



# SOMPTING PARISH COUNCIL

## POLICY ON: Bullying and Harassment in the Workplace

Sompting Parish Council is committed to the ideal that its staff should, at all times be treated with dignity, fairness and respect. In working towards this ideal, it regards the bullying and/or harassment of an employee by a fellow employee as intolerable behaviour that will be dealt with under the Council's Disciplinary Procedures. Similarly, bullying and/or harassment of an employee by elected members is regarded as equally intolerable and will be referred to the monitoring officer at Adur District Council.

### Definitions

This policy and procedures will apply to any unwanted behaviour that is contrary to the Council's various policies, codes and procedures on conduct at work. General definitions are set out below, however, the overriding principle, in defining when bullying or harassment has occurred, is to regard such acts as having occurred when the victim feels that they have been a victim.

**Dignity** – The state or quality of being worthy of honour. (Collins Millennium Dictionary).

**Bullying** – Regular and persistent intimidation that undermines the confidence and integrity of the victim. Whereas it is intended that the interpretation of the definition would exclude one off incidents, there cannot be a requirement that it has to happen a specified number of times or to pass any severity test before it is taken seriously. A single and extreme incident could not be ignored with propriety.

**Harassment** – Unwanted conduct that affects the dignity of men and women at work. It may be of racial or sexual nature or concern a disability, including appearance. It covers unwanted physical contact, verbal or non-verbal (gestures) conduct as well as harassment via the internet or e-mail.

**In this case, it can involve a single incident as well as persistent unwanted behaviour.**

## **Bullying and/or harassment complaints procedure.**

The following procedures relate to complaints from employees of unwanted behaviour that is contrary to the Council's various policies, codes and procedures on conduct at work, carried out by a fellow employee. A complaint about an elected member will be referred to the monitoring officer Adur District Council.

The aim of the procedures is to stop unwanted behaviour and to prevent recurrence. Whereas it is no less potentially damaging, it may be that the perpetrator is unaware that their behaviour is unwanted and is causing distress. It is felt, therefore, that the process should start with informal steps.

### **Informal steps**

An employee who feels that they have been treated by a fellow employee in a way that is in breach of the policy statement should, as soon as possible after the incident occurs, make it known that the behaviour causes offence and is unwanted. This may be done by the employee:

- Verbally either face to face or over the telephone
- In writing
- Through a third party – colleague or Clerk.

Regardless of the approach taken, a detailed note should be made and kept, by the employee who is making the complaint, of the nature of the behaviour and how it was resolved. If the unwanted behaviour continues after an informal approach has been made, the matter should be dealt with using the following formal steps.

### **Formal steps**

The following steps will apply if the informal approach has not been successful or if the circumstances are such that the employee involved feels that the informal approach is inappropriate.

#### **Raising the complaint**

The employee may raise the matter formally, in writing, with

- The Clerk
- The Chairman

### **Responsibilities of the Person dealing with the complaint**

- At the earliest opportunity, conduct an initial investigation of the complaint to establish the relevant facts.
- Establish if the complainant needs any support.
- Inform the complainant and the alleged 'harasser' of the outcome of the initial investigation. This should be within ten days of the complaint being received. Any delay beyond that period in completing the investigation must be notified to the complainant and the alleged 'harasser'.

- Refer the incident to the Personnel Panel who will proceed with advice from the monitoring officer at Adur District Council and Surrey and Sussex Association of Local Councils (SSALC) on the APPROPRIATE LEVEL of the disciplinary procedures if the initial investigation identifies that there is substance to the allegations.
- Refer the incident to the Personnel Panel who will proceed with advice from monitoring officer at Adur District Council and SALC for advice on the APPROPRIATE LEVEL of the disciplinary procedures if the initial investigation identifies that the complaint is malicious.
- Provide feedback to the complainant of the outcome of any disciplinary procedures.

### **Dissatisfaction with the outcome**

A complainant who is dissatisfied with the way that a complaint has been investigated may raise their concerns using the Council's Grievance Procedures.

### **Confidentiality**

All of those who are involved in a complaint raised under the Council's Dignity and Respect at Work policy must treat the matter as totally confidential outside of those immediately involved.

Any breaches of confidentiality by any party involved will be dealt with under the Council's Dismissal and Disciplinary Procedures.