



Anti Bullying and Harassment Policy

1 Introduction

All councillors and staff should be able to work in an environment free from harassment and bullying, and to be treated with dignity and respect.

Scarning Parish Council will not tolerate bullying or harassment. This applies whether the conduct is an individual incident or a repeated course of abusive behaviour and whether done purposefully or not.

The Council will not tolerate abusive or threatening behaviour towards its employees, other members of the Parish Council, or its contractors, or members of the public.

Should a complaint be made against a member of staff this may constitute a disciplinary procedure.

All allegations of bullying and harassment will be investigated. Investigations will be carried out promptly and confidentially. Should, after an investigation, the decision be that an employee or a member of the Parish Council, has harassed or bullied another individual/s then they may be subject to disciplinary action.

2 What is bullying and harassment ?

There are many definitions of bullying and harassment. Bullying may be characterised as offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour; an abuse or misuse of power through means to undermine, humiliate, denigrate, or injure an individual.

Harassment, in general terms, is unwanted conduct related to the relevant 'protected characteristics,' and affecting the dignity of individuals in the workplace. It may be related to age, sexual orientation, race, gender, disability, religion, belief, or any personal characteristic of an individual, and may be persistent or an isolated incident.

The key is that the actions or comments are viewed as demeaning and unacceptable to an individual.

Examples of what may be considered bullying and harassment are provided below for guidance:-

- Intimidation or humiliation
- Verbal abuse or offensive comments, related to age, disability, gender re-assignment, marriage, civil partnership, pregnancy, maternity, race, religion, belief, or sexual orientation
- Lewd or suggestive comments
- Shouting, haranguing, browbeating, swearing
- Spreading malicious rumours

- Deliberate exclusion from conversations or work activities
- Withholding information a person needs in order to do their job
- Practical jokes, initiation ceremonies or inappropriate birthday rituals
- Physical abuse such as hitting, pushing or jostling
- Rifling through, hiding, or damaging personal property
- Subjecting an individual to humiliation or ridicule, or belittling them
- Abusing a position of power

It is important to recognise that conduct which one person may find acceptable, another may find totally unacceptable. All employees and members of the Parish Council must therefore treat their colleagues with dignity and respect.

Bullying does not include appropriate criticism of an employee's, or councillor's, behaviour or proper performance of their duties.

3 Reporting Concerns

a. If you are an employee

If you feel you are being bullied or harassed by someone with whom you come into contact in your work, you should report it to the Chair of the Parish Council. If you witness an incident you believe to be harassment or bullying you should immediately report the incident to the Chair of the Parish Council. The Parish Council will decide how best to deal with the situation, in consultation with you. All reports will be treated in strict confidence as far as it is possible to do so.

If you are being bullied or harassed, the Parish Council provides two possible forms of resolution, informal and formal.

Informal Resolution

If you are being bullied or harassed, you may be able to resolve the situation yourself by explaining clearly to the alleged perpetrator/s that their behaviour is unacceptable and contrary to the Parish Council's policy. Alternatively, you may wish to ask the Chair of the Council, or another member of the Council, to act on your behalf, or to be with you when confronting the alleged perpetrator/s. No action will be taken without your consent.

If your complaint is resolved informally, the alleged perpetrator/s will not usually be subject to disciplinary sanctions. However, in exceptional circumstances (such as a serious allegation of bullying or harassment, or in cases where a problem has happened before) the Parish Council may decide to investigate further and take more formal action, notwithstanding that the complaint has been raised informally. The Council will consult you before taking this step.

Formal Resolution

If an informal resolution is unsuccessful or inappropriate, you can make a formal complaint to the Chair of the Parish Council. A formal complaint may lead to disciplinary action against the perpetrator/s.

The Chair will appoint a Panel to investigate the complaint. The Panel will comprise three members of the Parish Council. The Panel will appoint a Chairperson from one of its members. (The Chair of the Parish Council is not necessarily the Chair of the Panel.)

Depending on the nature of the allegations, members of the Panel may wish to meet with you to better understand your complaint. The members of the Panel will accept any request if you wish to have a work colleague, friend or union representative with you at that meeting.

The Council will consider how to protect the health and wellbeing of members of staff whilst the investigation is taking place and will discuss this with them.

Where the complaint is raised by a member of staff, the Panel will ask you to provide the following:-

- The name of the alleged perpetrator/s
- The nature of the harassment or bullying
- Dates and times the harassment or bullying occurred
- Names of any witnesses and
- Any action taken by you to resolve the matter informally

The alleged perpetrator/s will need to be told your name and the details of your complaint for the issue to be investigated properly. However, the Panel will carry out the investigation as confidentially and sensitively as possible.

Where a complaint is against a member of the Parish Council, the Council's Disciplinary and Grievance Policy will be followed.

b. If you are a parish councillor/volunteer acting on behalf of the Parish Council

If you feel you are being bullied or harassed by someone with whom you come into contact in your work, you should report it to the Chair of the Parish Council. If you witness an incident you believe to be harassment or bullying you should immediately report the incident to the Chair of the Parish Council. The Chair of the Parish Council will decide how best to deal with the situation, in consultation with you and other parish councillors. All reports will be treated in strict confidence as far as it is possible to do so.

Informal Resolution

If you are being bullied or harassed, you may be able to resolve the situation yourself by explaining clearly to the alleged perpetrator/s that their behaviour is unacceptable and contrary to the Parish Council's policy. Alternatively, you may wish to ask the Chair of the Council, colleague, or another member of the Council, to act on your behalf, or to be with you when confronting the alleged perpetrator/s. No action will be taken without your consent.

If your complaint is resolved informally, the alleged perpetrator/s will not usually be subject to any sanctions. However, in exceptional circumstances (such as a serious allegation of bullying or harassment, or in cases where a problem has happened before) the Parish Council may decide to take more formal action. The Council will consult you before taking this step.

Formal Resolution

Should an informal resolution prove unsuccessful or inappropriate, you can make a formal complaint to the Monitoring Officer. A formal complaint may lead to appropriate action being taken against the perpetrator/s.

The Chair will appoint a Panel to investigate the complaint. The Panel will comprise three members of the Parish Council. The Panel will appoint a Chairperson from one of its members. (The Chair of the Parish Council is not necessarily the Chair of the Panel.)

Depending on the nature of the allegations, members of the Panel may wish to meet with the complainant. The members of the Panel will accept any request if you feel you require support at the meeting.

Where the complaint is raised by a member of staff, the Panel will ask you to provide the following:-

- The name of the alleged perpetrator/s
- The nature of the harassment or bullying
- Dates and times the harassment or bullying occurred
- Names of any witnesses and
- Any action taken by you to resolve the matter informally

The alleged perpetrator/s will need to be told your name and the details of your complaint for the issue to be investigated properly. However, the Panel will carry out the investigation as confidentially and sensitively as possible.

Where a complaint is against a member of the Parish Council, the Council's Disciplinary and Grievance Policy will be followed.

Approved: May 2023. Reviewed without amendment February 2024.

Next review: February 2026.