suppliers and those providing services under a contract with the Company in their own premises.

These procedures are in addition to the Company's complaints procedures.

7.5 Purpose

The purpose of this procedure is to:

- encourage colleagues to feel confident in raising serious concerns and to question and act upon concerns about practice.
- provide avenues for colleagues to raise those concerns and receive feedback on any action taken.
- ensure that colleagues receive a response to their concerns and ensure that they are aware of how to pursue them if they are not satisfied.
- reassure colleagues that they will be protected from possible reprisals or victimisation if they have a reasonable belief that they have made a disclosure in the public interest;

7.6 Scope of the procedure

To encourage individuals to speak out, or to make a protected disclosure, then providing the person raising a concern meets the legal definition, there is protection afforded in law to anyone who does so.

A disclosure is within the scope of a protected disclosure if it indicates that the following may have occurred (please note that this is not an exhaustive list):-

- a criminal offence and / or activities;
- bribery, corruption or blackmail
- financial malpractice or irregularity
- improper use of authority
- failure to comply with any legal obligations or regulatory requirements;
- miscarriage of justice;
- there is a threat to an individual's health and safety;
- damage to the environment;
- covering up wrongdoing in respect of any of the above;
- conduct likely to damage the Company's reputation
- breaches of the Company's internal policies and procedures
- deliberate concealment regarding information about known malpractices (financial or otherwise)
- fraud or theft against the Company, its customers or its suppliers
- negligence
- sexual harassment

In addition, colleagues must also have a reasonable belief that the disclosure is in the public interest. This Procedure should not be used for complaints relating to a person's own personal circumstances, such as the way they have been treated at work. In those cases, the appropriate internal procedure should be used, for example the Grievance Procedure.

Any serious concerns that colleagues have, which are in the public interest, about any aspect of service provision or the conduct of officers of the Company or others acting on its behalf can be reported under the Whistleblowing Procedures.

This procedure does not replace the corporate complaints procedure which is concerned with addressing complaints about Company services.

7.7 Safeguards against harassment or victimisation

The Company is committed to good practice and high standards and wants to be supportive of colleagues and others covered by this procedure.

The Company recognises that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make; ultimately however they will be doing their duty to their employer and those for whom the company are providing a service.

The Company will not tolerate any harassment or victimisation of any kind. Harassment or bullying of a whistleblower constitutes a disciplinary offence and the Company will take appropriate action, including disciplinary action if necessary, to protect colleagues if they raise a concern.

Any investigation into allegations of potential malpractice will not influence or be influenced by other procedures such as investigations and hearings under the disciplinary, health and wellbeing, capability, redundancy or any other dismissal procedures that already affect a colleague or may affect them in the future.

7.8 Confidentiality

All concerns will be treated in confidence, and every effort will be made not to reveal the colleague's identity if they so wish. At the appropriate time, however, the colleague may need to come forward as a witness.

7.9 Anonymous Concerns' Reporting

This procedure encourages colleagues to put their name to their concern whenever possible. Concerns expressed anonymously are much more difficult to investigate thoroughly. It should be emphasised, however, that **wherever possible** confidentiality will be preserved.

In exercising this discretion, the factors to be taken into account would include: -

- the seriousness of the issues raised;
- the credibility of the concern; and
- the likelihood of confirming the allegation from attributable sources.

Whilst colleagues can remain anonymous if they choose, the Company does not encourage anonymous reporting. Proper investigation may be more difficult or impossible if further information from the person raising a concern cannot be obtained; it is also more difficult to establish whether any such allegations are credible and have been made in the public interest. People who are concerned about possible reprisals if their identity is revealed are assured that the Company will not tolerate any victimisation or detrimental treatment of anyone who raise a concern in good faith, in the Public Interest.

7.10 Untrue Allegations

If a colleague reports a concern in good faith, but it is not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against that individual. If, however, a colleague makes an allegation frivolously, maliciously or for personal gain, disciplinary action may be taken against them.

7.11 How to raise a concern

As a first step, colleagues should normally raise concerns with their immediate manager or a more senior manager within the Company.

Concerns can be raised verbally or in writing. Wherever possible, concerns should be made in writing. If the concern is raised verbally, a written note will be taken of the concerns raised.

In some cases, colleagues may feel unable, or it may not be appropriate, to raise concerns with their immediate manager due to the seriousness and sensitivity of the issues involved and who is suspected of the malpractice. In this case, the concern can be reported direct to a more senior manager within the Company, for example the:

- Chief Executive Officer
- Director of Governance and Sustainability
- Director of Finance
- Head of People and Organisational Development

The earlier colleagues express the concern the easier it is to act.

Advice or guidance on how to pursue matters of concern may be obtained from their line manager or the people named in the contact list at the end of this document.

Unless criminal actions are suspected, colleagues may invite their trade union representative or a work colleague to be present during any meetings or interviews in connection with the concerns raised.

7.12 Independent Whistleblowing Hotline - Safecall

Where the matter is more serious, or where a colleague feels that their concern has not been addressed, or where a colleague prefers not to raise the matter internally for any reason, they should utilise the independent confidential hotline. The company providing this service is Safecall.

Safecall provide an independent external reporting line where colleagues can raise their concerns about the Company and be assured, they will be fully addressed. Each call is treated in complete confidence by skilled call handlers who will summarise the content of the call and send it to the Monitoring Officer for dissemination as appropriate. Safecall will not disclose an individual's name to the Company if they wish to remain anonymous.

The Safecall service is available 24/7 365 days via the Freephone below:



Alternatively, Safecall can be contacted on 0800 915 1571 or via the web www.safecall.co.uk/report.

7.13 Investigation and outcome

Once a colleague has raised a concern, we will deal with it fairly and in an appropriate way. We will carry out an initial assessment to determine the scope of any investigation and will inform the individual of the outcome of that assessment. The person raising the concern may be required to provide further information.

Wherever possible the Company will aim to keep the individual informed of the progress of the investigation and its likely timescale. However, sometimes the need for confidentiality may prevent the Company giving specific details of the investigation or any disciplinary action taken as a result.

All persons involved in this process should treat any information about the investigation as confidential.

The Company will take steps to minimise any difficulties which colleagues may experience as a result of raising a concern. For instance, if the person raising the concern is required to give evidence in criminal or disciplinary proceedings, the Company will arrange for them to receive advice about the procedure, and they may also wish to contact Occupational Health for support or utilise the 24 hour helpline through Medicash.

7.14 The Responsible Officer

The Head of People and Organisational Development has overall responsibility for the maintenance of the procedure and the Monitoring Officer (Chief Executive Officer) for operation of this procedure.

7.15 How the matter can be taken further

This procedure is intended to provide colleagues with an avenue within the Company to raise concerns. The Company hopes those raising concerns will be satisfied with any action taken. If not, and if colleagues feel it is right to take the matter outside the Company, further possible contact points are given in the External Contact List at the end of this section.

If the matter is referred to an external body, colleagues should ensure that they do not disclose information which should properly remain confidential. Those persons raising a concern will need to confirm this with the person or organisation that they decide to contact.

7.16 Independent advice

If a colleague wants independent advice at any stage they can contact:

Protect (formerly known as Public Concern at Work)

Telephone: 020 3117 2520

www.protect-advice.org.uk

Protect is a registered charity which is the independent authority on public interest whistleblowing. Its lawyers can give free, confidential advice at any stage about raising a concern about serious wrongdoings or malpractice at work

7.17 Contact list

Internal

Advice or guidance about how to pursue matters of concern may be obtained from any of the people named below.

Steven Harrison	Chief Executive Officer	07736 626218
William Thompson	Director of Governance & Sustainability	07929 836782
Richard Mansel	Director of Finance	07701 258235
Pam Robertson	Head of People and Organisational Development	07494 279639

In addition, contact can be made with any member of the Advance Northumberland board of directors, who can be contacted via the NCC Monitoring Officer or the Company Secretary.

7.18 External

If colleagues have used the appropriate internal procedures and are not satisfied with any action taken in relation to their concerns and if they feel it is right to take the matter outside the Company, further possible contact points are given below. It is stressed that the list below is not exhaustive, and colleagues are free to contact any organisation which they feel will be able to deal properly with their concerns.

Action Fraud	Anti-Fraud & Corruption Hotline	0300 123 2040
External Auditor	Robson Laidler	0191 2818191
Northumbria Police		0300 123 2040
Professional Bodies:	CIPFA	0207 543 5600
	Royal Town Planning Institute	0370 774 9494
Regulatory Organisations:	Environment Agency	03708 506 506
	Health & Safety Executive	0300 0031647

8. DIGNITY AT WORK

8.1 Introduction

Advance Northumberland Limited which, for the avoidance of doubt, shall include any subsidiary company which forms part of the Group recognise that it is essential to provide equal opportunities to all persons without discrimination.

This procedure sets out the commitment of Advance Northumberland towards equality of opportunity in all aspects of employment, including recruitment and promotion, and provides guidance and encouragement to colleagues at all levels to act fairly and prevent discrimination. We aim to eliminate unlawful and unfair discrimination, bullying, harassment and victimisation in the workplace.

We value all of our colleagues and recognise the contribution they make to our business. We are committed to providing equality for all irrespective of:

- Age
- Disability
- Race
- Gender (including gender reassignment)
- Religion or belief
- Sexual orientation
- Pregnancy or maternity
- Marriage or Civil Partnership
- Association with any of the above

We will work to ensure that all our colleagues and clients, as well as those who apply or seek to apply to work with us will be treated fairly and will not be subjected to discrimination on any of these grounds, a combination of or because of any perception / association. We will make whatever reasonable adjustments are required to provide disabled people with a fair chance to access employment opportunities.

8.2 Our commitments

We will:

- Promote equality of opportunity for all
- Promote a productive and harmonious workplace where there is mutual respect.
- Not tolerate Harassment and / or bullying
- Prevent unlawful discrimination, direct and indirect and victimisation
- Comply with our legal obligations
- Take seriously and address any breaches of this procedure
- Ensure that no colleague is subject to any third-party harassment in the workplace
- Ensure colleagues have confidential avenues to report harassment

8.3 How we will implement this

The Chief Executive Officer has overall responsibility for the implementation of this procedure. On a day-to-day basis, this has been delegated to the Head of People & Organisation Development.

To implement this procedure, we will:

- Provide our colleagues with the necessary knowledge and skills to help ensure that the workplace is free from discrimination, bullying, harassment and victimisation
- Train all those who are involved in recruitment and selection, whether for vacant posts, promotions or training opportunities

- Regularly review our employment policies and procedures to ensure they do not unlawfully or unfairly discriminate
- Gather equality information on our workforce
- Make all necessary reasonable adjustments and consider options for flexible working
- Strive to have a diverse workforce that reflects the local community
- Inform suppliers of our dignity at work procedures and our expectation that they adhere to it
- Seek commitments from our suppliers that they are taking steps to promote equality and eliminate discrimination
- Make sure that there are sufficient resources in place to implement this procedure effectively
- Share and communicate best practice to colleagues, clients and customers

By implementing the above, we aim to have a holistic approach to ensure equality and diversity permeates throughout all aspects of the business.

8.4 Procedure and Review

Included in this procedure are the following areas:-

- Dignity at Work
- Prevention of Bullying, Harassment and Victimisation
- Personal Relationships at Work
- Equal Pay Statement

We will keep all these areas under review and update no less than annually. We will regularly assess the progress we are making toward achieving our equality commitments. We will take action when we identify areas where inequality or discrimination may exist.

8.5 Complaints of Discrimination

If a colleague believes they have suffered any form of discrimination, bullying, harassment or victimisation they can raise this matter through the grievance procedure. All complaints will be dealt with promptly and in accordance with the agreed procedures. Colleagues also have access to our confidential harassment reporting system via the intranet which goes directly to the People Team only.

Colleagues also have the right to make a complaint to an Employment Tribunal. It is advisable that you raise your complaint under our internal procedures first. For more information speak to the Head of People & Organisational Development. Further information can also be found at www.acas.org.uk

Anyone who makes a complaint of discrimination must not be victimised. We will make every effort to ensure victimisation does not occur and any complaints will be taken seriously and dealt with promptly.

8.6 Implementation

We will implement Dignity at Work across the business, with specific focus on:

- Prevention of Bullying, Harassment and Victimisation
- Personal Relationships at Work
- Equal Pay
- Recruitment and Selection
- Learning and Development
- Terms and Conditions of employment
- Equality and Diversity in our Employment Procedures

Recruitment and employment decisions will be made based on fair and objective criteria. Our selection procedures will be reviewed regularly to ensure that they are appropriate for achieving our objectives and eliminating unlawful

discrimination.

Learning and development opportunities will be made based on fair and objective criteria, with all colleagues having equal access to development opportunities.

To ensure that the Dignity at Work Procedure is effective, we will:

- Allocate responsibility for the implementation of the procedure to a Senior Manager, this is deemed to be the Head of People & Organisational Development.
- Make the procedure known to all colleagues and display it on the intranet.
- Consult with colleagues about the best way to make this procedure effective.
- Maintain a neutral working environment in which no colleague feels under threat or intimidated because of any of the protected characteristics.
- Ensure that the recruitment and selection procedures are consistent, provide equality of opportunity and are seen to be fair by all colleagues and job applicants. Selection will be based on the candidate's ability to do the job available.
- Ensure that opportunities for learning and development are widely available and accessible.
- Ensure effective communication that reaches all team members.
- Monitor emails / internet use where concerns are raised about appropriate usage.

8.7 Purpose

The purpose of this procedure is to:

- Ensure the Dignity and Respect at work of all colleagues, by respecting and valuing differences in the workforce and proactive handling of any conflict.
- Prevent acts of discrimination, exclusion, unfair treatment and other negative or demeaning behaviours.
- Demonstrate commitment to equal opportunities.
- Educate our team members in the development of positive behaviours through increased awareness of the unacceptability of any form of behaviour that breaches dignity at work.
- Provide an informal and formal mechanism for complaints; to bring forward cases for resolution in an effective and timely manner.
- Ensure we are open and constructive in our communications.
- Communicate the support mechanisms available to colleagues who feel they are subject to bullying, harassment or unfair treatment of any kind.

8.8 Roles and Responsibilities

8.8.1 The overall responsibility for the implementation of this policy rests with the Chief Executive Officer. The day to day, responsibility for implementation of the policy rests with the Head of People & Organisational Development, who will exercise this responsibility through line managers. The responsibility for compliance and for the positive attitude required to ensure success, is the responsibility of all colleagues within the organisation. All external persons connected with Advance Northumberland are encouraged to hold the same responsibility and commitment.

8.8.2 The Executive Leadership Team are responsible for:

- Ensuring all strategic, operational and development plans actively support and promote the aims and ethos of this procedure
- Monitoring and reviewing the implementation of the Dignity at Work Procedures.

8.8.3 The People Team will ensure:

- All new colleagues receive dignity at work information upon induction

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- All colleagues have access to dignity at work and related policies
- Provide statistical data to the ELT for monitoring, analysis and evaluation purposes
- Good equality practice in all aspects of employment
- Job adverts and role profiles do not have essential criteria that favour one group over another
- Colleagues have access to training & development for equality and diversity
- Each person has a redress against harassment, bullying and victimisation at work
- Colleagues are made aware that comments on social networking sites can impact on their employment.

8.8.4 All line managers are required to:

- Adhere to the expectations set out in the Dignity at Work Procedures
- Ensure team members comply with the Dignity at Work Procedures
- Ensure learning and development plans actively support and promote the aims and ethos of this procedure
- Report any incidents of harassment, bullying, prejudice or discrimination
- Behave with respect towards all colleagues, clients and customers within the Advance Northumberland community Undertake annual CPD on equality & diversity

8.8.5 All colleagues are required to:

- Behave with respect towards all members of our community
- Adhere to the expectations set out in Dignity at Work Procedures
- Report any incidents of harassment, bullying, prejudice or discrimination
- Undertake annual CPD on equality & diversity
- Be aware of the implications and use of social networking sites.

9 Prevention of Bullying, Harassment and Victimisation

9.1 Introduction

Advance Northumberland is committed to providing a work environment for its people which is free from embarrassment, intimidation, threats, discrimination or harassment. Harassment relating to a person's gender, transgender, ethnicity/race, sexual orientation, religion/belief, age, marital status or disability will not be tolerated under any circumstances and forms part of the individual contract of employment.

We recognise that bullying, harassment and victimisation can have the effect of humiliating, offending or demeaning the colleague against whom it is aimed.

We will do all that is reasonably possible to prevent bullying, harassment and victimisation occurring and will take all necessary steps to ensure this procedure is implemented effectively. This includes the prevention of any third-party harassment.

We consider that bullying, harassment and victimisation can amount to gross misconduct and such misconduct will be dealt with under the Advance Northumberland disciplinary procedures and may lead to summary dismissal. Less serious infringements may lead to a lesser sanction such as a warning.

All colleagues have a role to play in creating a work climate free from bullying, harassment and victimisation. Colleagues should be aware and sensitive towards bullying, harassment and victimisation at work, ensuring that standards of conduct for themselves and their colleagues do not cause offence.

We expect all managers to ensure that this policy and procedure is communicated to colleagues in the work areas for which they are responsible. Managers and supervisors will remind team members that they have a duty to always treat their colleagues with respect and dignity.

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Managers will treat all complaints in confidence. Any complaints of harassment should be made to the Head of People & Organisational Development. The matter will be dealt with in a discreet and confidential manner and appropriate action taken. Managers and colleagues can also use the harassment reporting system accessible via the intranet which is confidential and received by the People Team.

Examples of this kind of bullying, harassment and victimisation include, but are not limited to:

- Offensive and insensitive quips and jokes which are related to a person's disability, sexual orientation, race, religion/belief, age or ethnic origin;
- The deliberate exclusion and isolation of an individual;
- Threatening or insulting words or behaviour;
- The display of abusive writing or pictures.
- Having nick names or other words to describe colleagues

9.2 Harassment

Harassment primarily and generally consists of unwanted conduct, which may be of a sexual nature. Such conduct may include, but is not limited to:

- Unwanted physical conduct (intimate physical contact, sexual assault);
- Inappropriate, suggestive or uninvited comments; (comments on the way someone looks; questions about someone's sex life / age / religion etc.);
- Displays of sexual or sexually aggressive literature and pictures;
- Unwelcome propositions or repeated unwelcome invitations;
- Lewd comments or insensitive jokes.

9.3 Informal Resolution

Colleagues who are victims of bullying, harassment and/or victimisation are advised if possible /appropriate to explain clearly to their harasser that the behaviour is unacceptable to them; that it is offensive/makes them feel uncomfortable/interferes with their work (whichever is appropriate) and must stop. The People Team are available to guide and support colleagues at any time.

9.4 Formal Complaints Procedure

If informal resolution of the matter is unsuccessful or considered inappropriate in the circumstances, colleagues are advised to bring a formal complaint of bullying, harassment and/or victimisation to the Head of People & Organisational Development using the Grievance Procedure.

Any complaint will be investigated promptly, impartially and, so far as practicable, confidentially. The complainant will be asked to provide the following details:

- The nature of the bullying, harassment and/or victimisation
- The dates and times the bullying, harassment and/or victimisation occurred
- The name of the alleged perpetrator(s)
- The names of any witnesses
- Any action taken by the complaint to resolve the matter informally

In cases where serious bullying, harassment and/or victimisation is alleged action will be taken to separate the

complainant and the alleged perpetrator where possible. This may involve the suspension of one or both parties, with pay, until the complaint has been resolved.

The person dealing with the complaint will handle it with sensitivity and will carry out a thorough investigation as quickly as possible, always maintaining confidentiality, and respecting the rights of both the complainant and the alleged perpetrator. They will be totally independent from the allegation and will always be objective.

It is fully expected that all colleagues will act responsibly regarding the issue. A colleague who brings a complaint of sexual or racial harassment will not be victimised for having brought the complaint. However, false accusations can have a serious effect on innocent individuals. Therefore, should investigation show that a false accusation has been made, in bad faith, appropriate disciplinary action will follow.

9.5 Anonymous Allegations

The Company does not encourage the making of anonymous allegations. It does encourage colleagues to put their names to any allegations made. There may be certain circumstances where this may be considered. Please seek advice from the People Team if needed.

9.6 Differences between Management and Bullying/Harassment

There is a distinction between bullying and the exercise of managerial responsibility. Claims of bullying or harassment are sometimes made in response to managers trying to deal with performance or conduct issues. It is recommended that performance or conduct issues should be discussed and recorded as soon as they are identified together with the supporting remedial action and training. Managers must take action to address performance or conduct issues by the legitimate exercise of managerial responsibility and other appropriate policies.

Managers have a duty to manage and provide team members with accurate and honest feedback (which should be constructive). When dealing with performance or conduct issues, managers should look at all the potential reasons for the issues.

A manager may be perceived as a bully if they try to tackle poor performance or conduct issues, without identifying the reasons. The imposing of unreasonable standards or targets may put individuals under pressure as could using ridicule, public criticism, shouting, teasing or sarcasm.

Where a manager treats team members inconsistently, by treating individuals less favourably or taking action against someone because of protected characteristics this could be considered as bullying or harassment.

10 Personal Relationships at Work

10.1 Introduction

This procedure covers all colleagues of Advance Northumberland irrespective of gender or sexual orientation. It is intended to provide guidance in areas where personal relationships overlap with working relationships and to ensure that individual colleagues are not open to allegations of impropriety, bias, abuse of authority or conflict of interest.

We recognise the importance of preserving the integrity of professional relationships between colleagues and with consultants, contractors and suppliers. In order that business is conducted (and perceived to be conducted) in a professional and proper manner it is necessary to take account of, personal relationships, which overlap with professional ones.

In the context of this document, a personal relationship is defined as:

- A family relationship
- A business/commercial/financial relationship

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- A sexual/romantic relationship
- A relationship between members of an organisation not open to the public, with a commitment of allegiance (e.g. oaths), and which has secrecy about its rules, membership and conduct

10.2 Relationships with Clients / Service Users

Colleagues are prohibited from forming personal relationships with clients / customers and must not form relationships via social networking e.g. Facebook, Snapchat or any other similar sites. It is accepted that social media sites such as Linked In and X are designed to be professional networking sites that are of benefit to many colleagues within Advance. However, care should be taken in the content of any post, to ensure that they do not breach the sentiments of this policy.

10.3 Social Media

A relationship via social network sites such as Facebook, X, Linked In etc., that are open to the public must remain professional at all times.

10.4 Procedures

As soon as practicable, colleagues should declare to their Head of Department or the Head of People & Organisational Development any personal relationships with other team members or with a consultant, customer, contractor or supplier, which may give rise to a real or perceived conflict of interest, trust or breach of confidentiality. This also will be reviewed annually through the completion of a Declarations of Interest submission.

People who are in a line management or supervisory role should not be involved in:

- The recruitment, selection, or appointment of any applicant with whom they have a personal relationship.
- The appraisal, promotion, discipline or any other management activity or process involving a colleague with whom they have a personal relationship.
- The authorisation of any financial payments e.g. timesheets, expense claims, salary changes, allocation of external funding, for a team member with whom they have a personal relationship.

Additionally, colleagues in a personal relationship should not work together in any circumstance whereby a conflict of interest, breach of confidentiality or unfair advantage may be perceived to be gained, from the overlap of a personal and professional relationship. In any such circumstances, the relationship must be declared in confidence to the Head of Department / Head of People & Organisational Development.

Contracts to suppliers must be awarded on merit, by fair competition against other submissions and no special favour must be shown to businesses run by friends, partners, and relatives.

10.5 Declaration of Relationship

Colleagues who are uncertain about whether they should take action regarding a personal relationship, are invited to seek guidance in confidence from their Head of Department or from the People Team.

Where a personal relationship, as defined within this procedure, is not declared and results in an unfair advantage or disadvantage to either of the parties to the relationship, the matter will be considered seriously and may lead to disciplinary action.

10.6 Difficulties with the Personal Relationship

It is anticipated that when a personal relationship experiences difficulties, such as an argument or relationship breakdown, that both parties will conduct themselves at work in a professional manner and that the professional working relationship will not be affected. If the professional working relationship is not working, a meeting will be held with both parties to discuss a way forward. Both parties will need to be aware that harassment and bullying at work, whether because of a personal relationship or otherwise, will not be tolerated.

11.0 Equal Pay

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Advance Northumberland is committed to the principle of equality for all and aims to eliminate any sex bias in its pay systems.

We understand that equal pay between men and women is a legal right. It is in the interest of Advance Northumberland to ensure it has fair and just pay systems. We will operate pay systems which are transparent, based on objective criteria, free from bias and where colleagues receive equal pay for doing equal work or work of equal value.

To put this commitment to providing equal pay into practice we will:

- Examine existing and future pay practices for all colleagues to ensure that they comply with best practice
- Carry out regular monitoring of the impact of these practices and take appropriate remedial action
- Inform colleagues of how these practices work and how their pay is arrived at
- Respond to grievances and complaints on equal pay

Through the above we aim to avoid unfair discrimination in our pay and reward systems and reward fairly the skills, experience and potential of all our colleagues.

12.0 Recruitment and Selection

Colleagues should refer to the Recruitment and Selection Procedures where our commitment to equality in this area is detailed in full.

12.1 Appointment

We will make appointments based on the best match between the individual, identified through the stages of the selection procedure (C.V., interview, selection tests etc.) and the post, identified by reference to the role profile, without regard to any other non-material factors, e.g. protected characteristics, except where there is a Genuine Occupational Requirement (GOR).

The overriding principle is that the most suitable person for the job is appointed. Where appropriate, reasonable adjustments will be made to support disabled colleagues.

12.2 Criminal Records

We will not take account of spent criminal offences. We will identify any roles that will require clearance through the disclosure procedure administered by the Disclosure and Barring Service.

12.3 Recruitment Complaints

Any job applicant who believes that they have been unfairly treated during the recruitment and selection process can raise this with the Appointing Officer. All complaints will be carefully considered and responses provided within the timescales set out in the procedure.

13.0 Learning and Development

The needs of the Company and the needs of individual colleagues in carrying out their duties, in preparing for changes to these duties, and for career development, will form the only basis for selection for training. Availability of funds will limit the level of training activities and Heads of Department will establish priorities accordingly.

Any restrictions on access to training will not directly or indirectly discriminate on the grounds of any protected characteristic or any other factor which cannot be objectively justified.

14.0 Terms and Conditions of employment

The Company will apply all terms of employment procedures fairly.

The Company recognises the benefits of flexibility in working arrangements. Furthermore, we recognise the

rights of all colleagues working under such arrangements to be treated fairly and consistently in comparison to full time, permanent colleagues and to be given the same opportunities for development. The treatment of pay and benefits for colleagues on flexible working arrangements is consistent with full time entitlements, wherever possible, these are provided on a pro rata basis. The flexible working procedures can be accessed for further information.

15.0 Equality and Diversity in Employment Procedures

All colleagues, regardless of protected characteristics, are subject to employment policies and procedures including Capability, Disciplinary and Health and Wellbeing. If necessary, reasonable adjustments can be made to facilitate engagement with these procedures and to enable colleagues to participate in any meetings or hearings which may arise because of these policies. Occupational Health advice may be sought to enable this.