Willingale Parish Council

Anti-Harassment, Bullying and Dignity at Work Policy

Adopted: 10th March 2026
Next Review: September 2030

Introduction

Willingale Parish Council (the Council) are committed to creating a harmonious environment by ensuring equal opportunities and fair treatment for every employee in the workplace.

One of the key aims of the policy is to ensure the Council provide a positive working environment in which all staff feel comfortable and in which everyone is treated with respect and dignity, regardless of; age, being married or in a civil partnership, disability, sex, gender reassignment, pregnancy, maternity, paternity, race (which includes colour, nationality and ethnic or national origins), sexual orientation, religion or belief or any other personal factor or quality. This policy aims to ensure that there is no bullying and harassment of and by any employee, Councillor, contractor, or anyone else engaged to work for the Council. The purpose of this policy is to provide you with both protection and a procedure to raise and effectively deal with a complaint either informally or formally, if you believe you have been harassed or bullied.

Bullying and Harassment

Bullying or harassment will constitute unlawful discrimination where it relates to one of the protected characteristics, which are age, being married or in a civil partnership, sex, gender reassignment, pregnancy, maternity, paternity, race (which includes colour, nationality and ethnic or national origins), disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief. Serious bullying or harassment may amount to other civil or criminal offences, e.g. a civil offence under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 and criminal offences of assault.

Bullying is offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, and/or an abuse or misuse of power that is meant to undermine, humiliate or injure another person.

Examples, though not an exhaustive list, which may constitute bullying are:

- threats, abuse, teasing, gossip and practical jokes;
- humiliation and ridicule either in private, at meetings or in front of the public;
- name calling, insults, devaluing with reference to age, appearance;
- setting impossible deadlines;
- excessive monitoring;
- removing responsibilities;
- withholding information.

Harassment, in general terms, is unwanted conduct related to a relevant protected characteristic, that:

- violates a person's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that person; or

- is reasonably considered by a person to have the effect of violating their dignity or of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them, even if this effect was not intended by the person responsible for the conduct.

Conduct may be harassment whether or not the person behaving in that way intends to offend. Something which is meant to be ‘banter’ may offend another person. Different people find different things acceptable. Everyone has the right to decide what behaviour is acceptable to them and to have their feelings respected by others.

Harassment may also occur where an individual is subjected to unwanted conduct due to their association with another individual who has a protected characteristic. Harassment may also occur where a person engages in unwanted conduct towards another because they have a mistaken perception that the recipient has a protected characteristic.

Harassment may also occur where an individual is subjected to unwanted conduct from a third party, such as a member of the public. If you feel that you have been bullied or harassed by members of the public, contractors, suppliers, councillors or visitors, you should report any such behaviour to the Clerk or in the circumstances of the Clerk to the Chair of the Council in order that the Council can take appropriate action. Bullying or harassment of the public will be dealt with through the disciplinary procedure. If you feel you have been bullied or harassed by the Clerk, you should report such behaviour to the Chair of the Council.

For the avoidance of doubt, the Council will treat a single incident as harassment if it is sufficiently serious.

All bullying and harassment is misconduct and is a disciplinary offence which will be dealt with under our disciplinary and dismissal procedure. Bullying or harassment will often be gross misconduct, which can lead to dismissal without notice.

Examples, though not an exhaustive list, of behaviour which may constitute harassment are:

- physical contact ranging from touching to serious assault;
- verbal and written harassment through jokes, offensive language, gossip and defamatory references;
- unwanted nicknames related to a protected characteristic;
- excluding an individual from social activities due to their association with someone with a protected characteristic;
- intrusion by pestering, spying, following etc.

The Council will treat all such complaints of harassment and bullying seriously and will investigate them promptly, efficiently and in confidence.

The main aim of this policy is to provide a framework for resolving complaints of harassment or bullying and for stopping any behaviour that is causing offence or distress.

Raising a Complaint

You have a right to complain if you are treated in a manner that you believe constitutes harassment or bullying. This will include behaviour that has caused you

offence, humiliation, embarrassment or distress.
Apart from complaints about the behaviour of colleagues, you also have the right to complain if you believe that you have been bullied or harassed by a third party, for example a member of the public.

If you raise a complaint under this policy, you are automatically protected and under no circumstances will you be subjected to any unfavourable treatment or victimisation as a result of making a complaint. However, if it is established that you have made a knowingly false or malicious complaint against another person about harassment or bullying, serious disciplinary action will be taken against you which may result in your dismissal.

If you witness an incident that you believe to be the harassment or bullying of another member of staff, you should report the incident in confidence to the Clerk. The Council will consider all such reports seriously and will treat the information in strict confidence, as far as it is reasonably possible to do so.

Confidentiality is an important part of the procedures provided under this policy. Every worker involved in the operation of the policy, whether making a complaint or involved in any investigation, is responsible for observing the high level of confidentiality that is required.

Breach of confidentiality may give rise to disciplinary action under our disciplinary procedure.

Reporting a Complaint

Before raising a formal complaint, you are encouraged in the first instance to talk directly and informally to the person whom you believe is harassing you and explain clearly what aspect of the person's behaviour is unacceptable, or is causing offence to you, and request that it stop.

It may be that the person whose conduct is causing offence is genuinely unaware that their behaviour is unwelcome or objectionable and that a direct approach may resolve the matter without the need for formal action.
If you would like support in making such an approach, you should contact the Clerk.

However, if you feel unable to take this course of action, or if you have already approached the person to no avail, or if the harassment is of a very serious nature, you may decide to raise a formal complaint.

Formal complaints must be raised, in writing, with the Clerk or, if the complaint is about the Clerk, the Chair of the Council.

When lodging your complaint of harassment/bullying, you should state:

- the name of the person whose behaviour you believe amounts to harassment or bullying where known;
- the type of behaviour that is causing offence, together with specific examples if possible;
- dates and times when incidents of harassment or bullying occurred, and where they occurred;
- the names of any employees who witnessed any incidents, or who

themselves may have been the victims of harassment or bullying by the same person; and

- any action that you have already taken to try to deal with the harassment or bullying.

Management Responsibility

When the Council receives a complaint of harassment or bullying, we have a duty to investigate the matter thoroughly and objectively and to take corrective action in order to ensure compliance with our Dignity at Work Policy.

The Council will be responsive and supportive towards anyone who raises a genuine complaint of harassment or bullying.

The council's Human Resource advisers will assist the Clerk in dealing with complaints of harassment or bullying.

The Council reserves the right, at our discretion, to suspend from duty any employee under suspicion of harassment or bullying for a temporary period whilst investigations are carried out. Such suspension will be for as short a time as possible and will be on full pay.