
Anti-Bullying and Harassment Policy

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils





Change Record

Change Record	
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1 Vision and Values

Our Vision

We are customer focused and approachable. We are honest and open and are committed to providing high quality cost-effective public services.

Our Values



Working Together

We are a committed professional team, who embrace change and help one another improve



People and Planet

We care about each other and the environment we share



Respect

We act with integrity, and champion diversity and inclusivity



Accountability

We take ownership, do what we say, strive for clarity and welcome feedback



Approachability

We are open, honest and accessible



2 Introduction

2.1 Purpose

This document details the councils Anti-Bullying and Harassment Policy. The Councils are committed to providing a respectful, safe, and inclusive work environment. Harassment or bullying in any form, including sexual harassment, is not tolerated. This policy outlines the steps we take to prevent harassment and support anyone who experiences or witnesses it.

2.2 Scope

This Policy and Procedure applies to any permanent or temporary employee of councils excluding Contractors/Agency Workers who are the employees of third parties associated with the councils.

The councils will engage with third parties, including agency workers and contractors, to ensure they are aware of and comply with the principles of this policy. This includes setting clear expectations regarding behaviors and conduct when working on behalf of the councils.

This document supersedes any previously existing or alternative policies, agreements or arrangements relating to Anti- Bullying and Harassment Policy at the councils.

2.3 Contractual Status

The councils reserve the right to revise, withdraw or replace the content of this policy at any time and to introduce new policies from time to time to reflect the changing needs of the organisations.

The Anti-Bullying and Harassment Policy will be regularly reviewed to ensure legislative compliance and best practice and may therefore be subject to adjustment from time to time.

All changes to the councils People and Culture Policies & Procedures will be updated on the People and Culture page of Jarvis, SharePoint, advised through general email notification and, where necessary, team briefings or other face to face communications to assist understanding and application.

2.4 Relevant legislation

- **Equality Act 2010:** Protects individuals from harassment based on protected characteristics, including age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, Pregnancy and maternity, and Marriage and civil partnership
- **Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023:** Strengthens the responsibility of employers to prevent third-party harassment in the workplace.



- **Health and Safety at Work Act 1974:** Places a duty on employers to protect the health, safety, and welfare of employees, including mental wellbeing related to harassment.
- **Employment Rights Act 1996:** Ensures protection from unfair dismissal related to reporting harassment.

2.5 Alternative formats

Alternative formats of this publication can be made available on request. These include large print, braille, audio, email, easy read and other languages. Please contact Equalities@southandvale.gov.uk



3 Policy

3.1 Definition of Harassment

Harassment is any unwanted behaviour that makes someone feel intimidated, humiliated, or uncomfortable. It may be verbal, physical, or non-verbal and can occur in person, online, or through third-party interactions.

Harassment is unlawful when it is related to a protected characteristic, in line with the Equalities Act 2010 such as:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Marriage and civil partnership

A single incident, depending on its severity, can constitute harassment. This means that even one instance of inappropriate behaviour, if it is serious enough to create an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment, may meet the definition of harassment under this policy. Each situation will be assessed individually, considering the impact on the affected person.

Harassment can occur in any context related to work, such as in physical workplaces, through online communications, at work-related events, or outside of working hours when linked to work activities.

Examples of harassment include, but are not limited to:

- Making offensive or inappropriate comments, jokes, or gestures.
- Sending or sharing discriminatory or offensive emails, messages, or images.
- Unwelcome physical contact, such as touching, grabbing, or other physical advances.
- Displaying offensive material, such as posters or social media content.
- Mocking or belittling someone based on a protected characteristic.



The councils are committed to upholding their Equality Policy, which emphasises the importance of promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion in all aspects of work. Harassment of any kind undermines these principles and will not be tolerated.

3.2 Definition of Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment includes unwelcome behaviour of a sexual nature, such as inappropriate comments, unwanted touching, suggestive gestures, or sharing offensive material.

It also includes treating someone less favourably because they have submitted or refused to submit to unwanted conduct of a sexual nature in the past.

A person may be sexually harassed even if they were not the intended target.

A person may experience sexual harassment because of conduct of a sexual nature that they find unwanted, even if it was not intended to have that effect by the person doing it.

This applies to all situations, including social events and online communication.

A single incident can amount to sexual harassment.

3.3 Zero Tolerance

The councils will not tolerate sexual harassment in any context related to work, whether it occurs in physical workplaces, online, or outside of working hours e.g. social events. Any member of staff who sexually harasses another person will face disciplinary action, which may include dismissal in appropriate cases.

3.4 Commitment to protecting staff from harassment

The Councils are fully committed to fostering a safe and respectful environment, in line with best practices, and the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) 8 Steps for preventing harassment. The councils pledge covers the workplace and all work-related settings:

- We take proactive steps to prevent harassment by identifying risks and ensuring our staff are aware of unacceptable behaviours.
- We will foster leadership commitment, ensuring senior management takes responsibility for maintaining a harassment-free workplace.



- Clear standards of conduct will be communicated to all employees and third parties, emphasising zero tolerance for any form of harassment.
- Reporting mechanisms are in place and accessible to everyone. Employees can report concerns confidentially, and we commit to taking all complaints seriously.
- We will train and educate all employees on preventing harassment, with regular reviews to ensure our training remains effective.
- Monitoring and evaluating incidents and trends will allow us to continuously improve our prevention strategy.
- We pledge to take immediate action when complaints arise and ensure that victims and witnesses are supported without fear of retaliation.
- Finally, we will work to embed this culture of respect and dignity into all aspects of our operations, ensuring everyone feels safe and valued.

This pledge forms the foundation of our commitment to creating a positive and inclusive work environment for all.

3.5 Definition of Third-Party Harassment

We take third-party harassment seriously, ensuring employees are protected from inappropriate behaviour by customers, suppliers, or anyone outside the organisation.

Third party harassment occurs where a person is harassed by someone who is not employed by the councils or is under its control but with whom they have come into contact during the course of their employment. Including but not exclusive to suppliers and visitors.

Third-party harassment can occur in any context related to work, such as during interactions in physical workplaces, online communications, at work-related events, or outside of working hours when linked to work activities.

The law requires us to take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment by third parties and we will not tolerate third party harassment either by a third party to our staff or by our staff to a third party.

If you experience or witness third-party harassment, report it immediately as defined in section 3.7 Reporting and Resolution, and we will take action as appropriate, for example issuing a warning notice, banning third parties from premises, and/or reporting to the police.

If a member of staff has been harassed by a third party, we will take appropriate action to investigate, take action, and prevent it from reoccurring in the future.



3.6 Definition of Bullying

Bullying is unwanted behaviour that involves a misuse of power or position to undermine, humiliate, or intimidate someone. It can be verbal, physical, or non-verbal and often occurs repeatedly over time. However, a single incident may be classified as bullying if it is severe enough to have a significant impact on the individual.

Examples of bullying include:

- Spreading malicious rumours or gossip
- Insulting or ridiculing someone, particularly in public
- Deliberately excluding someone from workplace activities or communications
- Unjustified criticism or persistent pressure to meet unreasonable deadlines
- Misuse of authority, such as blocking promotion opportunities or assigning demeaning tasks.
- Bullying, like harassment, is unacceptable and will not be tolerated under any circumstances.

3.7 Reporting and Resolution

If you believe that you have been bullied or harassed, you have a number of options open to you:

- Raise issue with your line manager
- Speak to your HR advisor and/or your union representative if you are a member.
- If you feel safe doing so, you may choose to speak to the person who has bullied/harassed you, explain why their behaviour is unwanted, and ask them to stop. However, even if the issue is dealt with informally, you should still report the incident so it can be monitored, and appropriate action taken if necessary.
- You can raise a grievance under the councils' grievance procedure (you have the option of choosing an informal or formal approach).

Sometimes an informal solution may not be appropriate, or the informal approach has not worked. In these circumstances, the People and Culture team will discuss the process of raising a formal grievance. If you are uncertain whether an incident or series of incidents amounts to harassment, please speak to your manager or the People and Culture team (hr@southandvale.gov.uk) and/or union representative if you are a member and ask for advice.



If your concerns relate to your manager, contact the People and Culture team or another senior leader.

Reports of bullying or harassment will be handled confidentially and sensitively in the first instance. Should the matter progress to a formal grievance or another process, confidentiality will be maintained in line with the guidelines outlined in the relevant policy. If the individual does not wish to take the matter forward but the behaviour raises significant concerns, the councils may still pursue appropriate action in line with the relevant policies to ensure a safe and respectful work environment. In such cases, confidentiality will be maintained as far as possible, while balancing the need to address the issue.

Formal grievances will be investigated promptly, and where there is evidence of bullying or harassment, will take into account any aggravating factors, such as abuse of power, when determining the appropriate action. This may lead to the formal disciplinary process being instigated. Disciplinary action may be taken, up to and including dismissal.

3.8 Potential Criminal Behaviour

In cases where harassment involves criminal behaviour, such as physical assault, threats of violence, or other criminal offenses, the matter will be referred to the police for investigation. The councils take these matters seriously and will cooperate fully with law enforcement. In such situations, disciplinary action within the organization may also be pursued, in addition to any legal proceedings.

3.9 Witnessing or Experiencing Harassment

If you witness bullying or harassment in any form between others, you can report the issue confidentially to the People and Culture team and/or union representative (if you are a member).

If you feel safe to do so, you can in the first instance approach the individual, explaining how their behaviour is inappropriate and/or unwanted and explaining to the individual how their behaviour has affected you as someone witnessing such behaviour.

If you do not feel safe to approach the individual, or if the behaviour persists, you should use the reporting format defined in section 3.7 Reporting and Resolution



3.10 Protection from Victimisation

Anyone raising a complaint or supporting an investigation will not be subjected to any form of retaliation or detriment.

If you feel you have been victimised as a result of raising a complaint or participating in an investigation, you should report this immediately to your line manager or the People and Culture team. All concerns will be taken seriously and investigated promptly, with appropriate action taken to address and prevent further victimisation.

We are committed to protecting individuals from unfair treatment for reporting harassment in good faith.

3.11 Vexatious Allegations

The councils are committed to ensuring a safe and respectful workplace where all employees feel empowered to raise concerns about harassment, discrimination, or other inappropriate behaviour. However, making deliberately false or vexatious allegations is a serious matter.

If an allegation is found, after a thorough investigation, to have been made maliciously, dishonestly, or without reasonable grounds, the individual responsible may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.

It is important to note that raising a concern in good faith, even if it is not substantiated following investigation, will not result in disciplinary action. The councils encourage all employees to report concerns honestly and responsibly to help maintain a supportive and respectful workplace.

3.12 Support and Confidentiality

We offer support to anyone affected by harassment through our People and Culture team, Employee Assistance Programme and Mental Health First Aiders. Information of how to access this support can be found on Jarvis.

Complaints will be handled with strict confidentiality, and details shared only on a need-to-know basis.



3.13 Learning and Development

The councils are committed to ensuring that all employees have access to learning and development opportunities to enhance their knowledge and skills, including training related to bullying and harassment prevention and fostering a respectful workplace. Training is available through the following platforms:

- Employees can access a range of online courses, including mandatory training modules and additional resources on workplace conduct and equality via our Learning Management System and our Subscription with MBL Seminars.
- In-person or virtual sessions may periodically be organised to provide interactive learning experiences.
- Line managers may facilitate team-specific training to address departmental needs and reinforce organisational policies.
- The People and Culture team can assist in arranging bespoke training for teams or individuals where specific needs are identified.
- Utilisation of the corporate Learning and Development budget for additional learning can be sought, details can be found in the learning and development policy.

Employees are encouraged to utilise these resources to stay informed about workplace expectations and contribute to maintaining a positive organisational culture. For more details, please visit the Learning and Development page on Jarvis or contact the People and Culture team at learning@southandvale.gov.uk

3.14 Monitoring and Review

We regularly review this policy to ensure its effectiveness and alignment with legal obligations, including the Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023.