

# **BRACEBRIDGE HEATH PARISH COUNCIL**

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## **Bullying and Harassment policy**

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## **1 Purpose & scope**

- 1.1 In support of our value to respect others, the Council will not tolerate bullying or harassment by, or of, any of its employees, volunteers, officials, members, contractors, visitors to the council or members of the public from the community which we serve.
- 1.2 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 all role holders in order to protect them from bullying and harassment.

## **2 Definitions and examples**

### **2.1 Bullying**

“Bullying may be characterized 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.”

### **2.2 Harassment**

“is unwanted conduct that violates a person’s dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating 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.”

- 2.3 These definitions are from ACAS guidance and are behaviours unwanted by the recipient.
- 2.4 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 and payment of legal fees and potentially unlimited compensation.
- 2.5 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 others’ mistakes, preventing an individual’s promotion or training opportunities.
- 2.6 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. It may be a regular pattern of behaviour or a one-off incident.

## **3 The legal position**

- 3.1 Councils have a duty of care towards all their workers and liability under common law arising out of the Employment Rights Act 1996 and the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.

- 3.2 If an employer fails to act reasonably with regard to this duty of care by allowing bullying or harassment to continue unchallenged, an employee may decide to resign and claim 'constructive dismissal' at an Employment Tribunal.
- 3.3 Under the Equality Act 2010, bullying or harassment related to one of the protected characteristics covered by the Act (age, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, race, religion, belief, colour, disability) can be considered unlawful discrimination which could lead to an Employment Tribunal claim for discrimination against the corporate employer, the Council and the perpetrator(s) as individual named Respondents.
- 3.4 The legal definition of "Third Party Harassment" has been introduced which makes the employer vicariously liable for harassment from other parties such as parishioners, contractors etc and it must take reasonable steps to manage such situations which could include seeking legal redress on behalf of an employee or Member of the council.
- 3.5 In addition, the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 and Protection from Harassment Act 1997 created a criminal offence of harassment with a fine and/or prison sentence as a penalty and a right to damages for the victim. A harasser may be personally liable to pay damages if a victim complains to an Employment Tribunal on the grounds of discrimination. The 1997 Act was originally designed to assist in stalking situations but case law has demonstrated that it can be relevant to employment disputes, for instance; employers can be vicariously liable for harassment received in the workplace, that the conduct is viewed as 'serious', or 'oppressive and unacceptable', that a 'course of conduct' needs to be established but that this can link incidents which are separated by long time periods and that damages for personal injury and distress can be awarded under the Act.

## **4 Process for dealing with complaints of bullying and harassment**

### **4.1 Informal approach**

4.1.1 Anyone; employee, contractor, member or visitor, who feels he or she is being bullied or harassed 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.

4.1.2 Anyone concerned about being bullied or harassed is encouraged to maintain a journal or other record of the incidents.

### **4.2 Formal approach**

4.2.1 Where a role holder feels unable to resolve the matter informally any complaint about harassment or bullying can be raised confidentially and informally with the Chairman of the Council or Chairman of the Personnel committee.

4.2.2 It may be appropriate for the complaint to be put in writing after the initial discussion, as this will enable formal procedures to be invoked. For employees, this will invoke the Council's Grievance policy.

## **5 Penalties and actions**

5.1 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 perpetrator of the alleged action/behaviour.

- 5.2 Bullying and harassment by any employed persons can be considered examples of serious misconduct which will be dealt with through the Disciplinary Procedure at gross misconduct level and may result in summary dismissal from employment.
- 5.3 If elected Members are bullying or harassing employees, contractors, fellow councillors or others, then a referral through the Standards process in place at the time reported as a contravention of the Member's Code of Conduct could be an appropriate measure.
- 5.4 If an employee or councillor is experiencing bullying or harassment from a third party the Council will act reasonably in upholding its duty of care towards its role holders.
- 5.5 In extreme cases, harassment can constitute a criminal offence and the Council should take appropriate legal advice, sometimes available from the council's insurer, if such a matter arises.
- 5.6 Employees
- 5.6.1 For an employee found to have been bullying/harassing others this will follow the council's Disciplinary Procedures.
- 5.7 Members
- 5.7.1 For a Member who the Council reasonably believes to have been bullying or harassing another person(s) whilst undertaking council activities the action taken must be reasonable and in some cases counselling or training in appropriate skill areas e.g. inter-personal communication, assertiveness, chairmanship etc., may be more appropriate than a penalty.
- 5.7.2 The range of disciplinary sanctions available to the council, where a member has been involved in bullying/harassment are limited but do include; admonishment and an undertaking not to repeat the process, removal of opportunities to further harass/bully, a referral under the Code of Conduct to the Monitoring Officer.
- 5.7.3 There may also be a referral to the Police under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997, or a claim to an Employment Tribunal for Third Party harassment (for harassment relating to one of the protected characteristics under the Equality Act) in the most extreme cases. This list is not exhaustive.
- 5.8 False, unsubstantiated, or malicious allegations of harassment or bullying which damage the reputation of a fellow employee/Member will not be tolerated and will be dealt with as serious misconduct under the Disciplinary Procedure or a referral to the Monitoring Officer.

## **6 Responsibilities**

- 6.1 All parties to 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.
- 6.2 If unacceptable behaviour is observed, then each individual can challenge the perpetrator and ask them to stop.
- 6.3 Bullying is more likely to be complained about when individual Members criticise staff, often without objective evidence, without the mandate from the corporate body of the

Council and in environments which are open to the public or other employees or by way of blogs, Facebook comments, or in the pub or local playground.

- 6.4 The council undertakes to share its policy with all members and workers and request that each party signs to demonstrate acceptance of its terms. All new members and employees will be provided with a copy of this policy.

## **7 Policy review**

- 7.1 The Personnel committee is responsible for the review of this policy on a biennial basis or in response to changes in relevant legislation.

## **8 Related legislation, policies & guidance**

- 8.1 This policy is not a substitute for legislation, regulations and codes of practice. Related legislation, policies and guidance is listed below:

- Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended in 2005)
- Employment Relations act 1999
- Employment Rights Act 1996
- Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
- Protection from Harassment Act 1997

Bracebridge Heath Parish Council internal documents:

- Councillor and Employee protocol
- Disciplinary policy
- Equality policy
- Grievance policy

## **9 Version control and amendment history**

Date approved	Version Number	Revision / amendments made	Review date
October 2021	1.0	New policy – replaced the behaviour at work policy	October 2023
September 2024	1.1	References to Executive committee replaced with Personnel committee; New header used; altered description of bullying.	September 2026