

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Staff Governance
DATE	3 November 2025
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Policies for People Update
REPORT NUMBER	CORS/25/251
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR	Andy MacDonald, Executive Director – Corporate Services
CHIEF OFFICER	Isla Newcombe, Chief Officer – People & Citizen Services
REPORT AUTHOR	Sharon Robb, Employee Relations Casework Lead
TERMS OF REFERENCE	2.5, 2.7

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report follows from a report to Staff Governance Committee in June 2023 (CUS/23/186), where it was agreed that a report would be brought to Committee on an annual basis on the application of the Managing Discipline, Managing Grievances and Dignity and Respect at Work policies.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee:-

- 2.1 Notes the updated data provided regarding the usage and application of the policies; and
- 2.2 Notes the improvement actions planned to improve progress on timescales for employee relations casework across the organisation within a joint action plan.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

Background

- 3.1 The revised [Managing Discipline Policy](#) was approved by Committee on 7 June 2021, with the revised [Managing Grievances](#) and the [Dignity and Respect at Work](#) Policies approved by Committee on 28 September 2021.
- 3.2 The key aims of the policies are to:
- 1 Increase the use of informal methods of resolution and seek to deal with issues at the lowest level to avoid unnecessary escalation to the hearing stage of policies and

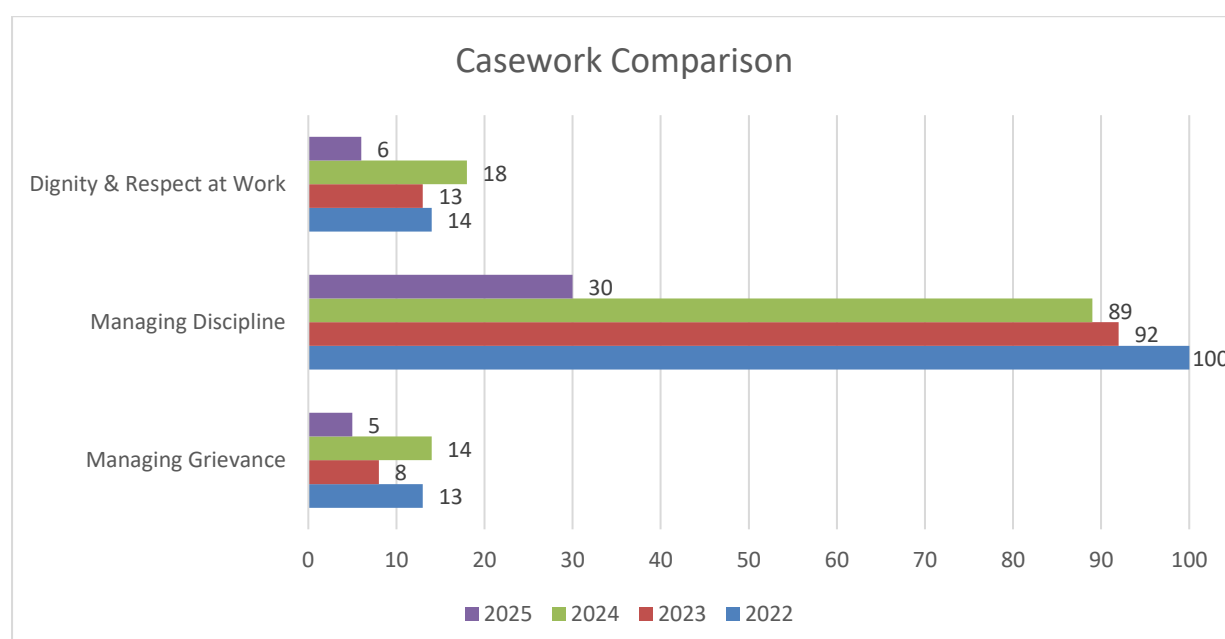
2 To introduce a single investigation process which applies to all 3 policies.

3.3 An [annual update](#) on the application of these policies was most recently presented to the Staff Governance Committee on 9 September 2024.

Data

3.4 For the purposes of comparison, the data for 2022 and 2023 from previous annual updates has been included. This has been compared against the period January to December 2024 and January to June 2025.

3.5 The graph below shows a breakdown of the type of cases progressed in 2024 and the first half of 2025. For clarity, the 2024/25 data includes only cases which were opened in that period.

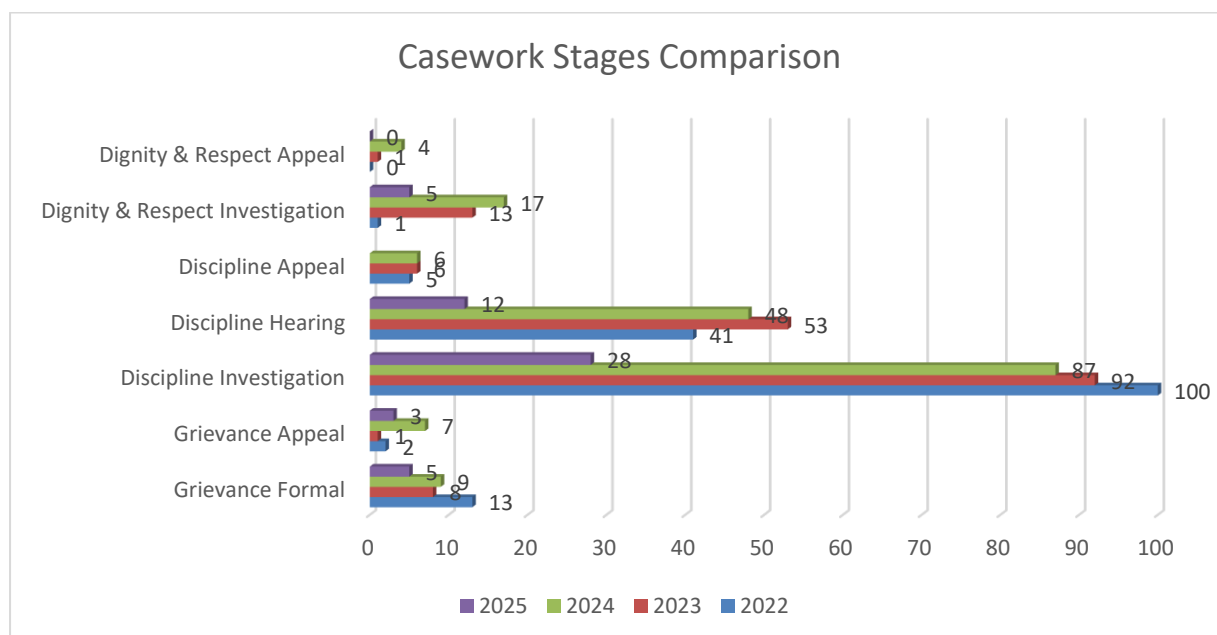


3.6 There is a degree of consistency in the numbers of cases opened in 2024 when compared to 2022 and 2023. For Managing Discipline cases, there was an improvement in the number of new cases, with a small decrease from 92 in 2023 to 89 cases in 2024. The 2025 data shows that up to June 2025, 30 new cases have been opened, therefore a further reduction is projected. The full year figures will be reported to Committee next year.

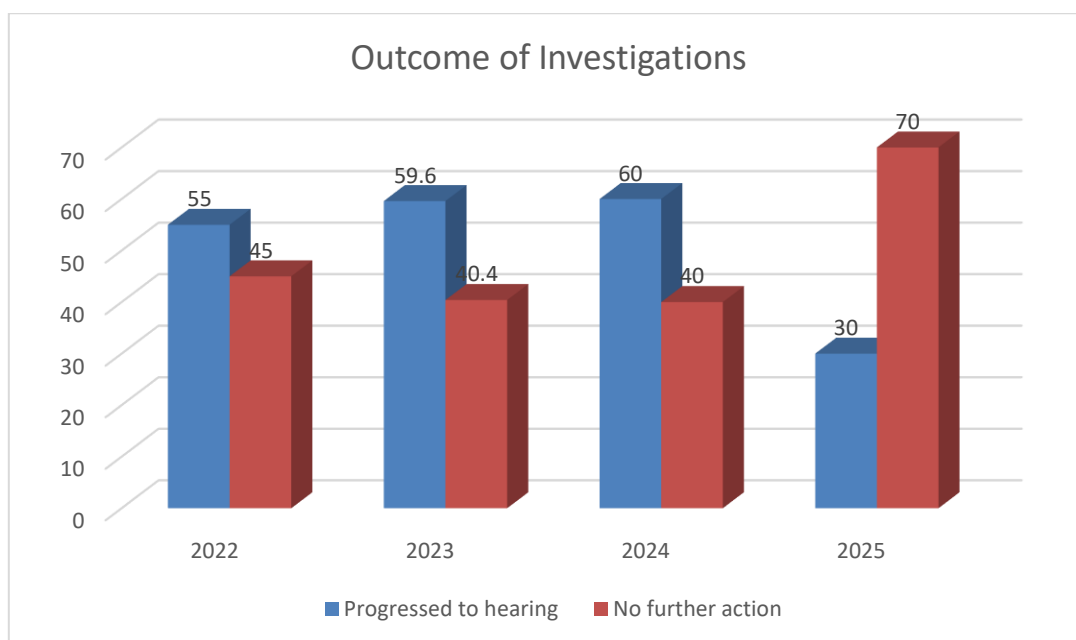
3.7 For Managing Grievance, there has been a slight increase in the number of cases from 8 in 2023 to 14 in 2024, similar to the number of cases in 2022. The 2025 data shows that up to June 2025, 5 new cases have been opened.

3.8 For Dignity and Respect cases, this again has shown a slight increase in the number of cases from 13 in 2023 to 18 in 2024. The 2025 data shows that up to June 2025, 6 new cases were opened.

- 3.9 The graph below shows a breakdown of the stages within each case type. As above, the 2024/25 data includes only cases which were opened in that period (and therefore some cases may not yet have concluded).



- 3.10 Informal grievances are not included in the figures above as these are not routinely recorded centrally by the employee relations team; these are often dealt with by managers at service level, and only where these cannot be resolved, are they escalated. Whilst there were similar numbers of grievances heard each year, there is a proportionate increase in the number of grievance appeals.
- 3.11 Whilst there was an increase in the number of disciplinary hearings from 2022 to 2023, the number of hearings in 2024 has decreased, with this decrease looking likely to continue in 2025 (whilst noting that not all disciplinary cases started in 2025 will have concluded). The number of appeals from cases commenced in 2023 to those commenced in 2024 has remained the same, with 0 appeals from cases commenced in 2025 to date (whilst again noting that not all cases will have concluded).
- 3.12 There has been an increase between 2023 and 2024 for investigations under the Dignity and Respect at Work policy, which has increased from 13 to 17. There were 4 Dignity and Respect at Work appeals in 2024. It should be noted that cases under the Dignity and Respect at Work Policy may involve multiple complainants/subjects of complaint, which would be recorded separately and may impact the figures.
- 3.13 The chart below shows that in 2022, 55% of formal investigations progressed to a disciplinary hearing, increasing to 60% in 2023, and remaining at the same level in 2024. For 2025 (to 30 June 2025) (although noting that not all will have concluded) 30% of investigations have progressed to a disciplinary hearing.



3.14 The data shows that, whilst timescales for the stages of the procedures are a matter of guidance rather than policy, the organisation's average timescales are not currently aligned with the timescales currently set out in the guidance, as detailed in the table below:

Policy Stage	Days in Guidance	Average Days 2023*	Average Days 2024*	Average Days 2025 (to date)*
Disciplinary Investigation	28 (20 working days)	85	97	51.3
Disciplinary Hearing	14 (10 working days)	32	38	25.8
Disciplinary Appeal	14/84** (10/60 working days)	56	65	-
Grievance Hearing	14 (10 working days)	54	105	43.5
Grievance Appeal	14 (10 working days)	41	45.6	-

* Please note that the timescales are calculated using only stages that have been completed and will not include any which are still ongoing. Therefore these figures may change in subsequent reports.

**Appeals Sub Committee timescales are 12 weeks or 84 working days

3.15 Whilst each case is individual and has unique challenges, the most common reasons for delays were as follows:

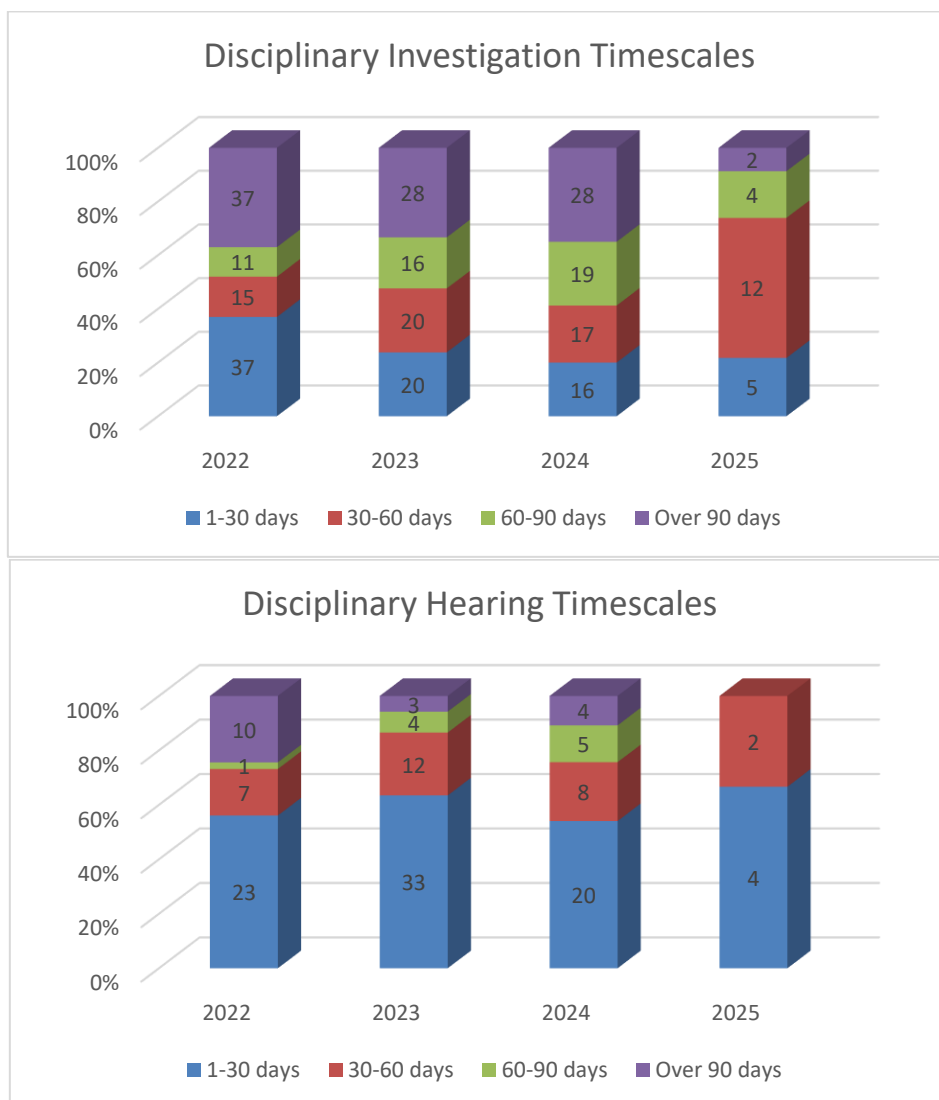
- Sickness absence/annual leave during the process (either employee, trade union representative, People & OD Adviser, Investigating Officer or Disciplinary Hearing Chair; or a combination)
- School holiday periods during investigations for school based employees
- Availability/capacity of investigating officer or disciplinary hearing chair
- Complexity of some cases, such as those involving police investigations or requiring numerous witnesses to be interviewed.

- Hearing/appeal date being varied by mutual consent.

3.16 It is also important to note that the length of each stage is measured as the time to reach a conclusion. The timescales outlined in the guidance for hearings and appeals relate to when the case should be heard by (i.e. the original hearing date). In many cases there may be adjournments to seek further information, to consider all the information presented or it may take several meetings to hear the entirety of a case. Further the case is not considered concluded until an outcome letter has been issued and the guidance allows a further 5 working days for this to be issued following the case being heard.

3.17 Appeals to the Appeals Sub Committee by necessity have a longer lead in time than officer appeals and in line with the Appeals Sub Committee procedure, these are heard within 12 weeks of a letter of appeal being submitted.

3.18 The table below shows a further breakdown of the timescales for the investigation and disciplinary hearings from 2022-25 by number of days taken to complete:



- 3.19 There will always be some cases which will exceed the length of time set out within the guidance for a number of reasons, as explained above, however the data shows that there is room for improvement.
- 3.20 In order to address some of the issues with timescales within our people processes and concerns raised by our trade union colleagues, an improvement action plan has been developed jointly, with trade union colleagues, and with feedback from managers, chief officers and investigating officers.
- 3.21 Appendix 1 sets out the initial actions included within the plan, with an update provided.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Dealing with disciplinary and grievance issues as promptly as possible and without unreasonable delay contributes to a fair procedure for employment law purposes.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no direct environmental implications arising from this report.

7. RISK

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H) <small>*taking into account controls/control actions</small>	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
Strategic Risk	No significant risks identified			Yes
Compliance	Non-compliance with our policies presents a legal risk of successful tribunal claims.	Functions acting on utilisation, trend and root cause information to develop and implement controls to ensure policy compliance. Provision of robust training in understanding/	M	Yes

		applying corporate policies. Provision of specialist support / advice.		
Operational	Risk to service delivery and standards if staff performance is impacted by ongoing/protracted casework	Provision of information, instruction and training as identified in Job Profiles, skills and training matrices. Open and clear two-way communication at all levels within the organisation.	M	Yes
Financial	If corporate policies are not complied with, then the organisation may incur both direct (as a result of tribunal claims) and indirect (due to loss of productivity) costs	Functions acting on utilisation, trend and root cause information to develop and implement controls to ensure policy compliance. Provision of robust training in understanding/ applying corporate policies. Provision of specialist support / advice.	M	Yes
Reputational	If corporate policies are not consistently and fairly applied, there is a risk of the organisation not being seen as an employer of choice and having recruitment and retention issues	Provision of information, instruction and training as identified in Job Profiles, skills and training matrices. Open and clear two-way communication at all levels within the organisation.	L	Yes
Environment / Climate	No significant risks identified			Yes

8. OUTCOMES

Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2016-26	
Prosperous Economy Stretch Outcomes	The Prosperous Economy theme in the LOIP makes mention of the importance of retaining talent and expertise in City organisations. This would include the Council. Ensuring that people policies are in place and applied appropriately and consistently should assist with employee relations in the organisation and with the retention of trained and valued employees. This would mean that they can continue in post and contribute to delivering effective services to citizens and businesses, indirectly contributing to the City's economy.
Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes	The Prosperous People theme in the LOIP indicates that all people in the City are entitled to feel safe, protected from harm and supported where necessary, which would include employees of the Council. Ensuring that people policies are in place and applied appropriately and consistently should assist with employee relations in the organisation, ensuring that conduct issues are efficiently addressed and that employees are supported when undergoing the procedure. This should indirectly assist with employee mental health and wellbeing allowing them to function both in employment and at home.
Regional and City Strategies	<p>This report links directly with the Council's Workforce Delivery Plan - setting up our Council in a way that supports our aspirations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy review principles are in place that embed early intervention and prevention • Industrial relations are based on positive working relationships with our recognized Trade Unions and have mutual respect at their core

9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	No assessment required. I confirm this has been discussed and agreed with Isla Newcombe, Chief Officer People & Citizen Services on 1/10/25.
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required
Other	Not required

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 [Policies for People Update – CUS/24/259](#)
- 10.2 [Policies for People Update – CUS/23/186](#)

11. APPENDICES

- 11.1 Improvement Action Plan

12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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Appendix 1 – Improvement Action Plan

Improvement Action	Why this is important?	Update
General		
Engagement with chief officers to support them to emphasise to managers about the importance of adherence to people policies and guidance.	The application of these policies within ACC is the responsibility of Chief Officers and feedback from Trade Unions is that visibility and involvement, where appropriate, of Chief Officers for cases in their respective areas could be improved. Feedback from Investigating Officers and Chairs also suggests that operational work is a barrier in terms of meeting timescales and support from Chief Officers in managing priorities would be of benefit.	Continuing to engage with Chief Officers exploring options for reporting based on new HR system.
Undertake a feedback session with Investigating Officers/ Hearing Chairs	To gain their input and insight into how the policies and processes are working in practice, understand any barriers and to make any resultant changes to improve the process.	Feedback sessions held and have contributed to actions within this plan
Review current methods of recording casework information	Reviewing our existing casework register will help ensure data is accurate and up to date for the purposes of tracking cases and reporting.	Review has been completed and casework register updated. People Services are currently developing and implementing Dynamics 365 as a case management system with expected implementation in 2026. This is expected to allow further improvement in data management and reporting.
Investigations		

Appendix 1 – Improvement Action Plan

Improvement Action	Why this is important?	Update
Review and consider options on current approach to allocating Investigating Officers to cases	Feedback from People & OD Advisors and managers indicates delays in the current process for allocating Investigating Officers, as well as delays associated with IOs managing their investigations in addition to business as usual priorities. Alternative models have been considered, including the potential to establish dedicated IO roles, as a test of change. The remit would be solely to undertake investigations with the intention of increasing organisational capacity to complete investigations in accordance with our set timescales. A benchmarking exercise has shown that this has been trialled within other organisations with successful outcomes. It is hoped this initiative will avoid/reduce delays and improve timescales	As part of the People Services redesign, 2 dedicated Investigating Officer posts are proposed to be established on the structure, on a fixed term basis, to trial this approach. It is anticipated this will be effective in early 2026
Review Investigations Training	Currently training is online and procedural in nature; feedback from investigating officers (IOs) suggests that this does not always sufficiently equip them to undertake investigations. A face to face course will be developed and implemented with a focus on improving the timescales whilst ensuring robustness around cases. It is hoped that this will also increase the pool of sufficiently trained IOs and allow cases to be allocated more quickly.	In progress
Review guidance around current timescales	The data within this report indicates that it is not always achievable to meet the timescales. By reviewing the timescales and associated guidance, this will ensure timescales are realistic and also provide clarity on actions that should be taken where achieving these is not possible.	Ongoing
Review training provision on People Policies for all managers	Review the current training provision for managers on key people policies and procedures including the importance of considering resolution at informal stage, where this is possible and undertaking 'preliminary investigations or fact finding', with the aim of reducing the number of formal cases.	In progress Briefing sessions held with Head Teachers and as part of the Aspiring Leaders Programme. Currently reviewing Manager Induction to ensure a session is included to cover this.

Appendix 1 – Improvement Action Plan

Improvement Action	Why this is important?	Update
Increase visibility of case work data for Chief Officers / Service Managers	Greater visibility of data allows for early intervention in cases, particularly where timescales are identified as exceeding those in the guidance.	People Services are currently implementing Dynamics 365 as a case management system with expected implementation in early 2026. This is expected to allow further improvement in visibility of data management and reporting.
Hearings		
Develop training/briefing for Disciplinary Hearing Chairs	Especially useful for managers new to the Disciplinary Hearing Chair role. Training purpose to increase confidence and expertise, as well as a focus on ensuring robustness around cases. Aim to reduce delays in arranging hearings and will place an emphasis on the need to improve timescales on case completion.	In progress
Appeals		
Record and report management and Appeals Sub-committee separately	Management appeals (14 days) and Committee appeals (12 weeks) have differing timescales, with committee appeals by necessity having a longer lead in time. Reporting these timescales separately will give a better indication of where improvements can be made	New action to be undertaken for next annual report.