



## **LISS PARISH COUNCIL DIGNITY AT WORK POLICY**

### **Purpose**

Liss Parish Council (LPC) is committed to creating a working environment where all council employees, councillors, contractors and others who come into contact with us in the course of our work, are treated with dignity, respect and courtesy.

Liss Parish Council has signed up to the Civility and Respect Pledge, as a commitment to civility and respect in our work, and politeness and courtesy in behaviour, speech, and the written word.

This document:

- explains how we will respond to complaints of bullying or harassment;
- ensures that we respond sensitively and promptly; and,
- supports our employees in ensuring their behaviour does not amount to bullying and/or harassment by giving examples.

### **Scope**

This policy outlines the expected behaviour of all employees and Councillors and LPC's approach to the management of concerns raised under this policy.

Agency staff, or contractors are equally expected to treat council colleagues, and other representatives and stakeholders with dignity and respect, and the council may terminate the contract, without notice, where there are suspicions of harassment or bullying.

It is noted that the management of a situation may differ depending on who the allegations relate to (e.g. employees, contractor, Councillor), however, the council will take appropriate action if any of its employees or councillors are bullied or harassed by employees, Councillors, members of the public, suppliers or contractors.

### **The position on bullying and harassment**

All staff and council representatives are entitled to dignity, respect and courtesy within the workplace and to not experience any form of discrimination. LPC will not tolerate bullying or harassment, whether the conduct is a one-off act or repeated course of conduct, and whether harm is intended or not. LPC will not tolerate retaliation against, or victimisation of, any person involved in bringing a complaint of harassment or bullying.

We expect all representatives of the council to treat each other with respect and uphold the values of the Code of Conduct, Civility and Respect Pledge, Equalities and Diversity Policy, and all other policies and procedures set by the Council.

Allegations of bullying and harassment will be treated seriously. Investigations will be carried out promptly, sensitively and, as far as possible, confidentially. Employees and others who make allegations of bullying or harassment in good faith will not be treated less favourably as a result.

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. While we 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 procedure.

### **What Type of treatment amounts to bullying or harassment?**

'Bullying' or 'harassment' are phrases that apply to treatment from one person/a group of people to another that is unwanted and has the effect of violating that person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment for that person.

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, unwanted nicknames or offensive comments, including jokes or pranks related to age, disability, gender re-assignment, marriage, civil partnership, pregnancy, maternity, race, religion, belief, sex or sexual orientation
- 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/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

Bullying and harassment can occur through verbal and face to face interactions, but can also take place through sharing inappropriate or offensive content in writing or via email and other electronic communications and social media.

It is important to recognise that conduct which one person may find acceptable, another may find totally unacceptable and behaviour could be harassment when the person had no intention to offend. Harassment occurs if behaviour continues after the recipient has advised

you that the behaviour is unacceptable to them. Harassment can also occur where the unwanted behaviour relates to a perceived characteristic or due to their association with someone else.

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.

It is important to recognise that bullying does not include appropriate criticism of an employee's behaviour or effective, robust performance management. Constructive and fair feedback about your behaviour or performance is not bullying. It is part of normal employment and management routines, and should not be interpreted as anything different.

### **Victimisation**

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 you act in good faith, i.e. you genuinely believe that what you are saying is true, you have a right not to be victimised for making a complaint or doing anything in relation to a complaint of bullying or harassment. LPC 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 you know to be untrue, or giving evidence that you know to be untrue, may lead to disciplinary action being taken against you.

### **Reporting Concerns**

#### **What you should do if you feel you are being bullied or harassed by a member of the public or supplier (as opposed to a colleague)?**

If you are being bullied or harassed by someone with whom you come into contact at work, please raise this with the Clerk/Chair. Any such report will be taken seriously, and we will decide how best to deal with the situation, in consultation with you.

#### **What you should do if you feel you are being bullied or harassed by a councillor?**

If you are being bullied or harassed by a councillor, please raise this with the Clerk/Chair in the first instance. They will then decide how best to deal with the situation, in consultation with you. Formal concerns regarding potential breaches of the Councillors Code of Conduct must be investigated by the Monitoring Officer. The council will consider any adjustments to support you in your work and to manage the relationship with the councillor the allegations relate to, while the investigation proceeds.

#### **What you should do if you witness an incident you believe to be harassment or bullying?**

If you witness such behaviour you should report the incident in confidence to the Clerk/Chair. Such reports will be taken seriously and will be treated in strict confidence as far as it is possible to do so.

### **What you should do if you are being bullied or harassed by another member of staff?**

Any employee experiencing bullying or harassment should report this to the Clerk/Chair or alternatively raise a formal grievance under LPC's Grievance Policy. Any complaint made against an employee will be investigated under LPC's Disciplinary Policy. The complaint will be investigated either formally or informally and the complainant will be notified of the result of the investigation in writing.

#### Informal resolution

If you are being bullied or harassed, you may be able to resolve the situation yourself by explaining clearly to the perpetrator(s) that their behaviour is unacceptable, contrary to the council's policy, and must stop. Alternatively, you may wish to ask the Clerk/Chair, to do this on your behalf or to be with you when confronting the perpetrator(s).

#### Raising a formal complaint

If informal resolution is unsuccessful or inappropriate, you can make a formal complaint about bullying and harassment through the council's grievance procedure. You should raise your complaint to the Clerk/Chair. A formal complaint may ultimately lead to disciplinary action against the perpetrator(s).

The Clerk/Chair will appoint someone to investigate your complaint in line with the grievance policy. You will need to co-operate with the investigation and provide the following details (if not already provided):

- The name of the alleged perpetrator(s),
- The nature of the harassment or bullying,
- The dates and times the harassment or bullying occurred,
- The names of any witnesses and
- Any action taken by you to resolve the matter informally.

The alleged perpetrator(s) would normally need to be told your name and the details of your grievance in order for the issue to be investigated properly. However, we will carry out the investigation as confidentially and sensitively as possible. Where you and the alleged perpetrator(s) work in proximity to each other, we will consider whether it is appropriate to make temporary adjustments to working arrangements whilst the matter is being investigated.

Investigations will be carried out promptly (without unreasonable delay), sensitively and, as far as possible, confidentially. When carrying out any investigations, we will ensure that individuals' personal data is handled in accordance with the Data Protection policy.

The council will consider how to protect your health and wellbeing whilst the investigation is taking place and discuss this with you. Depending on the nature of the allegations, the investigator may want to meet with you to discuss further.

After the investigation, a panel will meet with you to consider the complaint and the findings of the investigation in accordance with the grievance procedure. At the meeting you may be accompanied by a fellow worker or a trade union official.

Following the conclusion of the hearing, the panel will write to you to inform you of the decision and to notify you of your right to appeal if you are dissatisfied with the outcome. You should put your appeal in writing explaining the reasons why you are dissatisfied with the decision. Your appeal will be heard under the appeal process that is described in the grievance procedure.

### **The use of the Disciplinary Procedure**

If at any stage from the point at which a complaint is raised, we believe there is a case to answer and a disciplinary offence might have been committed, we will instigate our disciplinary procedure. We will keep you informed of the outcome.

*This policy should be read in conjunction with the LPC Code of Conduct, the LPC Civility and Respect Pledge, the LPC Grievance Policy, the LPC Equalities and Diversity Policy, and the LPC Disciplinary Policy.*

### **REVIEW**

Approved by Liss Parish Council on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2024.

To be reviewed in 3 years.