

FOREST ROW PARISH COUNCIL

DIGNITY AT WORK POLICY

Policy Aim

1. Everyone should be treated with dignity and respect at work. The aim of this policy is to promote dignity and respect in the workplace and provide a fair way of dealing effectively with bullying, harassment and discrimination.

Policy Scope

2. This procedure applies to all parties to the Parish Council; employees, Members and the public.

The Policy

3. Bullying, harassment and discrimination are unacceptable behaviours and will not be tolerated in any circumstances.
4. Bullying is defined by ACAS as, "offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, an abuse or misuse of power through means intended to undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient".
5. Harassment is defined by ACAS as, "unwanted conduct affecting the dignity of men and women in the workplace. It may be related to age, sex, race, disability, religion, nationality or any personal characteristic of the individual, and may be persistent or an isolated incident."
6. Examples of bullying and harassment include:
 - spreading malicious rumours or insulting someone
 - copying memos that are critical about someone to others who do not need to know
 - ridiculing or demeaning someone
 - telling derogatory jokes
 - 'picking on' someone or setting them up to fail
 - exclusion or victimisation
 - unfair treatment
 - overbearing supervision
 - misuse of power or position
 - unwelcome sexual advances e.g. touching, standing too close, inappropriate and sexist comments
 - displaying or circulating discriminatory or offensive pictures, images or materials
 - making threats or comments about job security without foundation
 - deliberately undermining a worker by overloading and constant criticism
 - preventing individuals progressing by intentionally blocking promotion or training opportunities.
7. We expect people:
 - to respect one another in the workplace and other work settings
 - to raise issues about behaviour at work, sooner rather than later, to resolve problems with working relationships.
8. We expect managers:
 - to promote feedback within teams
 - to respond to inappropriate behaviour when observed
 - to act on information given to tackle problems as they arise.
9. Any report of bullying, harassment or discrimination will be treated seriously and dealt with promptly. All reports of this nature will be investigated and if appropriate, formal action will be taken in accordance with the Disciplinary Policy. Serious breaches of the policy may lead to dismissal.

Members will be aware that where their Code of Conduct is transgressed a complaint can be made to the Standards Board (more detail is available in the Code of Conduct).

10. Anyone raising a concern about bullying or harassment within the workplace will be protected from victimisation, as will any persons giving or providing evidence in relation to the matter raised. Any employee found victimising another because they made a complaint will be subject to disciplinary action.

The Procedure

11. In some cases it may be possible to rectify matters informally. Sometimes people are not aware that their behaviour is unwelcome and an informal discussion can lead to greater understanding and an agreement that the behaviour will cease. If you feel able to, you may prefer to resolve your concerns directly with the other person involved; alternatively you may prefer to speak to your line manager or the Parish Clerk to resolve the situation. If the issue involves your line manager, the matter should be reported to the Parish Clerk. If the issue involves the Parish Clerk please follow the procedure as set out in paragraph 17.
12. If you decide to make a formal complaint it should be made in writing, signed and given to the Parish Clerk. Where the behaviour causing concern is believed to be bullying, harassment or discrimination, the Parish Council has a duty of care to all employees to make sure this is reported in writing.
13. Once a written complaint has been received an investigation will be carried out either by a senior manager or an independent investigating officer. The complaint will be investigated within 5 working days of the issue being raised unless otherwise agreed by all parties. The alleged bully or harasser will be informed of the complaint and that an investigation will take place. They will see the complaint and have an opportunity to produce a written response in order for the Parish Council to resolve the issue fairly and to consider disciplinary action. During the period of the investigation, if appropriate, staff may be temporarily redeployed.
14. The investigating officer will need to gather the facts and take witness statements where necessary. When a meeting takes place each party may ask a colleague or Trade Union Representative to attend the meeting if they wish. All employees will have the opportunity to see and amend their witness statement before signing it as a true and accurate reflection of the circumstances.
15. The investigating officer will write a report identifying the background to the case, the details of the behaviour or problem reported including a chronology of events and a summary of the facts that agree and differ between the statements taken. The report will make recommendations and will be presented to the Parish Clerk for the appropriate action to be taken.
16. Recommendations may include:
 - actions to be taken to make clear the appropriate standards of behaviour;
 - actions to be taken to assist the alleged bully or harasser to change their behaviour;
 - disciplinary action for the alleged bully or harasser (see Disciplinary policy).
17. If people feel that they are being bullied, harassed or discriminated against by the Parish Clerk the procedure is as follows.
 - If you feel able to, speak to the Parish Clerk to try and resolve the situation. If not, speak to your line manager or the Chairman of the Finance Committee if you wish to try to resolve the situation informally.
 - If you decide to make a formal complaint it should be made in writing, signed and given to the Chairman of the Finance Committee who will arrange for an independent investigating officer to investigate within 5 working days.
 - The investigating officer will report to the Finance Committee who will forward their recommendations to the full Council for action.

Appeals

18. The Grievance Procedure can be used by those who believe that their concerns about behaviour in the workplace have not been treated appropriately or in accordance with this policy.