Sexual Harassment Policy

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Introduction

Meriden Parish Council recognise that harassment and victimisation is unlawful under the Equality Act 2010. As such, harassment or victimisation on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

Personal harassment takes many forms ranging from tasteless jokes and abusive remarks to pestering for sexual favours, threatening behaviour and actual physical abuse. For the purposes of this policy, it also includes bullying.

Bullying is understood to be targeted and persistent offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour and can include the abuse or misuse of power to undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient. Whatever form it takes, personal harassment is always taken seriously and is totally unacceptable.

We recognise that personal harassment can exist in the workplace, as well as outside, and that this can seriously affect employees' working lives by interfering with their job performance or by creating a stressful, intimidating and unpleasant working environment.

Policy Purpose

Meriden Parish Council deplore all forms of personal harassment and seek to ensure that the working environment is sympathetic to all our employees. The aim of this policy is to inform employees of the type of behaviour that is unacceptable and provide employees who are the victims of personal harassment with a means of redress.

This policy covers all areas of the Organisation. This includes overseas sites, subject to any applicable local laws which impose any additional requirements on the Organisation. We recognise that we have a duty to implement this policy and all employees are expected to comply with it. We will also endeavour to review this policy at regular intervals in order to monitor its effectiveness.

Examples of Personal Harassment

Personal harassment takes many forms and employees may not always realise that their behaviour constitutes harassment. Personal harassment is unwanted behaviour by one employee towards another and examples of harassment include:

- insensitive jokes and pranks
- lewd or abusive comments
- deliberate exclusion from conversations
- displaying abusive or offensive writing or material
- abusive, threatening or insulting words or behaviour
- name-calling
- picking on someone or setting them up to fail
- exclusion or victimisation

- undermining their contribution/position
- demanding a greater work output than is reasonably feasible
- blocking promotion or other development/advancement.

These examples are not exhaustive and disciplinary action at the appropriate level will be taken against employees committing any form of personal harassment.

Examples of Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment can take place in many forms within the workplace and can go undetected for a period of time where employees do not understand that particular behaviour is classed as sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is unwanted behaviour related to sex, or of a sexual nature, by one employee towards another and examples of sexual harassment include:

- lewd or abusive comments of a sexual nature such as regarding an individual's appearance or body
- unwelcome touching of a sexual nature
- displaying sexually suggestive or sexually offensive writing or material
- asking questions of a sexual nature
- sexual propositions or advances, whether made in writing or verbally
- Sexual harassment can also take place where an employee is treated less favourably because they have rejected, or submitted to, the unwanted conduct that is related to sex or is of a sexual nature. Whether less favourable treatment occurs as a result will be examined broadly and includes areas such as blocking promotion and refusal of training opportunities or other development opportunities.

Examples of Victimisation

Victimisation takes place when an employee is treated unfavourably as a direct result of raising a genuine complaint of discrimination or harassment. Furthermore, any employee who supports or assists another employee to raise a complaint is also subjected to victimisation if they are treated unfavourably.

Third Party Harassment

Meriden Parish Council operates a zero tolerance policy in relation to harassment perpetrated against one of its employees by a third party, such as a client/customer or visitor to the Council. All employees are encouraged to report any and all instances of harassment that involve a third party in line with our reporting procedure, as outlined in this policy.

If we find that the allegation is well-founded, we will take steps we deem necessary in order to remedy this complaint. This can include, but is not limited to:

- warning the individual about the inappropriate nature of their behaviour
- banning the individual from Council premises
- reporting the individual's actions to the police.

In addition to this, Meriden Parish Council will endeavour to take all reasonable steps to deter and prevent any form of harassment from third parties taking place.

Employee Responsibilities

Meriden Parish Council requires its employees to behave appropriately and professionally at all times during the working day, and this may extend to events outside of working hours which are classed as work-related such as social events. Employees should not engage in discriminatory, harassing or aggressive behaviour towards any other person at any time.

Any form of harassment or victimisation may lead to disciplinary action up to and including dismissal if it is committed:

- in a work situation
- during any situation related to work, such as a social event
- against a colleague or other person connected to the employer outside of a work situation, including on social media
- against anyone outside of a work situation where the incident is relevant to their suitability to carry out the role.

A breach of this policy by will be treated as a disciplinary manner

Organisation Responsibilities

Meriden Parish Council will be responsible for ensuring all members of staff and Councillors, including those within management positions, understand the rules and policies relating to the prevention of harassing and bullying behaviour at work and during work-related social events. The Council will promote a professional and positive workplace whereby managers are alert and proactively identify areas of risk and incidents of harassment, sexual harassment and bullying.

Meriden Parish Council will also take into account aggravating factors, such as the abuse of power over a more junior colleague, when deciding what disciplinary action to take.

Where an incident is witnessed, or a complaint is made under this policy, the Council will take prompt action to deal with this matter. All incidents will be deemed serious and dealt within in a sensitive and confidential manner.

Meriden Parish Council will require all employees and Councillors to confirm they have read and understood this Policy.

Complaining about Harassment and/or Bullying

Informal Method

Meriden Parish Council recognises that complaints of personal harassment, and particularly of sexual harassment, can sometimes be of a sensitive or intimate nature

and that it may not be appropriate for you to raise the issue through our normal grievance procedure. In these circumstances you are encouraged to raise such issues with a senior colleague of your choice (whether or not that person has a direct supervisory responsibility for you) as a confidential helper.

If you are the victim of minor harassment you should make it clear to the harasser on an informal basis that their behaviour is unwelcome and ask the harasser to stop. If you feel unable to do this verbally then you should hand a written request to the harasser, and your confidential helper can assist you in this.

Formal Method

Where the informal approach fails or if the harassment is more serious, you should bring the matter to the attention of the Chair of the Parish Council as a formal written grievance and again your confidential helper can assist you in this. Complaints against Councillors will be reported to the Monitoring Officer at Solihull Council. If possible, you should keep notes of the harassment so that the written complaint can include:

- the name of the alleged harasser
- the nature of the alleged harassment
- the dates and times when the alleged harassment occurred
- the names of any witnesses any action already taken by you to stop the alleged harassment.
- Where it is not possible to make the formal complaint to the above named person, for example where they are the alleged harasser, we would encourage you to raise your complaint to the Vice Chair of Meriden Parish Council.
- On receipt of a formal complaint we will take action to separate you from the alleged harasser to enable an uninterrupted investigation to take place by the Chair of Meriden Parish Council for complaints about staff members, or the Monitoring Officer for complaints about Councillors.
- On conclusion of the investigation into staff complaints, which will normally be within 14 days of the meeting with you, a report of the findings will be submitted to the FGP Committee who will hold the grievance meeting.
- You will be invited to attend a meeting, at a reasonable time and location, to discuss the matter once the person hearing the grievance has had opportunity to read the report. You have the right to be accompanied at such a meeting by a colleague or a Union Representative and you must take all reasonable steps to attend. Those involved in the investigation will be expected to act in confidence and any breach of confidence will be a disciplinary matter.
- You will be able to put your case forward at the meeting and the manager will explain the outcome of the investigation. You have a right to appeal the outcome, which is to be made to the Vice Chair of the Parish Council within 7 days of receiving the outcome.
- If the decision is that the allegation is well founded, the harasser will be liable to disciplinary action in accordance with our disciplinary procedure up to and including dismissal.
- Meriden Parish Council is committed to ensuring employees are not discouraged from using this procedure and no employee will be victimised for having brought a complaint.