

BULLYING AND HARASSMENT POLICY

STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT

Godalming Town Council fully supports the right of all people to be treated with respect and dignity in the workplace. The Council recognises that bullying is not only unacceptable on moral grounds and harassment on legal grounds, but that either can have a negative effect on both individuals and the organisation. Under the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974, employers have a general duty of care to protect employees' health, safety and welfare whilst at work. Prolonged harassment or bullying can cause both serious psychological and physical health problems, such as stress and depression. Godalming Town Council is therefore committed to promoting a working environment free from any form of bullying or harassment.

Bullying and harassment will not be tolerated by anyone at Godalming Town Council and all employees will be made aware of Godalming Town Council's policy forbidding bullying and are expected to adhere to this policy. This policy applies to staff both on and off the premises, as well as Councillors.

All employees are required to help create a working environment in which bullying and harassment are unacceptable. Employees should in particular ensure that they do not collude with bullying or harassing behaviour and that they fully cooperate with any complaints procedure. Managers are responsible for raising awareness of the issue, responding constructively to any complaints, and challenging and stopping bullying and harassment at work.

Godalming Town Council also recognises that it has a responsibility to protect employees from bullying or harassment at work by members of the public.

DEFINITION OF BULLYING AND HARASSMENT

Bullying and harassment may occur 'face-to-face', in meetings, through written communications including email, by telephone and through automatic supervision methods.

Bullying is generally behaviour that is identified as a misuse of power. Bullying is primarily intimidating in nature, but may also be insulting, offensive or malicious. It is frequently recognised through the abuse or misuse of power through means intended to undermine, humiliate, denigrate or create a detriment for the employee. Bullying may occur as an isolated incident, but is commonly persistent.

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 age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage & civil partnership; pregnancy & maternity; race; religion or belief; sex or sexual orientation.

Examples of **Unacceptable Behaviour** are as follows:

- spreading malicious rumours, or insulting someone (particularly on the grounds of race, sex, sexual orientation and religion or belief)
- copying memos that are critical about someone to others who do not need to know ridiculing or demeaning someone — picking on them or setting them up to fail
- exclusion or victimisation
- unfair treatment
- overbearing supervision or other misuse of power or position
- unwelcome sexual advances — touching, standing too close, display of offensive materials
- making threats or comments about job security without foundation
- deliberately undermining a competent worker by overloading and constant criticism
- preventing individuals progressing by intentionally blocking promotion or training opportunities.

(this list is not exhaustive)

PREVENTION OF BULLYING AND HARASSMENT

Informal Approach

A few people are not aware that their behaviour is unacceptable and an informal discussion can lead to greater understanding and an agreement that the behaviour will cease. It may be that the individual will choose to do this themselves, or they may obtain support from a colleague, or an external source in the case of a Councillor.

Disciplinary Procedures

All complaints of bullying and/or harassment, or information from staff relating to such complaints, will be taken seriously and dealt with fairly, sensitively and confidentially.

Colleagues who witness another colleague being harassed or bullied will be able to report it to the appropriate manager, without fear of reprisal. Any victimisation arising from making a complaint (informal or formal) will not be tolerated.

Grievance Procedure

In the event that an employee wishes to make a formal complaint, the Council's Grievance Procedure will be implemented immediately and complaints will be investigated swiftly in an objective and independent manner. Appropriate disciplinary action may be taken following Godalming Town Council's Disciplinary Procedure.

In the event of a case which appears to involve serious misconduct, the Council recognises that it has a duty to ensure that the complainant is safeguarded and arrangements must be put in place; generally this will be to ensure that the complainant is not left alone at any time so that the course of unacceptable conduct cannot continue behind closed doors.

Contacts

Step one of the Council's Grievance Procedure requires the employee to discuss the matter with their line manager. Godalming Town Council recognises that this may not be appropriate if it is the immediate manager who is conducting the bullying or harassment. In such a case, the employee may approach the Chairman of the Staffing Sub-Committee or the Town Clerk should they wish to. The Chairman of the Staffing Sub-Committee will be able to:

- provide sympathetic assistance to employees with complaints of bullying/harassment

- explain to the employee how the grievance procedure operates
- establish the main details of the complaint
- channel the complaint to the appropriate manager for action if the employee decides to take the matter further

The Chairman of the Staffing Sub-Committee will discuss cases in complete confidence and will not divulge information to any other person without the agreement of the employee. Any employee who talks to the Chairman of the Staffing Sub-Committee about bullying is not under any obligation to take further action.

An employee may initiate the Council's Grievance Procedure with or without having approached the Chairman of the Staffing Sub-Committee.

Unfounded Allegations of Bullying or Harassment

If an employee makes an unfounded allegation of bullying or harassment for malicious reasons, this will be investigated and dealt with fairly and objectively under Godalming Town Council's Disciplinary Procedure.

Whenever a case of bullying or harassment arises, Godalming Town Council will take the opportunity to examine its policy, procedures and working methods to see if they can be improved.