

Willoughby Parish Council

DIGNITY AND RESPECT AT WORK POLICY

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This Dignity and Respect at Work policy was adopted by Willoughby Parish Council at its meeting on 10 October 2023. It will be reviewed in 2025.

Statement

Willoughby Parish Council is committed to the idea that everyone, at all times, should be treated with dignity, fairness and respect and will not tolerate bullying or harassment by, or of, any of its Councillors, employees, officials, contractors, volunteers, visitors or members of the public.

Purpose and Scope

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 its employees in order to protect them from bullying and harassment.

The Council will also consider on a case by case basis whether it is appropriate to share this policy with officials, contractors, volunteers, visitors and members of the public.

Definitions

a. Bullying

Bullying may be characterised as a pattern of offensive, intimidating, malicious, insulting or humiliating behaviour; an abuse of this 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.

b. Harassment

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. These definitions are derived from the ACAS guidance on the topic.

Bullying and Harassment are behaviours which are unwanted by the recipient. They are generally evidenced by a pattern of conduct, rather than being related to one-off incidents. Bullying and harassment in the workplace can lead to poor morale, low productivity and poor performance, sickness absence, mental health issues, lack of respect for others, turnover, damage to the Council's reputation and ultimately, legal proceedings against the Council leading to payment of legal fees and potentially compensation.

c. Examples

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
- 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 another's mistake
- Preventing an individual's promotion or training opportunities

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 work hours or non-work time.

Penalties

Bullying and harassment by any employed persons can be considered examples of gross misconduct which may result in dismissal from the Council.

If Councillors are bullying or harassing fellow Councillors, employees, officials, contractors, volunteers, visitors or members of the public employees, then a referral through the Standards process, in place at the time, reported as a contravention of the Council's Code of Conduct could be an appropriate measure.

If an employee, official, contractor, volunteer, visitor or member of the public is experiencing bullying or harassment from a third party, the Council will act reasonably in upholding its duty of care towards them.

If an employee, official, contractor, volunteer, visitor or member of the public is bullying or harassing anyone, the Council will act reasonably in upholding its duty of care towards them. This could include cancelling a contract, asking a volunteer to cease their activities as a volunteer, asking a visitor or member of the public to leave the meeting or activity where the bullying or harassment is taking place.

The Council will consider whether it is appropriate to send a formal letter recording the incident and detailing that conduct of this nature will not be tolerated.

The Council will also consider whether it is appropriate for incidents to be formally recorded in a formal meeting of the Council.

In extreme cases, harassment can constitute a criminal offence and the Council will consider taking appropriate legal advice, if such a matter arises.