



MACCLESFIELD TOWN COUNCIL

Dignity At Work Policy



Document Version Control

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01.00	August 2026	NM	New policy in line with Civility and Respect Pledge to reflect Employment Rights Act 2025 changes coming into force on 30 October 2026, including the duty to take all reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment and third-party harassment.



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Introduction

Macclesfield Town Council believes that civility and respect are important in the working environment, and expects all members, staff and the public to be polite and courteous when working for and with the council.

The Council is committed to creating a working environment where all council employees, members, contractors and others who encounter us in the course of our work, are treated with dignity, respect and courtesy. We aim to create a workplace where there is zero tolerance for harassment and bullying.

The Council recognise that unaddressed issues have the potential to escalate to become larger and more complex issues and this policy sets out how concerns will be managed with an emphasis on resolution and mediation (where appropriate) rather than an adversarial process.

Principles

The Town Council will not tolerate bullying or harassment at the workplace or at work-related events outside the workplace, whether such conduct is a one-off act or repeated, and whether harm is intended or not.

The Council will take all reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment of its employees and workers and will take appropriate steps to prevent and address harassment by third parties, including members of the public, suppliers, contractors, visitors and others encountered in the course of work.

Neither will the council tolerate retaliation against, or victimisation of, any person involved in bringing a complaint of harassment or bullying.

Allegations of bullying and harassment will be treated seriously, and investigations will be carried out promptly, sensitively and, as far as possible, confidentially in line with the council's grievance procedures.

False accusations of harassment or bullying can have a serious effect on innocent individuals.

Staff and others have a responsibility not to make false allegations. The council will assume that all complaints of bullying and harassment are made in good faith, in the event that allegations are found to be malicious or vexatious the person raising the complaint may be subject to action under the council's disciplinary procedures.



Definitions

Harassment is where a person is subject to unwanted conduct that violates their dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment, and which is related to a relevant protected characteristic.

Sexual harassment is unwanted conduct of a sexual nature which has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity, or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them. Conduct can amount to sexual harassment whether or not the person responsible intended to cause offence.

Bullying is behaviour that leaves the victim feeling threatened, intimidated, humiliated, vulnerable or otherwise upset. It does not need to be connected to a protected characteristic.

Examples of bullying and harassment include:

- Physical conduct ranging from unwelcome touching to serious assault
- Unwelcome sexual advances
- The offer of rewards for going along with sexual advances e.g. promotion, access to training
- Threats for rejecting sexual advances
- Demeaning comments about a person's appearance
- Verbal abuse or offensive comments, including jokes or pranks related to protected characteristics
- Unwanted nicknames, especially related to protected characteristics
- Threats in relation to taking or not taking a particular course of action
- Spreading malicious rumours or insulting someone
- Lewd or suggestive comments or gestures
- Deliberate exclusion from conversations, work activities or social 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
- Display of pictures or objects with sexual or racial overtones, even if not directed at any particular person
- Isolation or non-cooperation at work
- Subjecting a person to humiliation or ridicule, belittling their efforts, whether directly and / or in front of others
- The use of obscene gestures
- Abusing a position of power

Behaviour that one person may find acceptable; another may find unacceptable and such behaviour could constitute bullying/harassment when the person had no intention to offend. People have the right to determine what offends them and



harassment will occur if behaviour continues after a recipient has advised you that a behaviour is unacceptable.

Harassment can also occur where the unwanted behaviour relates to a perceived characteristic (such as offensive jokes or comments based on the assumption someone is gay, even if they are not) or due to their association with someone else (such as harassment related to their partner having a disability). All employees must, therefore, treat their colleagues with respect and appropriate sensitivity and should feel able to challenge behaviour that they find offensive even if it is not directed at them.

Bullying does not include appropriate criticism of an employee's behaviour or effective, robust performance management. Constructive and fair feedback about behaviour or performance from a manager, colleagues or members is not bullying. It is part of normal employment and management routines and should not be interpreted as anything different.

Victimisation is subjecting a person to a detriment because they have, in good faith, complained (whether formally or otherwise) that someone has been bullying or harassing them or someone else, or supported someone to make a complaint or given evidence in relation to a complaint. This would include isolating someone because they have made a complaint or giving them a heavier or more difficult workload.

Provided that one acts in good faith, i.e. genuinely believes that what they are saying is true, they have a right not to be victimised for making a complaint or doing anything in relation to a complaint of bullying or harassment and the council will take appropriate action to deal with any alleged victimisation, which may include disciplinary action against anyone found to have victimised you.

Making a complaint that is known to be untrue, or giving evidence that is known to be untrue may lead to disciplinary action being taken against the complainant.

Prevention, risk assessment and training

The Council will take a proactive approach to preventing bullying, harassment and, in particular, sexual harassment. It will not rely solely on employees making complaints before taking action.

The Council will assess the risks of sexual harassment and third-party harassment arising from its working arrangements and activities and will take appropriate measures to eliminate or reduce those risks. Risk assessments will take account of the Council's interactions with members of the public, contractors, suppliers, visitors, event participants and other third parties.

Preventative measures may include appropriate policies and procedures, staff training and information, clear reporting arrangements, management action, measures to protect employees from identified risks, and appropriate terms or standards of behaviour for contractors, suppliers and other third parties.

The Council will provide appropriate information and training to employees to ensure that they understand their responsibilities under this policy and know how to



recognise, prevent and report bullying and harassment.

The Council will monitor and record relevant incidents and the action taken, and will review the effectiveness of its preventative measures. Where an incident or emerging risk identifies a need for additional action, the Council will consider and implement further reasonable measures.

The Council will ensure that employees have appropriate ways of raising concerns and will seek to ensure that employees know who they can contact if they experience or witness bullying, harassment or sexual harassment.

Raising concern

Bullying or harassment by the public or suppliers or third parties

If you feel you are being bullied or harassed by a member of the public or a supplier, , contractor, visitor or other third party, this should be raised with your line manager or the Town Clerk.

A decision on how to deal with the situation will be made in consultation with you.

The Council will consider appropriate action to protect you and prevent further harassment. This may include contacting the third party, setting clear standards of behaviour, restricting access to Council premises or activities, changing working arrangements, or taking other proportionate measures.

Where an incident involves sexual harassment or other serious harassment, the Council will review the circumstances and consider whether the incident identifies a wider risk requiring additional preventative action.

Bullying or harassment by Councillors

If you feel you are being bullied or harassed by a Councillor, this should be raised with the Town Clerk.

The Town Clerk will inform the Town Mayor and a decision on how to deal with the situation will be made in consultation with you.

The situation will either be dealt with through informal resolution (detailed below), or through the submission of a formal complaint to the Monitoring Officer under the Councillor Code of Conduct.

The council will consider reasonable measures to protect your health and safety. Such measures may include a temporary change in duties or change of work location, not attending meetings with the person about whom the complaint has been made etc.

Bullying or harassment by colleagues



If you feel you are being bullied or harassed by a colleague, this should be raised with your line manager and the Town Clerk.

A decision on how to deal with the situation will be made in consultation with you.

The situation will either be dealt with through informal resolution (detailed below), or as a formal grievance under the council's grievance procedures.

Witnessing bullying or harassment

If you witness an incident, you believe is bullying or harassment you should report such behaviour to the Town Clerk.

As far as is possible, such reports will be treated confidently. The Town Clerk shall ensure a suitable investigation is undertaken into the report.

Informal resolution

It may be possible to resolve a situation by explaining clearly to the perpetrator(s) that their behaviour is unacceptable, is contrary to policy and must stop. This could be done by you directly, or on your behalf by a line manager, the Town Clerk or a councillor.

If this approach does not work, if you do not wish to try to resolve a situation this way, or if the issue relates to your line manager or the Town Clerk an informal resolution may be attempted.

Under informal resolution, the issue will be discussed with a view to resolving the situation informally by telling the alleged perpetrator, without prejudicing the matter, that:

- a. there has been a complaint that their behaviour is having an adverse effect on a member of the council staff
- b. such behaviour is contrary to our policy
- c. for employees, the continuation of such behaviour could amount to a serious disciplinary offence

It may be possible for this conversation to take place with the alleged perpetrator without revealing your name, if this is what you want. The person dealing with it will also stress that the conversation is confidential.

In certain circumstances the council may be able to involve a neutral third party (a mediator) to facilitate a resolution of the problem. This will be discussed with you if it is appropriate.



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

Formal complaints

If informal resolution is unsuccessful or inappropriate, a formal process (i.e. grievance or code of conduct complaint) will be available.

Formal complaints will be dealt with promptly, sensitively and fairly in accordance with the council's relevant grievance, disciplinary and/or complaints procedures.

The Council will consider any complaint or incident not only in terms of the individual circumstances, but also whether it indicates a wider risk of bullying, harassment or sexual harassment and whether further preventative action is required.

Nothing in this policy prevents the Council from taking immediate action where the circumstances are sufficiently serious to warrant it, including measures to protect an employee or worker while an investigation is undertaken.