

RENHOLD PARISH COUNCIL
DIGNITY AT WORK AND BULLYING AND
HARASSMENT POLICY



1. Purpose and Scope

1.1 Statement: In support of our value to respect others, Renhold Parish Council (the Council) will not tolerate bullying or harassment by, or of, any of its contractors, councillors, employees, members, officials, visitors to the Council or members of the public (Our Stakeholders).

1.2 The Council is committed to the elimination of any form of bullying or harassment while conducting its business whether electronically, at events, in meetings, or in any workplace, work environment or location where the Council is officially represented.

1.3 This policy reflects the spirit in which the Council intends to undertake its business and outlines the specific procedures available in order to protect our Stakeholders from bullying and harassment. It should be read in conjunction with the Council's policies on Grievance and Discipline and the Elected Members Code of Conduct.

2. Definitions of Bullying and Harassment.

2.1 According to the National Bullying Helpline¹, Bullying *"can be defined in many different ways and can be described as unwanted conduct or behaviour designed to cause harm or distress to another person. It can be characterised as offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, an abuse or misuse of power through means intended to undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient. Bullying can be related to age, sex, race, disability, religion, sexual orientation, nationality or any personal characteristic of the individual, and may be persistent or an isolated incident. The key is that the actions or comments are viewed as demeaning and unacceptable to the recipient"*.

2.2 Harassment is unwanted behaviour by the recipient, whether intended or not, that violates a person's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating

¹ <https://www.nationalbullyinghelpline.co.uk/>

or offensive environment. This policy 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. The Council applies the definitions from ACAS guidance².

2.3 Bullying and harassment in a work environment can lead to poor morale, low productivity and poor performance, sickness absence, mental health issues, lack of respect for others, damage to the Council's reputation and ultimately, legal proceedings against the Council incurring legal fees and compensation.

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

3. Examples of unacceptable behaviour are as follows (this list is not exhaustive).

3.1 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, making threats of physical violence against a person or their family, deliberately undermining a competent worker by overloading work and/or constant criticism, blaming a person for others' mistakes, preventing an individual's promotion or training opportunities.

4. Penalties

4.1 Bullying and harassment by any of our Stakeholders may amount to serious misconduct, which will be dealt with through the Council's Grievance and Discipline policy.

4.2 If elected members of the Council (Members) are accused of bullying or harassing behaviour, then a referral to the monitoring officer at Bedford Borough Council as a potential contravention of the Members' Code of Conduct may be made. Additionally, a referral may be made to an appropriate organisation (see 4.4).

4.3 If a Stakeholder is experiencing bullying or harassment from a third party, the Council will act reasonably in upholding any duty of care that it may owe.

4.4 The Council reserves the right to refer instances of bullying or harassment to the police or it may seek legal advice on appropriate steps to take.

² <https://www.acas.org.uk/if-youre-treated-unfairly-at-work/being-harassed>

5. Process for dealing with complaints of Bullying and Harassment

5.1 Informal approach

5.1.1 Anyone, who feels they are being bullied or harassed, if the circumstances allow, 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, or an intermediary, that their conduct is unacceptable, offensive or causing discomfort. Anyone concerned about being bullied or harassed is encouraged to maintain a journal or other record of the incidents.

5.2 Formal approach

Those directly engaged in the business of the Council

5.2.1 Where an informal approach is not appropriate or has not resolved the matter, any complaint about harassment or bullying can be raised confidentially, with the Clerk, or if the complaint is about the Clerk, the Chairperson or another Councillor as appropriate. It may be appropriate for the complaint to be put in writing after the initial discussion, as this will enable the formal Grievance Procedure in the Grievance and Discipline policy to be invoked. The Council will appoint an investigator to investigate the complaint on its behalf.

5.2.2 Evidence of the conduct complained about will be needed in order to allow an investigation to take place. A meeting will be arranged by the investigator to discuss the complaint with the complainant, normally within 5 working days of receipt of the written complaint.

5.2.3 The process to be followed will be that in the Grievance and Discipline policy. Following a Grievance Hearing or investigation into allegations of bullying or harassment, a full report will be made to all parties and this may result in disciplinary action being taken against the person complained about.

Others

5.2.4 Stakeholders who are not directly engaged in the business of the Council who feel they are being bullied or harassed should raise their complaint with the Council, (or the Monitoring Officer where a Member is directly involved in bullying or harassment) if an informal approach has been unsuccessful.

5.2.5 If the matter remains with the Council, an investigator will be appointed to investigate the complaint on its behalf. Evidence of the conduct complained about will be needed in order to allow an investigation to take place. A meeting

will be arranged by the investigator to discuss the complaint with the complainant, normally within 5 working days of receipt of the written complaint.

5.2.6 The process to be followed will be that in the Grievance and Discipline policy.

Outcomes

5.2.7 Following the outcome of an investigation under 5.2.1 or 5.2.5, Members who the Council reasonably believe have been bullying or harassing another person(s) whilst undertaking council activities may face sanction.

5.2.8 For less serious matters, this may include counselling or training in appropriate skill areas such as (but not limited to) interpersonal communication, assertiveness, and chairmanship.

5.2.9 For more serious matters, sanctions may include admonishment and an undertaking not to repeat the process, removal of opportunities to further harass/bully, banning from any committees of the Council and representation on any outside bodies, and a referral under the Code of Conduct.

5.2.10 In extreme cases there may also be a referral to the police or a claim to an Employment Tribunal for Third-Party harassment (for harassment relating to one of the protected characteristics under the Equality Act).

5.2.11 The sanctions listed above are not exhaustive.

5.2.12 Note: False or malicious allegations of harassment or bullying will not be tolerated and will be dealt with as serious misconduct under the Grievance and Discipline policy and/or a referral to the Monitoring Officer.

6. Responsibilities.

6.1.1 It is important that any person against whom the complaint does not prevent the Council from operating impartially in its investigation and decision-making.

6.1.2 Those engaged in the business of the Council have a responsibility to ensure that their conduct towards others does not harass or bully or in any way demean the dignity of others. If unacceptable behaviour is observed then individuals can challenge the perpetrator and ask them to stop. The Council undertakes to publicly share its policy and to review its policy as appropriate.

7. Useful contacts.

7.1.1 ACAS www.acas.org.uk tel: 0845 7 47 47 47

7.1.2 Local Government Ombudsman for England www.lgo.org.uk 0300 061 0614

- 7.1.3 Equalities and Human Rights Commission www.equalityhumanrights.com
- 7.1.4 SLCC www.slcc.co.uk
- 7.1.5 DirectGov website
www.direct.gov.uk/en/Employment/ResolvingWorkplaceDisputes/DiscriminationAtWork/DG_10026670 Approved Jan. 2017. Re-Approved Jan. 2018 Re-

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