

YOXFORD PARISH COUNCIL
ANTI-HARASSMENT AND BULLYING POLICY

1. Introduction

1.1 Yoxford Parish Council (“Council”) is committed to providing a working environment free from harassment and bullying and ensuring all staff are treated, and treat others, with dignity and respect.

1.2 This policy covers harassment or bullying which occurs at work and out of the workplace, such as on business trips or at work-related events or social functions.

1.3 This policy covers bullying and harassment by staff (which may include councillors, contractors and agency workers) and also by third parties such as customers, suppliers or visitors to the Council’s premises.

2. What is Harassment?

2.1 Harassment is any unwanted physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct that has the purpose or effect of violating a person’s dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them. A single incident can amount to harassment.

2.2 It also includes treating someone less favourably because they have submitted or refused to submit to such behaviour in the past.

2.3 Unlawful harassment may involve conduct of a sexual nature (sexual harassment), or it may be related to age, disability, gender reassignment, marital or civil partner status, pregnancy or maternity, race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. Harassment is unacceptable even if it does not fall within any of these categories.

2.4 Harassment may include, for example:

- unwanted physical conduct or “horseplay”, including touching, pinching, pushing and grabbing;
- unwelcome sexual advances or suggestive behaviour (which the harasser may perceive as harmless);
- offensive e-mails, text messages or social media content;
- mocking, mimicking or belittling a person’s disability.

2.5 A person may be harassed even if they were not the intended “target”. For example, a person may be harassed by racist jokes about a different ethnic group if the jokes create an offensive environment.

3. What is Bullying?

3.1 Bullying is offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour involving the misuse of power that can make a person feel vulnerable, upset, humiliated, undermined or threatened. Power does not always mean being in a position of authority but can include both personal strength and the power to coerce through fear or intimidation.

3.2 Bullying can take the form of physical, verbal and non-verbal conduct. Bullying may include, by way of example:

- physical or psychological threats;
- overbearing and intimidating levels of supervision;
- inappropriate derogatory remarks about someone's performance;

3.3 Legitimate, reasonable and constructive criticism of a worker's performance or behaviour, or reasonable instructions given to workers in the course of their employment, will not amount to bullying.

4. If an Employee has been Harassed or Bullied

4.1 If an employee is being harassed or bullied, they should consider whether they feel able to raise the problem informally with the person responsible. They should explain clearly to them that their behaviour is not welcome or makes them uncomfortable. If this is too difficult or embarrassing, they should speak, in confidence, to the Chairman or Vice-Chair of the Council who can provide advice and assistance in resolving the issue formally or informally.

4.2 If informal steps are not appropriate, or have not been successful, the employee should raise the matter formally under the Council's Grievance Procedure.

4.3 The Council will investigate complaints in a timely and confidential manner. The investigation will be conducted by someone with appropriate experience and no prior involvement in the complaint, where possible. Details of the investigation and the names of the person making the complaint and the person accused must only be disclosed on a "need to know" basis. The Parish Council will consider whether any steps are necessary to manage any ongoing relationship between the employee and the person accused during the investigation.

4.4 Once the investigation is complete, the Council will inform the employee of its decision. If the Council considers the employee has been harassed or bullied by an employee the matter will be dealt with under the Disciplinary Procedure as a case of possible misconduct or gross misconduct. If the harasser or bully is a third party such as a member of the public, volunteer, contractor, third party or other visitor, or a Councillor, the Parish Council will consider what action would be appropriate to deal with the problem. Whether or not the complaint is upheld, the Council will consider how best to manage any ongoing working relationship between the employee and the person concerned.

5. Protection and Support

5.1 Employees who make complaints or who participate in good faith in any investigation must not suffer any form of retaliation or victimisation as a result. Anyone found to have retaliated against or victimised someone in this way will be subject to disciplinary action.

6. Record-Keeping

6.1 Information about a complaint by or about an employee may be placed on the employee's personnel file, along with a record of the outcome and of any notes or other documents compiled during the process. These will be processed in accordance with the Council's Data Protection Policy.

Adopted 26th February 2022.