



# SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL

## Dignity and Respect at Work Policy

### AIMS OF THE POLICY

The aim of this policy is to ensure that no employee, or anyone else involved with the Town Council, is subjected to any form of bullying or harassment and to provide for a complaints procedure should this occur.

This policy will be communicated to all employees within the Town Council, including new employees and, whilst the implementation of the policy is the duty of managers and supervisors, all employees have individual responsibility to comply with both the spirit and wording of the policy.

Harassment or bullying of or by Elected Members, employees, customers, contractors or visitors is not acceptable. Any behaviour which results in an individual feeling demeaned, bullied, threatened, intimidated or patronised will not be tolerated and the Council will investigate any alleged cases of harassment through formal and informal procedures.

The effects of various forms of bullying and harassment can be far-reaching and detrimental to the individual concerned and their employer. These include:

- employees becoming less motivated and less productive
- increased levels of stress, potentially damaging the health of the recipient of the bullying or harassment
- an atmosphere of intimidation and poor morale in the workplace
- loss of self-confidence and self-esteem
- increased sickness absence
- high employee turnover
- loss of respect for managers and supervisors
- poor performance
- damage to the Council's reputation
- resignations
- tribunal and other court cases and payment of unlimited compensation

Employees often suffer bullying in silence because they are reluctant to draw attention to the situation, or fear that the situation will not be taken seriously.

### The Legal Position

The Equality Act 2010 highlights the need for employers to develop and implement coherent policies to prevent harassment. In addition, various laws place responsibilities on employers to protect employees and these are outlined below.

### DEFINITIONS

Acts of harassment usually centre on unwanted, offensive or intrusive behaviour, often with a sexual, racial, physical or psychological component. Whether or not the harassment is intentional is irrelevant; it is simply whether the behaviour displayed is unacceptable by normal standards. Harassment can take the form of a single incident or many incidents and can be an abuse of power, regardless of whether that power is real or perceived. The key is that the actions or comments are viewed as demeaning and unacceptable to the recipient.

Behaviour that is considered bullying by one person may be considered firm management by another. Most people will agree on extreme cases of bullying and harassment, but it is sometimes the 'grey' areas that cause most problems.

Bullying is where an individual uses their strength or power to hurt, intimidate or undermine others. It can have multiple forms, some obvious and easy to identify, others more difficult to explain. Bullying may be characterised as offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, an abuse or misuse of power through means intended to undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient. Whatever the form it takes, it will be unwanted behaviour that is unwelcome and unpleasant.

#### **Forms of bullying may include:**

- humiliating an individual in front of their colleagues
- deliberately ignoring or excluding individuals from activities
- behaviour which is intimidating, threatening or physically abusive
- undermining an individual and their ability to do their job
- consistently criticising an employee in terms of their professional or personal standing
- shouting at or ridiculing an individual in front of colleagues
- 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
- unfair treatment
- overbearing supervision or other misuse of power or position
- 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
- preventing individuals from getting their point across.

#### **RESPONSIBILITIES**

All Council employees are responsible for:

- ensuring a working environment in which the dignity of all employees is respected
- supporting colleagues who have been or are being harassed or bullied
- using and following this procedure if they believe they are experiencing bullying or harassment.

All managers are responsible for:

- explaining this policy to their employees and taking steps to positively promote this policy
- ensuring that bullying or harassment does not occur in the work areas for which they are responsible
- being supportive to any employee who complains about bullying or harassment undergoing the training relating to the policy.

#### **PROCEDURES AND ACTION**

Anyone who believes that they are the subject of harassment or bullying in any form can take the following steps:

##### ***Undertake the Informal Procedure:***

An informal approach may produce solutions that are speedy, effective and minimise the embarrassment caused to all parties. Some people may be genuinely unaware that their behaviour in certain circumstances is unacceptable and may be defined as bullying or harassment. Sometimes when this is clearly pointed out to them the problem can be resolved.

### ***Informal action:***

If at all possible, those who feel they are the subject of bullying or harassment should tell the person(s) concerned that their behaviour is causing offence and ask them to stop. It may be helpful to have a note of incidents including times and dates in order to be able to give examples of the behaviour that may have caused offence.

### ***Informal action with assistance:***

If an individual has attempted to address the issues or alternatively does not feel able to do so without support and assistance they should seek advice from their line manager, who may need to discuss the issues with both parties.

## **UNDERTAKE THE FORMAL PROCEDURE**

This may be necessary where the informal approach has proved ineffective, or where the seriousness of the complaint immediately warrants formal action.

### **Complaint**

A written complaint should be made and passed to the line manager. Where the line manager is the perpetrator, this should be to the senior manager or Town Clerk. This written complaint should include:

- the type of bullying or harassment which has occurred, together with specific examples
- dates and times when the bullying or harassment has occurred (where possible)
- the names of any witnesses to incidents of bullying or harassment (where possible)
- any action already taken by the employee to stop the bullying or harassment, for example, approaching the alleged perpetrator to request that their behaviour stops.

On receipt of this complaint, the Disciplinary Procedure will be initiated.

### **Investigation**

All complaints of bullying or harassment will be handled in a sensitive and confidential manner and in accordance with the Disciplinary Procedure.

### **Possible Outcomes**

On investigation, the outcome of the disciplinary process may not warrant a formal sanction being issued, for example due to lack of evidence; however, the line manager may consider the following measures as an informal means to addressing the matters raised:

- counselling
- requirements for behavioural change
- training or mentoring
- and regular review meetings with the individual, or
- reallocation of duties (subject to consideration of wider issues, eg. Job Evaluation)

Where the line manager opts not to use means other than disciplinary sanction to remedy the situation then s/he must establish procedures to ensure that behaviours have improved to the required standard within a reasonable time frame, eg. through setting SMART objectives, interim meetings to discuss development.

## **SUPPORT**

Throughout the process employees will have access to the confidential counselling service.

## **VICTIMISATION**

This Policy is targeted at maintaining dignity at work for everyone who works for Shrewsbury Town Council. Victimisation of any individual who has reported matters under this procedure, or who has had action taken against them within it, will not be tolerated and will constitute serious disciplinary misconduct.

<b>Approved by Personnel Committee</b>	<b>3 August 2022</b>
<b>Adopted by Council</b>	
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