



## Dignity at Work Policy

Owner	John Harrison, Town Clerk
Reviewer	Kaylee Butcher, Corporate Services Officer Emily Hastings, Corporate Services Manager
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If you require any support in understanding or applying this policy, please contact the Corporate Services Manager. In addition, in line with the Equality Act 2010, we will make reasonable adjustments to remove or reduce disadvantages faced by disabled employees, Councillors, or applicants.

## 1. Mission Statement

1.1 Hailsham Town Council believes that civility and respect are important in the working environment, and expect all staff, councillors and the public to be polite and courteous when working for, and with the council.

1.2 Hailsham Town Council is committed to creating a working environment where all council employees, councillors, contractors and others who come into contact with us in the course of our work, are treated with dignity, respect and courtesy. We aim to create a workplace where there is zero tolerance for harassment and bullying. See appendix 1: Zero Tolerance Statement

1.3 In support of this objective, Hailsham Town Council has signed up to the Civility Pledge, as a commitment to civility and respect in our work, and politeness and courtesy in behaviour, speech, and in the written word. Further information about the Civility and Respect Pledge is available [NALC](#) & [SLCC](#)

1.4 We recognise that there is a continuum where unaddressed issues have the potential to escalate and become larger, more complex issues and this policy sets out how concerns will be managed, however the emphasis of this policy is on resolution and mediation where appropriate, rather than an adversarial process.

1.5 This document:

- Explains how we will respond to complaints of bullying or harassment,
- Ensures that we respond sensitively and promptly,
- Support our employees in ensuring their behaviour does not amount to bullying and/or harassment by giving examples.

## 2. Scope

2.1 This policy covers bullying and harassment of and by Town Clerk/Council Management, Council staff, Councillors, and job applicants engaged to work at Hailsham Town Council. Should agency staff or contractors have a complaint connected to their engagement with Hailsham Town Council this should be raised to their nominated contact, manager, or the Chair of the Council, in the first instance. Should the complaint be about the Chair of the Council the complaint should be raised to the Deputy chair / council's personnel and/ or Staffing Committee.

2.2 Agency staff, or contractors are equally expected to treat council colleagues, and other representatives and stakeholders with dignity and respect, and the council may terminate the contract, without notice, where there are suspicions of harassment or bullying.

2.3 Complaints about other employment matters will be managed under the council's grievance policy.

2.4 It is noted that the management of a situation may differ depending on who the allegations relate to (e.g. employees, contractor, councillor), however, the council will take appropriate action if any of its employees are bullied or harassed by employees, councillors, members of the public, suppliers or contractors.

### **3. The position on bullying and harassment**

3.1 All staff and council representatives are entitled to dignity, respect and courtesy within the workplace and to not experience any form of discrimination. Hailsham Town Council will not tolerate bullying or harassment in our workplace or at work-related events outside of the workplace, whether the conduct is a one-off act or repeated course of conduct, and whether harm is intended or not. Neither will we tolerate retaliation against, or victimisation of, any person involved in bringing a complaint of harassment or bullying. You should also be aware that, if you have bullied or harassed someone (e.g. physical violence, harassment), in some circumstances the treatment may amount to a crime punishable by a fine or imprisonment.

3.2 We expect all representatives of the council to treat each other with respect and uphold the values of the code of conduct, civility and respect pledge, equality opportunities policy, and all other policies and procedures set by the Council.

3.3 We expect you to demonstrate respect by listening and paying attention to others, having consideration for other people's feelings, following protocols and rules, showing appreciation and thanks, and being kind.

3.4 Allegations of bullying and harassment will be treated seriously. Investigations will be carried out promptly, sensitively and, as far as possible, confidentially. See the grievance policy for further details regarding the process. Employees and others who make allegations of bullying or harassment in good faith will not be treated less favourably as a result.

3.5 False accusations of harassment or bullying can have a serious effect on innocent individuals. Staff and others have a responsibility not to make false allegations. While we will assume that all complaints of bullying and harassment are made in good faith, in the event that allegations are found to be malicious or vexatious the person raising the complaint may be subject to action under the council's disciplinary procedure.

### **4. What type of treatment amounts to bullying or harassment?**

4.1 'Bullying' or 'harassment' are phrases that apply to treatment from one person (or a group of people) to another that is unwanted and that has the effect of violating that person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment for that person.

4.1.1 Examples of bullying and harassment include:

- Physical conduct ranging from unwelcome touching to serious assault
- Unwelcome sexual advances
- The offer of rewards for going along with sexual advances e.g. promotion, access to training
- Threats for rejecting sexual advances
- Demeaning comments about a person's appearance
- Verbal abuse or offensive comments, including jokes or pranks related to age, disability, gender re-assignment, marriage, civil partnership, pregnancy, maternity, race, religion, belief, sex or sexual orientation
- Unwanted nicknames, especially related to a person's age, disability, gender re-assignment, marriage, civil partnership, pregnancy, maternity, race, religion, belief, sex or sexual orientation
- Spreading malicious rumours or insulting someone
- Lewd or suggestive comments or gestures

- Deliberate exclusion from conversations, work activities or social activities.
- Withholding information, a person needs in order to do their job
- Practical jokes, initiation ceremonies, inappropriate rituals or banter
- Physical abuse such as hitting, pushing or jostling
- Rifling through, hiding or damaging personal property
- Display of pictures or objects with sexual or racial overtones, even if not directed at any particular person
- Isolation or non-cooperation at work
- Subjecting a person to humiliation or ridicule, belittling their efforts, whether directly and / or in front of others
- The use of obscene gestures
- Abusing a position of power

4.2 Bullying and harassment can occur through verbal and face to face interactions but can also take place through sharing inappropriate or offensive content in writing or via email and other electronic communications and social media.

4.3 It is important to recognise that conduct which one person may find acceptable, another may find totally unacceptable and behaviour could be harassment when the person had no intention to offend. We all have the right to determine what offends us. Some behaviour will be clear to any reasonable person that it is likely to offend – for example sexual touching. Other examples may be less clear, however you should be aware that harassment will occur if behaviour continues after the recipient has advised you that the behaviour is unacceptable to them.

4.4 Harassment can also occur where the unwanted behaviour relates to a perceived characteristic (such as offensive jokes or comments based on the assumption someone is gay, even if they are not) or due to their association with someone else (such as harassment related to their partner having a disability for example). See the council's equality and diversity Policy.

4.5 All employees must, therefore, treat their colleagues with respect and appropriate sensitivity and should feel able to challenge behaviour that they find offensive even if it is not directed at them.

4.6 It is important to recognise that bullying does not include appropriate criticism of an employee's behaviour or effective, robust performance management. Constructive and fair feedback about your behaviour or performance from your manager or colleagues/Councillors is not bullying. It is part of normal employment and management routines and should not be interpreted as anything different.

## 5. Victimisation

5.1 Victimisation is subjecting a person to a detriment because they have, in good faith, complained (whether formally or otherwise) that someone has been bullying or harassing them or someone else, or supported someone to make a complaint or given evidence in relation to a complaint. This would include isolating someone because they have made a complaint or giving them a heavier or more difficult workload.

5.2 Provided that you act in good faith, i.e. you genuinely believe that what you are saying is true, you have a right not to be victimised for making a complaint or doing anything in relation to a complaint of bullying or harassment and the council will take appropriate action to deal with any alleged victimisation, which may include disciplinary action against anyone found to have victimised you.

5.3 Making a complaint that you know to be untrue, or giving evidence that you know to be untrue, may lead to disciplinary action being taken against you.

## **6. Reporting Concerns**

### **6.1 - What you should do if you feel you are being bullied or harassed by a member of the public or supplier (as opposed to a colleague):**

6.1.1 - If you are being bullied or harassed by someone with whom you come into contact at work, please raise this with your nominated manager in the first instance or, with the clerk. Any such report will be taken seriously, and we will decide how best to deal with the situation, in consultation with you.

### **6.2 - What you should do if you feel you are being bullied or harassed by a councillor:**

If you are being bullied or harassed by a councillor, please raise this with the clerk or the chair of the council in the first instance. They will then decide how best to deal with the situation, in consultation with you. There are two possible avenues for you, informal or formal. The Informal Resolution is described below. Formal concerns regarding potential breaches of the Councillors Code of Conduct must be investigated by the Monitoring Officer.

6.2.2 - The council will consider reasonable measures to protect your health and safety. Such measures may include a temporary change in duties or change of work location, not attending meetings with the person about whom the complaint has been made etc.

### **6.3 - What you should do if you witness an incident you believe to be harassment or bullying:**

6.3.1 - If you witness such behaviour you should report the incident in confidence to the clerk or a councillor. Such reports will be taken seriously and will be treated in strict confidence as far as it is possible to do so.

### **6.4 - What you should do if you are being bullied or harassed by another member of staff:**

6.4.1 - If you are being bullied or harassed by a colleague or contractor, there are two possible avenues for you, informal or formal. These are described below.

#### **6.5 - Informal resolution**

6.5.1 - If you are being bullied or harassed, you may be able to resolve the situation yourself by explaining clearly to the perpetrator(s) that their behaviour is unacceptable, contrary to the council's policy and must stop. Alternatively, you may wish to ask the clerk, your nominated manager or a colleague to put this on your behalf or to be with you when confronting the perpetrator(s).

6.5.2 - If the above approach does not work or if you do not want to try to resolve the situation in this way, or if you are being bullied by your own nominated manager, you should raise the issue with the Chair of the Council. (If your concern relates to the chair, you should raise it with the chair of the personnel/staffing committee). The chair (or another appropriate person) will discuss with you the option of trying to resolve the situation informally by telling the alleged perpetrator, without prejudicing the matter, that:

- there has been a complaint that their behaviour is having an adverse effect on a member of the council staff

- such behaviour is contrary to our policy
- for employees, the continuation of such behaviour could amount to a serious disciplinary offence

6.5.3 - It may be possible for this conversation to take place with the alleged perpetrator without revealing your name, if this is what you want. The person dealing with it will also stress that the conversation is confidential.

6.5.4 - In certain circumstances we may be able to involve a neutral third party (a mediator) to facilitate a resolution of the problem. The chair (or another appropriate person) will discuss this with you if it is appropriate.

6.5.5 - If your complaint is resolved informally, the alleged perpetrator(s) will not usually be subject to disciplinary sanctions. However, in exceptional circumstances (such as extremely serious allegation or in cases where a problem has happened before) we may decide to investigate further and take more formal action notwithstanding that you raised the matter informally. We will consult with you before taking this step.

## **6.6 - Raising a formal complaint**

6.6.1 - If informal resolution is unsuccessful or inappropriate, you can make a formal complaint about bullying and harassment through the council's grievance procedure.

## **6.7 - The use of the Disciplinary Procedure**

6.7.1- If at any stage from the point at which a complaint is raised, we believe there is a case to answer and a disciplinary offence might have been committed, we will instigate our disciplinary procedure. We will keep you informed of the outcome.

## Appendix 1: Zero Tolerance Statement



### Zero Tolerance Statement

At Hailsham Town Council we believe that all our staff, management, residents, councillors, and suppliers have the right to work or live in an environment free from all forms of prejudice and abuse.

The Council considers all forms of diversity to be positive and enriching for the Town and should be celebrated. We take a strict zero tolerance approach to any form of discrimination, harassment, victimisation, aggression or bullying including the prohibited conduct described in the Equality Act 2010. Any allegation of such behaviour will be taken seriously and investigated; and appropriate action will be taken where deemed necessary. We actively uphold the right of every individual to be treated with dignity and respect.

We also believe that everyone has the right to be treated equitably. Likewise, we believe that our staff and councillors at Hailsham Town Council should be able to work with the local authorities' wider stakeholders without being subject to any form of bullying, harassment, or discrimination. We therefore extend the principles of our Zero Tolerance Statement to issues surrounding stakeholder engagement.

The prohibition on behaviours described in this statement extends to the wider suppliers, residents, customers, visitors and members that our employees and councillors are required to work with. Keeping our staff and councillors safe when working with the Council's stakeholders and partners is one of our key priorities as an employer. This means that we fully support and encourage any staff member or councillor who is experiencing/has experienced, or witnessed, any form of discrimination, bullying, and harassment to report the issue to their line manager/Corporate Services Manager/Town Clerk.

No act is too small to be addressed or raised. If a member of staff or councillor breaches our approach to zero tolerance and acts unreasonably or in an offensive manner, we encourage our residents, customers, suppliers, visitors, and members to follow the Council complaints procedures.

Every complaint will be taken seriously and will be investigated. We are openly committed to creating a secure, welcoming, and friendly environment that protects the dignity and equality of all staff members, councillors, managers, residents, visitors, and suppliers that work for or in partnership with the local authority.

If such behaviour occurs, we may need to take one or more of the following steps to ensure a safe and respectful environment:

- report the incident to the police
- limit communication to specific channels
- restrict access to Hailsham Town Council premises
- withdraw certain services