

Harassment and Bullying Prevention Policy

1. Introduction

It is in everyone's interests for the environment in which we work to be harmonious and respectful. Although we would like to think this is always the case, this policy recognises that inappropriate behaviour, which may include harassment, can and does take place. This policy aims to ensure that if inappropriate behaviour does occur in the workplace it is dealt with in a serious, sensitive and confidential manner so that the matter can be resolved as quickly as possible for all concerned.

The council is committed to tackling incidents of inappropriate behaviour swiftly and decisively. A strong stand is needed on this issue to enable people of all backgrounds to have dignity at work, and enable them to progress in the organisation and fully contribute to our success.

2. Identifying Harassment

Different things affect us all in different ways, and therefore what one individual might think of as harmless could be felt to be harassment by another. It is important to remember that harassment is defined by the way that someone feels about your behaviour, and not by your intentions. For example, you tell a joke that you think is funny. Although it was just a bit of fun and you did not intend to upset anyone, one of your colleagues finds it offensive. This individual may have a valid claim that they have been harassed.

It is important to note that the question of whether or not behaviour constitutes harassment rests with the person on the receiving end of the behaviour. Friendly, welcome and reciprocated actions are fine, but great care should be taken when interacting with others to distinguish between behaviour that is viewed as welcome and behaviour that is potentially offensive to another person. Harassment may also take place between several people (e.g. one person may harass a number of others, or a group of people may harass one individual).

A single incident can constitute harassment, if it is sufficiently serious. Alternatively, a series of relatively minor incidents or actions can be collectively viewed as harassment, in particular if the behaviour persists after the individual has expressed an objection to it or asked for it to stop. The Council's position is that no harassment of any kind should take place and all employees have a responsibility to ensure at all times that their own behaviour does not offend others.

It is important to remember that harassment:

- depends on the view of the individual on the receiving end of another person's behaviour
- does not depend on the severity of the behaviour – a joke or a throw away comment could be perceived as harassment by anyone who hears it
- can include behaviour that you hear or see, even if it is not directed at you and has nothing to do with you.

Harassment can be based on specific aspects of an individual or group, such as gender, race, skin colour, ethnic origin, disability, sexual orientation, religion/faith or age.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is the creation of an offensive working environment where individuals feel uneasy because of their gender. It is direct and personal, and causes humiliation, offence and distress to the recipient.

Racial Harassment

Racial harassment, which covers race, colour, nationality or ethnic or national origins, can be seen as a deliberate or calculated act directed by members of one distinct racial group against those of a different racial group. Harassment in this context may be defined as any action by a person (or a group of people) that is unwanted, found objectionable, and causes humiliation, offence and distress.

3. Bullying

Bullying is regarded as any behaviour, occasional or persistent, by anyone, that intimidates or oppresses another person, possibly through misuse of authority or power. It invariably has a negative effect on the victim's self-confidence, self-esteem and general well-being. It can be subtle in nature and is intended to hurt. It can take place with your work colleagues in public or in private, at work or socially.

Bullying is not only conduct by an individual. It might be carried out by a group of people against one. While this might most commonly be against a junior person in a department, it can also occur against a senior member of staff or even a team manager.

4. Preventing Harassment

We all have a responsibility to discourage harassment and prevent it from taking place by:

- being aware of the problems that harassment can cause, and ensuring that our behaviour does not cause others to feel harassed
- making our colleagues aware that certain conduct or behaviour is causing concern or offence to ourselves or to others

Line Managers and supervisors have a particular responsibility to prevent harassment taking place by:

- being alert to the possibility that harassment may be happening in their area
- using their judgement to correct behaviour that could be considered offensive, and reminding employees of organisational policy on this matter
- taking prompt action to stop harassment as soon as it is identified
- dealing with all incidents quickly, seriously, sensitively and in confidence.

5. Dealing with Harassment

All complaints of harassment will be dealt with promptly, fairly, sensitively and in confidence.

Most people who complain that they are being harassed simply want the behaviour to stop. Where appropriate, they can be encouraged to take charge of the situation themselves by informing the harasser that his or her behaviour is unacceptable and that it must stop.

If you feel that you are unable to deal with a particular situation without support, you should ask your line manager or supervisor to explain to the person causing offence that their behaviour is unwelcome and must stop. If the harasser happens to be your manager or supervisor or elected member you could approach the next level of management or contact Human Resources.

If this initial approach fails to resolve the problem, you may use the formal grievance procedure. **Disciplinary action will be considered in all cases where a claim of harassment is substantiated.**

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Some examples of Sexual Harassment

The following examples identify some types of unwelcome or unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature

- **Physical** -Touching, patting, pinching or brushing against another employees body; assault
- **Written, Verbal** - Sexual advances, demands for sexual favours, lewd comments, sexual innuendo or other suggestive comments; offensive emails, notes or messages, flirtation
- **Non-Verbal** - Display of pornographic or sexually suggestive pictures, objects or written materials, leering, whistling or making sexually suggestive gestures.
- **Intimidation** - Conduct that ridicules or offends or is physically abusive, based on gender, dress or appearance.
- **Sexual Extortion** -Suggestions that sexual favours might further someone's career, or that refusal may damage it.

Some examples of Bullying

Examples of bullying, although not exhaustive, may include:

- shouting or swearing at an individual
- persistent, excessive, unfair or unjustified criticism
- public humiliation and/or insults
- persistent undervaluing of a person's effort
- constant ignoring of opinions
- withholding information without justification that would be beneficial to an individual
- unjustified, excessive monitoring and/or supervision
- setting someone up to fail – for example, setting a target/objective that simply cannot be achieved
- constant changing of targets for no justifiable reason
- unreasonably blocking requests for leave
- aggressive communications
- intimidating or threatening behaviour.