



Dignity at Work and Bullying & Harassment Policy

1. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

1.1 Statement

In support of our value to respect others Sandown Town Council will not tolerate bullying or harassment by, or of, any of their employees, officials, members, contractors, visitors to the Council or members of the public from the community which we serve. The Council is committed to the elimination of any form of intimidation in the workplace.

This policy reflects the spirit in which the council intends to undertake all of its business and outlines the specific procedures available to all employees in order to protect them from bullying and harassment.

The council will issue this policy to all employees as part of their induction and to all members as part of their Councillor Pack. The Council may also share this policy with contractors, visitors and members of the public.

Bullying and harassment is most likely to be complained about when individual elected members or members of the public criticise Town Council employees, often without objective evidence and in environments which are open to the public such as Town Council meetings, or by way of blogs, Facebook comments, Twitter and other social media (cyber bullying)

1.2 Definitions.

1.2.1 These definitions are derived from the ACAS guidance on the topic. Both bullying and harassment are behaviours which are unwanted by the recipient. They are generally evidenced by a pattern of conduct rather than one off incidents.

1.2.2 Bullying and harassment in the workplace can lead to poor morale, low productivity and poor performance, sickness, absence, lack of respect for others, turnover, damage to the council's reputation and ultimately, Employment Tribunal or other court cases and payment of unlimited compensation.

Bullying

1.2.3 "Bullying may be characterised as a pattern of offensive, abusive, intimidating, malicious, insulting or humiliating behaviour; an abuse of this use of power which makes the recipient feel upset, threatened, humiliated or vulnerable which tends to undermines their confidence which may cause them to suffer stress".

Harassment

1.2.4 Harassment is unwanted conduct that isolates a person's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

1.2.5 This policy cover, but is not limited to, harassment on the grounds of sex, marital status, sexual orientation, race, colour, nationality, ethnic origin, religion, belief, disability or age.

1.3 **Examples.**

1.3.1 Examples of unacceptable behaviour are as follows (this list is not exhaustive). Spreading malicious rumours, insulting someone, ridiculing or demeaning someone, exclusion or victimisation, unfair treatment, overbearing supervision or other misuse of position or power, unwelcome sexual advances, making threats about job security, deliberately undermining a competent worker by overloading work and/or constant criticism, preventing an individual's promotion or training opportunities.

1.3.2 Bullying and harassment may occur face-to-face, in meetings, through written communication, including e-mail, by telephone, social media or through automatic supervision methods. It may occur on or off work premises, during work hours or non-work time.

1.4 **Penalties.**

1.4.1 Bullying and harassment are considered examples of serious misconduct which will be dealt with through the Disciplinary Procedure at Gross Misconduct level and may result in summary dismissal from the council for employees or through referral to the Standards Committee of the IOW Council as a contravention of the Members' Code of Conduct which may result in penalties against the member concerned.

1.4.2 In extreme cases, harassment can constitute a criminal offence and the council should take appropriate legal advice, sometimes available from the council's insurer, if such matter arises.

1.5 **The Legal position.**

1.5.1 Councils have a duty of care towards all their workers and liability under common law arising out of the Employment Rights Act 1996 and the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974. Under the following laws, bullying or harassment may be considered unlawful discrimination; Sex Discrimination Act 1995, Race Relations Act 1976, Disability Discrimination Act 1995, Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003, Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003, Employment Equality (Sex Discrimination) 20095, Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006.

In addition, the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 and Protection from Harassment Act 1997 created a criminal offence of harassment with a fine and/or prison sentence as a penalty and a right to damages for the victim. In addition, a harasser may be personally liable to pay damages if a victim complains to an Employment Tribunal for sexual, racial, disability or age discrimination.

2. **PROCESS FOR DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS OF BULLYING AND HARASSMENT**

2.1 **Informal Approach**

Anyone; employee, contractor, member or visitor, who feels he or she is being bullied or harassed should try to resolve the problem informally, in the first instance. It may be sufficient to explain to the person(s) involved in the unwanted behaviour that their conduct is unacceptable, offensive or causing discomfort.

2.2 Formal Approach

Employees

- 2.2.1 Where the employee feels unable to resolve the matter informally, any complaint about harassment or bullying can be raised confidentially and informally, initially with the Mayor or other Councillor if more appropriate. It may be appropriate for the complaint to be put in writing after the initial discussion with the Councillor, as this will enable the formal Grievance Procedure to be invoked.

Others

- 2.2.2 False or malicious allegations of harassment or bullying which damage the reputation of a fellow employee /member will not be tolerated and will be dealt with as serious misconduct under the Disciplinary Procedure and/or a referral to the Monitoring Officer.
- 2.2.3 If elected members are bullying or harassing town council employees, contractors, fellow councillors or members of the public, a referral to the Monitoring Officer as a contravention of the Code of Conduct may be an initial appropriate measure. If this is unsuccessful then referral to the town council's solicitors may follow.
- 2.2.4 If any employee is experiencing bullying or harassment from a member of the public the Town Council will act reasonably in upholding its duty of care towards its own employees. Such complaints will be taken seriously and will be pursued with the third party concerned, exercising whatever sanctions are available. In some cases, harassment can constitute a criminal offence and the Town Council will take appropriate legal advice and action if such an issue arises.
- 2.2.5 A member of the public who feels he/she has been bullied or harassed by any members or officers of the council should use the council's official Complaints Procedure details are found on the Council's website.

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