



Bullying and Harassment Policy

Policy and Finance Approved: April 2015
Last Reviewed: November 2025
Due for Next Review: November 2028

Policy Elements (Principles and Scope)

1. Policy Statement

Fleet Town Council is committed to providing a working environment where everyone is treated with dignity, respect, and fairness.

Bullying, harassment, or victimisation of any kind will not be tolerated. Such behaviour undermines wellbeing and performance and may be unlawful under the Equality Act 2010.

The Council will take all reasonable steps to prevent and address such conduct, including disciplinary action where appropriate, up to and including dismissal.

2. Purpose and Scope

This policy applies to:

- All employees of Fleet Town Council.
- Members of Fleet Town Council.
- Agency workers, contractors, and volunteers working on behalf of the Council.

The policy should be read alongside the Equality & Diversity Policy, Disciplinary Policy and Procedure, and Grievance Procedure.

The Council also has a duty of care to protect employees from bullying or harassment by members of the public or third parties.

3. Policy Outcomes

The aims of this policy are to:

- Promote a culture of dignity, respect, and inclusion.
- Prevent and respond to incidents of bullying and harassment.
- Clarify unacceptable behaviour and the standards expected.
- Provide fair and consistent processes for raising and addressing concerns.
- Protect those who raise concerns in good faith from victimisation.

4. Legal Framework

This policy aligns with the:

- Equality Act 2010
- Employment Rights Act 1996
- Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974
- ACAS Code of Practice and Guidance on Bullying and Harassment

5. Key Definitions

Harassment

As defined by the Equality Act 2010: “Unwanted conduct related to a protected characteristic which has the purpose or effect of violating an individual’s dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.”

Protected characteristics include age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

Harassment may occur even if it was not intended. It can also happen because of someone’s connection to another person with a protected characteristic (association), or because they are wrongly assumed to have one (perception). What matters is how the behaviour *makes the person feel*, not whether it was meant to offend.

Bullying

Offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, or an abuse or misuse of power that undermines, humiliates, or causes physical or emotional harm to another person.

Legitimate management actions such as performance review or discipline, when conducted fairly, do not constitute bullying.

Victimisation

Unfavourable treatment of someone because they have made, or supported, a complaint of harassment or bullying. Victimisation is unlawful in this instance.

6. Responsibilities

Managers

- Promote a respectful workplace culture.
- Take prompt action to address concerns.
- Treat all complaints seriously, fairly, and confidentially.
- Seek advice from the Executive Officer or HR support as needed.

Employees

- Treat colleagues and others with respect.
- Refrain from any form of bullying or harassment.
- Report concerns early and co-operate with investigations.

Members

- Uphold the same standards when dealing with officers and colleagues.
- Comply with the Members' Code of Conduct.

Procedural Elements (How the Policy Works in Practice)

7. Raising a Concern

Informal Resolution (Stage 1)

- Where possible, the person experiencing the behaviour should make it clear that it is unwelcome and must stop.
- If uncomfortable doing so, they may seek help from a line manager, colleague, trade union representative, or the Executive Officer.
- Many issues can be resolved at this stage if the behaviour was unintended.

Formal Complaint (Stage 2)

- If informal action is inappropriate or ineffective, a written complaint should be made to the Executive Officer.
- If the complaint concerns the Executive Officer, it should be sent to the Chairman of the Council (or relevant committee).
- The complaint should include details of what happened, when, and any witnesses.

The matter will be investigated under the **Grievance Procedure**. Both parties will have the opportunity to be heard and may be accompanied by a work colleague or trade union representative.

Possible outcomes may include mediation, disciplinary action, changes to working arrangements, or no further action.

Complaints Involving Councillors

- Informal concerns can be raised with the Executive Officer or Chairman.
- Formal complaints about potential breaches of the Code of Conduct must be referred to the Monitoring Officer.
- The Council will take appropriate steps to protect employees during investigations (e.g., limiting contact).

8. Confidentiality

All complaints will be handled sensitively and confidentially.

However, confidentiality cannot be absolute, as allegations must be disclosed to the person complained about to allow a fair investigation.

Breach of confidentiality may itself be treated as misconduct.

9. Malicious or Unfounded Complaints

Genuine complaints by an accuser, even if not upheld, will not result in disciplinary action.

Malicious or deliberately false allegations may, however, lead to disciplinary action.

10. Support and Aftercare

The Council will support all parties involved in a complaint, including access to counselling or occupational health support where appropriate.

Learning from complaints will be used to strengthen culture, training, and management practice.

11. Review and Monitoring

The Executive Officer will review all cases and report any learning points to the Establishment Committee (without identifying individuals).

This policy will be reviewed every three years, or sooner if legislation or best practice changes.