

## **Guidance Document 5**

### **Handling Difficult Questions - Guidance for Investigating Officers**

#### **In advance of the meeting:**

- Prepare your areas of questioning and what you will say
- Consider the environment and location of where you will meet
- Face-to-face conversations are normal for Investigations, but online meetings could be used in some circumstances.

Your HRR will help with considerations such as:

- The layout of the room
- Bringing water to the room for all those involved

#### **During the meeting**

- Set the right tone: begin the conversation in a professional and non-threatening manner
- State the purpose of the meeting clearly and why you are investigating the issue
- Put the issue in context: explain why it is important
- Ask if individuals can give specific examples and evidence
- Be aware of your body language

#### **Do**

- Listen to and acknowledge the individual's point of view
- Appreciate the value of silence and allow the individual time to respond
- Ask if you have not understood something
- Summarise the individual's points
- Check that the individual has understood what you have said
- Be prepared for an emotional reaction
- Try to stick to your pre prepared questions but use probing questions to clarify statements the individual makes - eg "tell me more about that"

#### **Don't**

- Jump in while an individual is speaking
- Answer questions that you have put to the individual
- Ask multiple questions before waiting for an answer to the first question
- Use any form of humour
- Discuss another individual
- Try to minimise the situation
- Offer false hope
- Side with any one individual

#### **When the member of staff is upset**

The meeting can be productive even if the individual is upset or angry

- Remain calm
- Let the individual "vent"
- Remember the reason for the meeting
- Consider if a short break is appropriate

- Remember the issue needs to be dealt with: do not postpone simply because the individual is not receptive