

TELSCOMBE TOWN COUNCIL



DIGNITY AT WORK POLICY

Purpose & Scope

In support of the Council's values to respect others and create a harmonious working environment, Telscombe Town Council will not tolerate bullying or harassment by, or of, any of its employees, officials, members, contractors, visitors to the Council or members of the public from the community which it serves.

The Council is committed to the elimination of any form of intimidation in the workplace and this policy reflects the nature in which the Council intends to undertake all of its business. It outlines the specific procedures available to all employees in order to protect them from bullying and harassment. It should be read in conjunction with the Council's policies on Grievance and Disciplinary handling, as well as the Code of Conduct for Councillors.

In support of and as a commitment to this, Telscombe Town Council has signed up to the Civility & Respect Pledge.

Definitions

Bullying may be characterised as a pattern of offensive, intimidating, malicious, insulting or humiliating behaviour; an abuse or use of power or authority which tends to undermine an individual or a group of individuals, gradually eroding their confidence and capability, which may cause them to suffer stress. Forms of bullying can include but are not limited to:

- * repeated aggression (whether verbal, psychological or physical), conducted by an individual or group against another individual or group;
- * persistently criticising, condemning and/or humiliating an individual;
- * conduct or behaviour which is offensive, abusive, intimidating, malicious, insulting, abusive of power or that results in unfair sanctions;
- * giving someone tasks to do in the full knowledge that they cannot be achieved;
- * unpleasant or over-repeated jokes about a person;
- * removing responsibility without good reason or knowingly withholding work-related information;
- * behaviour which causes an individual to feel ignored, marginalised or excluded, including exclusion from social media which has the effect of isolating or criticising/complaining about a staff member

Harassment is unwanted conduct that violates a person's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. This usually covers, 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. Forms of harassment can include, but are not limited to:

- * persistent requests for social activities (after it has been made clear that such requests are unwelcome) or other persistent unwelcome attention or pressure of a personal or sexual nature;



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- * offensive, suggestive patronising or belittling remarks;
- * intimate questions;
- * foul or obscene language;
- * inappropriate jokes, 'banter', teasing, innuendos, nicknames, ridicule or insults;
- * inappropriate comments about clothes, physical appearance, body, or abilities;

Both bullying and harassment are behaviours which are unwanted by the recipient. 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. It is the impact of the behaviour or conduct on the recipient that is most relevant.

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

Reporting Procedures

In the first instance, all incidents must be reported to the staff member's line manager. In the case of the most senior employee, all incidents must be reported to the Chairman of the Employment Sub-Committee. A comprehensive note of the incident must be made to include:-

- * date
- * time
- * type of incident
- * details of incident
- * if known, the name of the person accused of harassment and/or bullying (and if that person is not a staff member, their home address if known)
- * the names of any witnesses to the incident (and if witnesses are not staff members, their home address if known)

If the incident relates to correspondence received, either written or electronic (i.e. SMS text messages, direct social media messages or email), the correspondence should be retained as evidence and no response should be made.

If the incident relates to a telephone call which is recorded, or where a message has been left on an answering service, the message or recording should be retained as evidence and no response should be made.

If the incident relates to cyber-stalking or social media, screen shots should be retained as evidence and no response should be made.

Resolution

Informal Approach

If a staff member encounters bullying or harassment by another staff member, it is vital that they make the person responsible aware that their remarks or conduct are offensive to them. This should be done in a simple, straightforward way.



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It is recognised that complaints of harassment or bullying are often of a sensitive or worrying nature and that it may be difficult to speak directly to the other person involved. If this is the case, the staff member should put their request in writing and hand it or email it to the harasser or bully. Staff members wishing to address this kind of behaviour may seek advice from their line manager in the first instance, or Chair of the Employment Sub-Committee on how to address the matter. If appropriate, an informal meeting with both parties may be held by the Town Clerk in order to address the matter in a conciliatory and constructive manner. Both parties need to agree to this approach.

If the informal approach fails or if the staff member believes that the harassment or bullying is of a very serious nature, they must bring the matter to the attention of their line manager in the first instance, or the Chair of the Employment Sub-Committee via a written formal complaint, including information referred under the reporting procedures.

If you are being bullied by your line manager, or you do not want to try and resolve the situation in this way, you should raise the issue with the Chair of the Employment Sub-Committee. The Chair will discuss with you the option of trying to resolve the situation informally.

Formal Approach

Employees – Where the employee feels unable to resolve the matter informally any complaint about harassment or bullying can be raised confidentially and informally, initially with your line manager or if the matter involves them, with the Chair of the Employment Sub-Committee.

Others - Any other party to the Council, other than an employee, who feels he or she is being bullied or harassed should refer to the Council's Complaints Procedure if an informal approach cannot be taken to resolve matters.

Members of the public - If it is alleged that a member of the public has bullied a staff member, following investigation the Council reserves the right to impose sanctions against that member of the public, including:

- Blocking the member of the public's email address and accepting no further emails
- Blocking the member of the public's phone number
- Banning the member of the public from the Council offices or other Council owned buildings
- The Council will not tolerate verbal abuse to staff members and approve that they can put the phone down if abuse continues despite a request to cease, or if it is someone at the Civic Centre, that they can close the reception window and pull down the blind. All incidents will subsequently be dealt with as detailed in this policy.

Councillors - The Council considers bullying and harassment of staff members by Councillors equally unacceptable. If a complaint is made and a grievance regarding bullying or harassment by a Councillor is upheld, this will be reported to the monitoring officer.



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Possible Outcomes

If the Town Clerk does not consider an incident serious enough to report to the police, they may decide to attempt to resolve the problem directly with the aim to receive an apology and guarantee of no future repeat of the behaviour which gave rise to the incident. However, if the Town Clerk considers an incident serious enough to report to the police, the Council will take advice from the police with regard to any appropriate sanction, excluding any sanction related to internal disciplinary action.

Bullying and harassment are considered examples of serious misconduct which will be dealt with through the Council's disciplinary or grievance procedure.

In cases where allegations are made regarding an employee of the Council, this may result in the Council's Disciplinary/Grievance Procedure being invoked.

The Monitoring Officer at Lewes District Council will deal entirely with any complaints involving the conduct of Councillors and will advise of and implement any sanctions where required. The Council will consider any adjustments to support you and manage the relationship with the Councillor the allegations relate to during the investigation.

In extreme cases, the Council may be required to refer details of any harassment to the Police.

False or malicious allegations

If a staff member brings a complaint of harassment or bullying they will not be victimised for having brought the complaint. However, if after a full investigation, the Council has grounds to believe that the complaint was brought by a staff member with malicious intent, or is deemed vexatious in nature, they may be subject to disciplinary action under the Council's disciplinary policy and procedure.

Policy	Dignity at Work (previously Bullying & Harassment Policy)
Review Cycle	Every 3 years, or earlier in the event of legislative changes
Date Last Adopted	20 th March 2024
Previous Adoption Dates	March 2021
Responsibility	Policy & Resources Committee and then adoption by Full Council