

Herne & Broomfield Parish Council Harassment & Bullying Policy

The aim of the Policy is to:

- Provide a definition of harassment and bullying;
- Contribute towards developing a working environment that is free from hostility;
- Provide an effective channel through which individuals can seek solutions to perceived harassment

Herne & Broomfield Parish Council is committed to providing a workplace in which employees and councillors can contribute effectively in a non-threatening environment. Intimidating behaviour is likely to have a negative effect on individuals and groups and as such is harmful to the Council. Employees will be encouraged to challenge all forms of harassment without fear of victimisation.

Everyone has a responsibility for implementing the policy. Additionally, every employee and councillor is expected to be responsible for his or her own behaviour and treat colleagues with respect.

Definition of Harassment

Harassment can take on many forms, but may be described as unwanted behaviour which is considered unacceptable by normal standards. Such behaviour will generally leave the recipient feeling humiliated, intimidated, offended or embarrassed.

Grounds of Harassment

People can be victimised for many reasons. The following list shows the most common reasons for harassment. **It is neither definitive nor exhaustive:**

- Gender
- Race, ethnic origin, nationality and skin colour
- Sexual orientation
- Physical or mental disabilities or impairments
- Age
- Social background
- Health
- Religion
- AIDS or HIV status
- Physical characteristics
- Personal beliefs

The way in which harassment manifests itself can be wide-ranging. However, the behaviour shown by the harasser will always be unwanted by the recipient. The most common behaviours relating to harassment are:

- Physical contact
- Offensive jokes and language
- Slander and gossip
- Obscene gestures
- Posters and graffiti, including IT images or text
- Deliberate exclusion of victims

- Coercion for sexual favours
- Pressure to participate in social groups
- Pestering, spying or stalking

Effects of Harassment

Recipients of harassment can be subject to fear, stress and anxiety, which are likely to have a detrimental effect on their personal life and their work performance. Absenteeism is often higher for individuals who are suffering from harassment. The effect on the council can also be negative as a result of poor morale, poor teamwork and lower productivity, for example. Harassment is a very individual feeling and people should be treated with sensitivity at all times.

Sanctions

Harassment within Herne & Broomfield Parish Council will be treated as a disciplinary offence. If an employee or councillor is found to have harassed a colleague they will be subject to disciplinary action. In some cases harassment is also unlawful (for example sexual and racial harassment) and may lead to police involvement.

Procedures for Obtaining Help

All allegations of harassment will be taken seriously and investigated swiftly, thoroughly and confidentially. All parties will be treated in a sensitive manner in order to preserve the dignity of those involved and the Council will protect those who complain of harassment from victimisation.

Employees and councillors who feel they are being harassed are advised to make it clear to the person involved that their behaviour is unacceptable and must stop. This will give the person in question the opportunity to recognise that their behaviour is not acceptable and take action to rectify the situation immediately. They should inform the Chairman. Should the situation still remain unresolved then an employee has the option to pursue the matter more formally through the Grievance Procedure. Councillors or Employees may also pursue matters against a Councillor through the Standards Committee.

Where the Chairman is the cause a councillor should approach the Vice Chairman

Investigation

A thorough investigation will be carried out to ensure fairness to all parties. It is important to act quickly in order to minimise stress to all involved. It may be necessary to suspend one of the parties during the investigation.

The investigation will focus on factual information and will allow both parties to state their case with representation if desired (a work colleague or fellow Councillor).

No decision will be taken until the matter has been thoroughly investigated.

Concluding the Investigation

Where a complaint is upheld, the penalty imposed on the harasser will be in line with the Disciplinary Procedure. In cases of gross misconduct by an employee this can lead to summary dismissal. In the case of a councillor they may be required to resign.

Where a complaint is not upheld, the Council will take no disciplinary action against the alleged harasser. Should an employee who has made the complaint disagree with this outcome, they then have the right to appeal under the Grievance Procedure.

All complaints will be taken seriously and investigated thoroughly. Any complaints found to have been malicious in intent will be viewed seriously. Such cases may lead to disciplinary action being taken against the individual who claimed harassment without cause.

Adopted March 2007