

Aberdeen Hockey Club

Disciplinary Procedure

Part A: Volunteers · Part B: Employees

Purpose

This procedure sets out how Aberdeen Hockey Club responds to alleged breaches of conduct, standards or contract by anyone acting on behalf of the club. It ensures that where disciplinary action is required, it is taken fairly, proportionately, consistently, and in line with legal and good-governance standards.

The procedure has two parts because the framework that applies is different depending on whether the person is a volunteer or an employee:

- **Part A applies to volunteers** — coaches, team managers, committee members, and any other person acting on behalf of AHC without a contract of employment. This is a governance procedure rooted in the AHC Code of Conduct.
- **Part B applies to employees** — any person employed by AHC under a contract of employment. This is an employment procedure aligned with the ACAS Code of Practice on Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures.

If it is unclear which part applies, the President (in consultation with the CWPO where safeguarding is involved) will decide before any action is taken.

Principles

The following principles apply to both parts of this procedure:

- **Fairness.** Any person subject to disciplinary action will be given a clear explanation of the concern raised, an opportunity to respond, and a fair hearing before any decision is made.
- **Proportionality.** The response will be proportionate to the seriousness of the alleged breach and any pattern of previous conduct.
- **Consistency.** Similar breaches will be treated in a similar way. The procedure applies equally regardless of the person's standing, length of service, or role in the club.
- **Confidentiality.** Information will be shared only with those who need to know to progress the matter properly.
- **Timeliness.** Concerns will be triaged and acted upon promptly, without unreasonable delay.
- **Right of appeal.** Any formal sanction imposed under this procedure can be appealed.

Relationship to other AHC procedures

This procedure sits alongside, and does not replace, the following AHC procedures:

- **Reporting and Recording Concerns Procedure** — the entry point for any concern raised about a member of AHC. Concerns are triaged there before entering this procedure.

- **Codes of Conduct (Adult and Youth)** — the standards a person is being held to.
- **Safer Recruitment Pack** — the framework under which volunteers and employees are appointed.

Where a concern raised may involve a child protection matter, the AHC Reporting and Recording Concerns Procedure takes precedence. Statutory referral to Police Scotland, Social Work Services, or Scottish Hockey happens before any internal disciplinary action. Disciplinary action may be paused pending the outcome of an external process.

Where a concern raised may involve a criminal matter, the same principle applies — statutory processes take precedence, and internal action is taken alongside or after.

Part A: Volunteers

Scope

Part A applies to any person acting on behalf of AHC without a contract of employment. This includes:

- Volunteer coaches and session helpers
- Team managers
- Committee members and officers
- Occasional parent helpers acting under an Occasional Parent Helper Agreement
- Any other individual carrying out a role at AHC on a voluntary basis

Grounds for volunteer disciplinary action

Disciplinary action under this procedure may be considered where a volunteer's conduct falls short of the standards set out in the AHC Code of Conduct or other AHC policies. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Breaches of the Code of Conduct — for example, inappropriate behaviour toward players, parents, officials, or other members; abusive or discriminatory language; conduct that brings the club into disrepute
- Safeguarding failures — for example, not reporting a concern about a child, breaches of the two-adult rule, inappropriate communication with junior members
- Failure to hold or maintain required qualifications, PVG membership, or safeguarding training
- Misuse of AHC funds, equipment, or facilities
- Repeated failure to fulfil the responsibilities of the role
- Retaliation against a person who has raised a concern in good faith
- Any conduct that would constitute a criminal offence

How a concern enters the volunteer disciplinary process

A concern about a volunteer's conduct is normally raised through the AHC Reporting and Recording Concerns Procedure. The receiving officer determines, in triage, whether the concern:

1. Can be addressed through an informal conversation with the volunteer;
2. Warrants a formal response under this procedure; or
3. Requires external referral (child protection, police, or Scottish Hockey) before any internal action is taken.

Where option 2 applies, the concern enters this procedure.

Investigation

Before any disciplinary hearing takes place, the concern will be investigated. The investigation is normally conducted by a committee member not involved in raising the concern and not proposed for the disciplinary panel. The purpose of the investigation is to establish the facts — not to reach a conclusion on outcome.

The investigation will:

- Gather relevant evidence, including witness statements where appropriate
- Give the volunteer notice of the concern in writing

- Give the volunteer a fair opportunity to respond, in writing or in a meeting
- Produce a written summary of the concern, the evidence gathered, and any response received, to be considered by the disciplinary panel

The volunteer may be asked to step back temporarily from their role pending the investigation. This is a precautionary step, not a sanction, and is only used where there is a credible safeguarding, safety, or reputation concern.

The disciplinary panel

The disciplinary panel comprises three people:

- The AHC President
- The AHC Child Wellbeing and Protection Officer (CWPO)
- One additional committee member, nominated by the President

Where any of these three individuals has a conflict of interest, is the subject of the concern, or was involved in the investigation, the President will nominate a substitute committee member.

Where the concern is about the President, the CWPO takes the chair of the panel and nominates a substitute. Where the concern is about the CWPO, the President takes the chair and nominates a substitute. Where the concern is about both the President and the CWPO, the procedure is escalated to the Team Captains as set out in the Reporting and Recording Concerns Procedure.

The disciplinary hearing

The disciplinary hearing gives the panel and the volunteer an opportunity to consider the concern together and reach an outcome. The following applies:

- **Notice.** The volunteer will be given at least 14 days written notice of the hearing, including a summary of the concern, the evidence gathered, and the possible outcomes.
- **Right to be accompanied.** The volunteer may bring one other person to the hearing to support them — for example, a friend, a colleague, or (if a committee member) another committee member. The accompanying person may speak on their behalf.
- **Format.** The hearing is held in private. The volunteer will be invited to respond to the concern, and the panel may ask questions. Witnesses may be called if the panel considers this necessary.
- **Decision.** The panel considers the matter after the hearing and reaches a decision by majority. The volunteer is informed of the decision, and the reasons for it, in writing within 7 days.

Possible outcomes

The panel may decide on any of the following outcomes, having regard to the seriousness of the breach, any pattern of previous conduct, and any mitigating factors:

- **No case to answer.** The concern is not upheld and no action is taken.
- **Informal advice.** The concern is upheld to a limited extent; the volunteer receives informal guidance from the panel.
- **Formal warning.** The concern is upheld; a formal warning is issued in writing. The warning remains on the volunteer's record for a defined period (typically 12 months).

- **Conditions of continued involvement.** The volunteer may continue in their role subject to specific conditions — for example, completing further safeguarding training, or being observed in sessions for a period.
- **Suspension from role.** The volunteer is suspended from their role for a defined period.
- **Removal from role.** The volunteer is removed from their specific role but may continue as a member of AHC.
- **Expulsion from AHC.** The volunteer's membership of and involvement with AHC is terminated. This is reserved for the most serious breaches.

Where the outcome affects the volunteer's ability to work with children, or where the breach involves safeguarding, the outcome will be reported to Scottish Hockey and may be reported to Disclosure Scotland where required.

Right of appeal (Part A)

The volunteer may appeal a formal outcome (warning, conditions, suspension, removal, expulsion) within 14 days of receiving the written decision. The appeal must be made in writing to the President and CWPO.

The appeal will be heard by a panel of three committee members, none of whom were involved in the original decision or investigation. Where insufficient uninvolved committee members exist, the President will nominate substitutes from outside the committee (e.g. a former committee member, or a Scottish Hockey nominee).

The appeal panel may:

- Uphold the original decision
- Reduce the sanction
- Set aside the sanction entirely
- Refer the matter back for a new investigation where a procedural fault is identified

The appeal panel's decision is final within AHC. The volunteer's right to raise the matter externally (e.g. with Scottish Hockey or a statutory authority) is unaffected.

Part B: Employees

Part B is designed to be compliant with the ACAS Code of Practice on Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures. Failure to follow the ACAS Code can result in employment tribunal awards being increased by up to 25%. This procedure should be followed carefully in every employee disciplinary matter, and specialist HR or legal advice should be sought where the matter is complex or the sanction under consideration is dismissal.

Scope

Part B applies to any person employed by AHC under a contract of employment — including the Schools and Junior Pathway Coach post funded by the Club Support Programme, and any future employees.

It does not apply to volunteers (see Part A), independent contractors, or third-party service providers.

Grounds for employee disciplinary action

Disciplinary action under this procedure may be considered where an employee's conduct or performance falls short of the standards required by their role, their contract, or AHC's policies. Two categories are relevant:

Ordinary misconduct

Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Poor timekeeping or attendance
- Failure to follow reasonable management instructions
- Failure to meet the standards required by the role
- Minor breaches of AHC policies (Code of Conduct, health and safety, communication)
- Repeated minor errors or lapses

Gross misconduct

Gross misconduct is a fundamental breach that goes to the root of the employment contract and destroys the employer's trust and confidence. In cases of gross misconduct, summary dismissal (dismissal without notice) may be justified without prior warnings. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Any safeguarding failure that puts a child at risk of harm, including failure to report a suspected safeguarding concern
- Abuse, threatening or discriminatory behaviour toward players, parents, colleagues, or members of the public
- Theft, fraud, or deliberate misuse of AHC funds or equipment
- Serious breach of health and safety rules
- Falsification of records, qualifications, or references
- Being under the influence of alcohol or drugs while carrying out coaching duties or working with children
- Serious breach of AHC's Code of Conduct
- Conduct that could bring criminal charges relevant to the role
- Serious insubordination or refusal to follow reasonable management instructions

Informal action

Minor concerns will normally be addressed informally in the first instance, through a conversation between the employee and their line manager (the AHC Youth Secretary). The purpose is to make clear what has fallen short of the standard required, agree how the matter will be put right, and support the employee in doing so.

Informal action is not a formal warning and does not sit on the employee's record. It does, however, become relevant if similar concerns recur and the formal procedure needs to be invoked.

Formal action — investigation

Where the concern warrants formal action, an investigation will be carried out. The investigation is normally conducted by a committee member or an external person not involved in supervising the employee day-to-day. The investigator will:

- Give the employee written notice of the concern being investigated
- Gather relevant evidence, including witness statements where appropriate
- Invite the employee to attend an investigatory meeting to give their account
- Produce a written investigation report summarising the facts, the evidence, and the employee's response

The investigation report is used to decide whether the matter should progress to a disciplinary hearing, or be closed at that stage.

Suspension during investigation

An employee may be suspended from work on full pay during the investigation, where their continued attendance would prejudice the investigation, present a safeguarding risk, or where the alleged conduct is sufficiently serious. Suspension is a precautionary step and is not a disciplinary sanction. It will be reviewed regularly and lifted as soon as practicable.

Formal disciplinary hearing

If the matter progresses to a formal disciplinary hearing, the following applies:

- **Written notice.** The employee will be given at least 14 days written notice of the hearing, including a summary of the concern, the evidence gathered (including a copy of the investigation report), and the possible outcomes (including whether dismissal is being considered).
- **Right to be accompanied.** The employee has a statutory right to be accompanied at the hearing by a work colleague or a trade union representative. The accompanying person may address the hearing, take notes, and confer with the employee, but may not answer questions on their behalf.
- **Panel.** The disciplinary hearing panel will comprise the AHC President and one other committee member who has not been involved in the investigation. Where the sanction under consideration is dismissal, the panel will include the CWPO.
- **Format.** The hearing is held in private. The panel presents the concern and evidence, the employee responds, and either party may call witnesses. The employee may cross-examine witnesses.
- **Decision.** The panel considers the matter after the hearing and reaches a decision. The employee is informed of the decision, and the reasons for it, in writing within 7 days. The written decision must include the sanction imposed, the reasons for it, and the employee's right of appeal.

Sanctions available

The disciplinary hearing panel may impose any of the following sanctions:

For ordinary misconduct or performance concerns

- **Verbal warning** — recorded on file for 6 months. The lowest formal sanction. Given for a first-time or lower-level concern.
- **Written warning** — recorded on file for 12 months. Given where a verbal warning is insufficient, or where the concern recurs after a verbal warning.
- **Final written warning** — recorded on file for 12 months. Given where a written warning is insufficient, where the concern recurs after a written warning, or where the concern is serious enough to warrant a final warning as the first formal step.
- **Dismissal with notice** — employment terminated with the notice period specified in the employee's contract. Given where the concern recurs after a final written warning, or where continued employment is not tenable but the conduct does not meet the threshold for summary dismissal.

For gross misconduct

- **Summary dismissal** — employment terminated without notice. Reserved for cases where the employee's conduct constitutes gross misconduct as defined above.

Alternative sanctions

Where appropriate, the panel may consider alternative sanctions in addition to or instead of the above:

- Additional training or supervision
- Redeployment to a different role
- Financial penalty in the form of adjustment to bonus or expenses (where permitted by contract)

Right of appeal (Part B)

The employee may appeal any formal sanction (warning, dismissal) within 14 days of receiving the written decision. The appeal must be made in writing to the President.

The appeal will be heard by a panel of committee members, none of whom were involved in the original investigation or hearing decision. The appeal panel may:

- Uphold the original decision
- Reduce the sanction
- Set aside the sanction entirely
- Refer the matter back where a procedural fault is identified

The appeal is normally heard within 21 days of the appeal being lodged. The employee has the same right to be accompanied at the appeal hearing as at the original hearing. The employee is informed of the appeal decision, and the reasons for it, in writing within 7 days of the appeal hearing.

The appeal panel's decision is final within AHC. The employee's statutory right to raise a claim at an employment tribunal is unaffected by this procedure.

Records

A written record is kept of every disciplinary matter dealt with under this procedure, including:

- The concern raised
- The investigation conducted, including evidence gathered and witnesses interviewed
- The hearing held, including who attended and the summary of what was said
- The decision reached and the reasons for it
- The sanction imposed, if any, and any conditions attached
- Any appeal lodged and its outcome

Records are held securely by the President for volunteer matters and by the AHC Youth Secretary for employee matters. Access is restricted to those who need it to progress the matter or its appeal, and to those responsible for continued oversight (e.g. CWPO for safeguarding-related sanctions).

Retention periods:

- **Volunteer disciplinary records** — 6 years from the date of the final decision, or longer where required by safeguarding good practice.
- **Employee disciplinary records** — 6 years from the date the employee leaves AHC, in line with employment law good practice.
- **Warnings that expire** — the warning remains on the employee's record for its stated duration and then becomes inactive; it is not deleted, but it does not count toward future disciplinary decisions once expired.