

Dignity at Work Policy

July 2026

1. Aim

The Council is committed to ensuring a supportive, safe, and inclusive working environment and culture. This includes ensuring all colleagues are treated with dignity and respect in the workplace and in the course of their work.

The Council values the contribution everyone makes to the provision of quality services. This contribution is most effective in conditions which are free from unnecessary anxiety, stress and fear, and where everyone is valued as an individual. The council takes a zero tolerance approach to behaviours and actions which are discriminatory or constitute harassment, bullying or victimisation.

The overall purpose of this policy is to:

- Maintain a zero tolerance approach to discrimination, harassment, bullying and victimisation at work
- Help identify behaviours and actions which amount to discrimination, harassment, bullying and victimisation at work
- Detail support available to colleagues who experience discrimination, harassment, bullying and victimisation during the course of their work
- Provide a process and guidance to colleagues and managers on how to report, respond, investigate and address behaviours which are discriminatory, harassment, bullying and victimisation

Employees are expected to maintain high standards of professional conduct at all times. This includes times when they are not at work but are in a situation where their conduct may potentially bring the Council or their profession into disrepute.

This policy works alongside other council policies and procedures and takes account of the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) Code of Practice. It also replaces any previous policies and procedures that have been in place.

The aim is to ensure consistent and fair treatment for everyone at work.

This policy does not form part of any contract of employment or other contract to provide services.

2. Equalities Statement

In applying this policy, the council gives due regard for the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, promote equality of opportunity, and provide for good relations between people of diverse groups, in particular on the grounds of the following characteristics protected by the Equality Act (2010); age, disability, gender reassignment (including non binary), marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation, in addition to unpaid carers, care experienced children and care leavers, military veterans and those who are considered socio-economically vulnerable.

3. Scope

This procedure supports the resolution of unwanted, unacceptable and inappropriate behaviours experienced by council employees only. Third party complaints regarding the behaviours of council employees should be directed through the council's complaints procedures.

This procedure applies to all employees of the Authority except:

- Employees in locally managed schools where there are separate arrangements.

The Council will not take any action under this procedure against a Shop Steward or other accredited Trade Union representative (including safety representatives) until the circumstances of the case have been discussed with a full-time official of the Trade Union concerned, after obtaining the employees agreement.

4. Responsibilities

Everyone at Bury Council has a responsibility to help create and maintain an environment free from discrimination, harassment, bullying and victimisation where everyone is treated with dignity and respect.

All colleagues have the right to:

- Be treated with dignity and respect in the course of their work
- Have equitable access to this policy and procedures
- Be able to challenge or report unwanted or unacceptable behaviours without fear of reprisal
- Have their concerns heard fairly and without prejudice

Managers

It is the responsibility of all managers to:

- Implement the Dignity at Work policy and ensure the colleagues they manage are aware of the requirements of the policy
- Ensure the work environment they manage is non-threatening and supportive
- Take a zero-tolerance approach by challenging and addressing unwanted or unacceptable behaviours set out in this policy
- Have respect for the personal dignity of everyone they work with as set out in this policy
- Behave and act in a way that is not hostile or offensive to others
- Challenge and address behaviours they witness themselves in line with this policy
- Treat reports of behaviours and actions under this policy seriously, sensitively and in line with policy
- Ensure colleagues making a report have access to the support and assistance set out in this policy
- Ensure reports are logged and documented appropriately in line with this policy

In addition, service leads/chief officers should:

- Ensure dignity at work is factored into service risk assessments to reduce the exposure of colleagues to unwanted and unacceptable behaviours
- Ensure managers and colleagues are aware of necessary departmental/service level safeguards and reporting external to this policy

Colleagues

It is the responsibility of all colleagues to:

- Have respect for the personal dignity of everyone they work with as set out in this policy
- Behave and act in a way that is not hostile to or offensive to others
- Support the council's commitment to zero tolerance by reporting or challenging (where appropriate) unwanted or unacceptable behaviours set out in this policy

People, Inclusion and Culture Team

It is the responsibility of the People, Inclusion and Culture Team to:

- Ensure this policy remains compliant with relevant legislation and council objectives, reviewing and amending the policy where appropriate
- Ensure the policy is accessible to all colleagues
- Advise, support and guide managers and colleagues to ensure consistent and appropriate application of the policy
- Own and maintain a log of reports and actions arising from reports in line with this policy
- Monitor and analyse logs of reports and actions arising from reports to identify trends and ensure a consistent application of this policy

4. Unwanted, Inappropriate or Unacceptable Behaviours

The Equality Act 2010 identifies protected characteristics that are protected from discrimination, harassment and victimisation in law. Furthermore, the Public Sector Equality Duty as set out in the Equality Act 2010 requires public bodies including Bury Council to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation as an employer, a service provider and commissioner.

Protected Characteristics

The nine protected characteristics identified in the Equality Act 2010 are:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender Reassignment (including non binary identities)
- Marriage and Civil Partnership
- Pregnancy and Maternity
- Race
- Religion and Belief
- Sex

- Sexual Orientation

Bury Council recognises four additional characteristics to which it gives the same consideration and protection, these are:

- Carers
- Care Experienced Children and Care Leavers
- Military Veterans
- Socio-Economically Vulnerable

All protected characteristics are equal; unwanted behaviours towards one protected characteristic based on another is unacceptable behaviour.

A table of examples of unwanted, inappropriate and unacceptable behaviours based on protected characteristics is detailed in **Appendix 1**.

Discrimination

Discrimination is where a person or group are treated less favourably because of a protected characteristic.

Treating someone or a group less favourably includes disadvantaging them or treating them unfairly or inequitably when compared to people who do not have the protected characteristic.

A person or group can experience **direct discrimination** if they are treated less favourably because they have a protected characteristic.

A person or group can experience **indirect discrimination** when a policy or rule applied to everyone creates a disadvantage because of a protected characteristic they have.

A person or group can experience **associative discrimination** if they are treated less favourably because they have an association or link to a person or group with a protected characteristic.

A person or group can experience **perceived discrimination** if they are treated less favourably because they are perceived or thought to have a protected characteristic when they do not.

Harassment and Bullying

Harassment is where a person or group of people experience unwanted conduct that has the effect of violating their dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment because they have a protected characteristic, have an association to people or a group with a protected characteristic or are perceived to have a characteristic when they do not.

Bullying is where a person or group of people experience the same unwanted conduct, but this is not related to a protected characteristic

Acts of harassment or bullying can be single, multiple and/or sustained acts of unwanted conduct.

It is important to note that bullying does not consist of a manager legitimately carrying out their management responsibilities in a proper and reasonable manner.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is unwanted and inappropriate harassment/behaviour towards a person which is of a sexual nature.

Examples of sexual harassment include:

- sexual comments or jokes
- displaying sexually graphic pictures, posters or photographs
- suggestive looks, staring or leering
- propositions and sexual advances
- making promises in return for sexual favours
- sexual gestures
- questioning about a person's private or sex life or a person discussing their own sex life
- sexual posts or contact on social media
- spreading sexual rumours about a person
- sending sexually explicit emails, text messages or online messages
- unwelcome touching, hugging, massaging, kissing or being in someone's personal space

Sexual harassment can also occur if a person experiences unfavourable or unfair treatment through rejecting unwelcome and uninvited behaviours or rejecting behaviours which were previously welcome, invited or consensual but are no longer welcome, invited or consensual.

A person can experience sexual harassment from someone of the same or different sex or gender identity.

Victimisation

Victimisation is where a person or group of people are treated less favourably because they have, or are thought to have:

- Made an allegation of discrimination, harassment or sexual harassment
- Made a report or complaint of discrimination, harassment or sexual harassment
- Taken action to address or prevent discrimination, harassment or sexual harassment
- Have contributed to any of the previous points
- Have a connection or link to a person or group who has been involved in any of the previous points

False, Vexatious or Malicious use of this Policy

Making a deliberately false, vexatious, or malicious allegation, report or complaint under this policy is unacceptable and may result in disciplinary action.

5. Preventing Unwanted, Inappropriate or Unacceptable Behaviours

The council has a legal duty to prevent and eliminate unwanted, inappropriate and unacceptable behaviours and takes preventative measures that contribute to this duty. These include:

- Mandatory equalities training for all colleagues and managers
- Equality impact analysis of policies, procedures, strategies and projects
- Dignity at work policy and procedures
- Risk assessing exposure of colleagues and residents to unwanted behaviours in delivering our services
- Monitoring and analysing reports of unwanted, inappropriate and unacceptable behaviour relating to dignity at work

6. Support for colleagues affected by Dignity at Work

It is recognised that experiencing and the processes of reporting and addressing unwanted, inappropriate and unacceptable behaviours can be difficult for everyone involved whether this is the person or group the behaviour is directed at, witnesses or colleagues alleged to have breached dignity at work.

Sources of support include:

- Access to Occupational Health
- Employee Assistance Programme
- Equality staff networks
- Trade Union and/or professional bodies

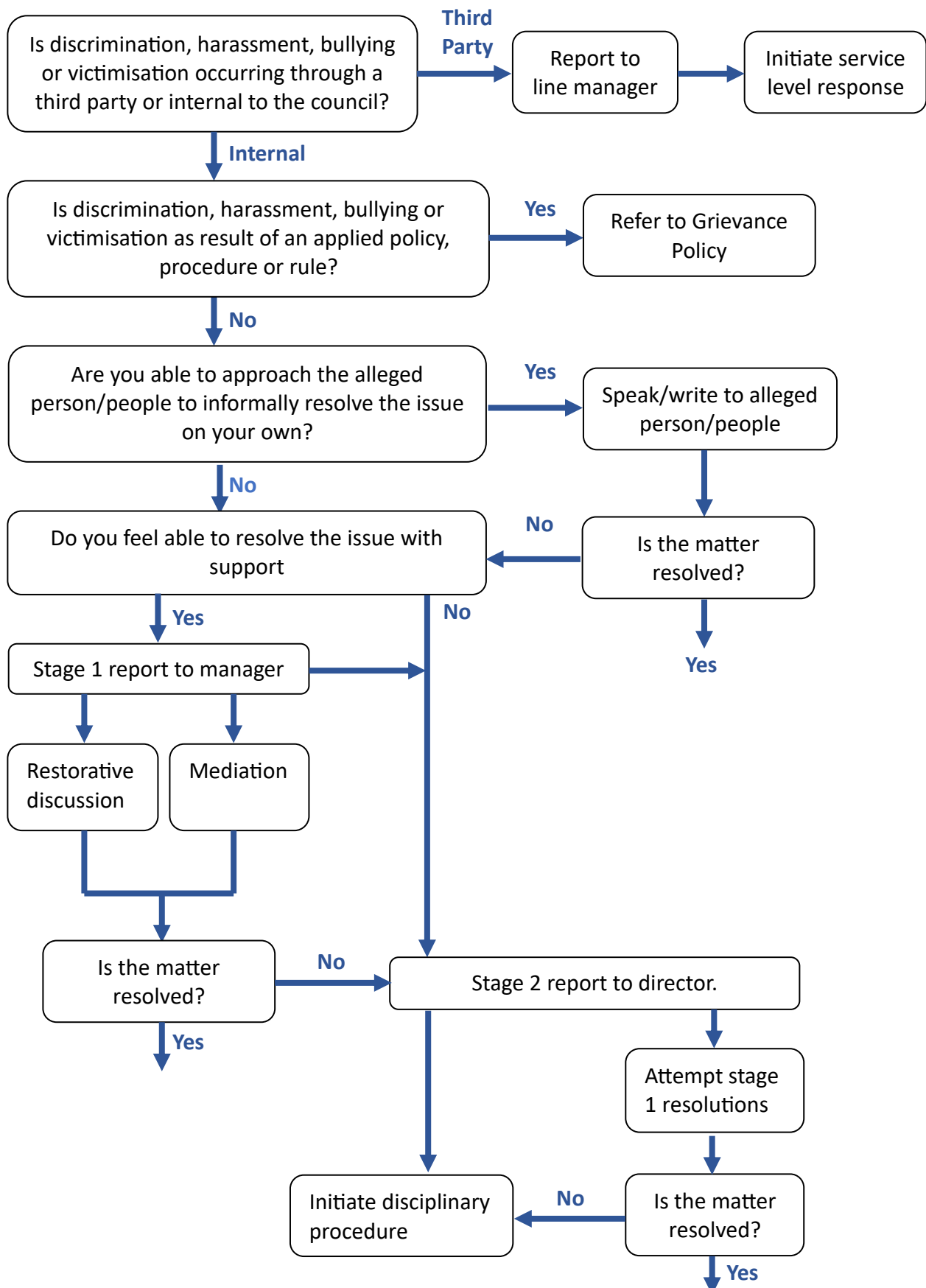
7. Procedure for Dealing with Discrimination, Harassment, Bullying or Victimisation

Allegations of discrimination, harassment, bullying or victimisation must be dealt with in a sensitive and timely manner, ensuring minimal stress for both the complainant and the person/people the complaint is about, also allowing a degree of flexibility appropriate to the individual circumstances of each case.

If, at any stage in the procedure, an individual does not receive a response as required within this policy, or where the response is considered inappropriate, the individual is entitled to raise a grievance in the usual manner.

An individual who believes they are experiencing discrimination, harassment, bullying and victimisation is advised to keep a personal record of the event(s). Such records should include details of the date, time and place of incidents, the name of the alleged person/people, details of the incident, names of any witnesses and any action taken to attempt to remedy the problem. These records should be made as soon as practicable after the event(s) occurred.

This flowchart summarises the different options for dealing with allegations of discrimination, harassment, bullying or victimisation. Detailed guidance is set out on the subsequent pages.



Confidentiality

Every effort will be made to ensure reports, records and proceedings arising from this procedure will be kept as confidential as possible. This includes anonymising names of victims and witnesses where requested and this is possible.

It should be noted that confidentiality cannot always be guaranteed following a report of unwanted, inappropriate or unacceptable behaviour. It may be necessary to share information with additional colleagues to resolve issues informally or as part of investigating incidents. Additionally, if behaviours are serious enough to put a person's or group's health, safety, security or wellbeing at risk, additional colleagues and/or appropriate third parties may have to be informed to safeguard anyone at risk.

A log of stage 1 and stage 2 reports will be kept and maintained by the People, Inclusion and Culture team, this log will detail the nature of the report, the service area the incident(s) occurred in and relevant outcomes of these reports. No names will be recorded on this log. The log will be used for monitoring and reporting purposes, as part of monitoring and reporting, no individuals will be identifiable.

Third Party Unwanted, Inappropriate or Unacceptable Behaviour

If the person/people alleged of the unwanted, inappropriate or unacceptable behaviour is a third party such as a resident, service user or a client. The person or people experiencing this behaviour should report this to their line manager.

The line manager should initiate corporate or service level policy and protocol to address and resolve the issue.

The incident should be recorded on the corporate Dignity at Work log via the People, Inclusion and Culture team.

In cases of sexual harassment, line managers must take all steps to ensure this does not happen again to the same colleague or other colleagues.

Internal Unwanted, Inappropriate or Unacceptable Behaviour

If a council colleague or group of colleagues are alleged to have demonstrated unwanted, inappropriate or unacceptable behaviour towards another colleague or a group of colleagues, the following process should be followed which includes attempts to self resolve, stage 1 reporting and/or stage 2 reporting for serious breaches of Dignity at Work.

Self Resolution

In most cases the colleague(s) alleged to have demonstrated unwanted, inappropriate or unacceptable behaviour will not have acted with malicious intent and will be unaware of the effects of their behaviour. It is important to remember that the impact of behaviours always outweighs intent.

Sometimes the person/people experiencing the alleged behaviour may feel unable to approach alleged person/people demonstrating the unwanted, inappropriate or

unacceptable behaviour directly if this has been significant, of a threatening nature or has caused considerable upset.

If the person/people experiencing the unwanted, inappropriate or unacceptable behaviour feels confident and able, they are encouraged to try to resolve the issue respectfully by speaking or writing to the people/person alleged to have demonstrated the behaviour to explain how this behaviour has affected them.

Before approaching the person/people they allege to resolve the issue, the person/people experiencing the unwanted, inappropriate or unacceptable behaviour should:

- Be clear of how specific behaviours have affected them
- Have clear specifics about incidents of the behaviours (when it happened, where it happened, frequency) where possible
- Keep a diary to help log sustained/frequent behaviours

When approaching the people the allege, the person/people experiencing the unwanted, inappropriate or unacceptable behaviour should:

- Clearly describe the behaviour(s) and the impact this is having on them with as much detail as possible
- State this is unwanted and/or inappropriate and/or unacceptable
- Describe what should be changed about the alleged person/people's behaviour
- Seek agreement for how the issue can be resolved

If the person/people experiencing the unwanted, inappropriate or unacceptable behaviour does not feel confident in self resolution or, the attempt at resolving the issue through self resolution is not satisfactory, a stage 1 report should be made to a manager.

Stage 1 Report

A stage 1 report can be made to any manager where the person/people experiencing the unwanted, inappropriate or unacceptable behaviour feels they are unable to resolve the issue alone or without support.

The person/people making a report can be supported to make a report by other colleagues, witnesses, staff equality network leads or members or their trade union representatives.

The report can be made in person or in writing (email/teams/letter) explaining that the person/people wish to make a stage 1 report under the Dignity at Work policy.

The manager to whom the report is made should ensure the immediate safety of the people/person making the report and arrange to meet with the person/people making the report as soon as possible within one week of the report being made.

The person/people making the report can be accompanied at this meeting by a colleague, staff equality network member or their trade union representative for support.

At the meeting, the person/people making the report should:

- Clearly describe the behaviour(s) that they have experienced and by whom with clear examples
- Provide specific details (who was involved, where did this happen, what time did this happen, any witnesses)
- Describe how this has made them feel
- Detail whether an attempt at self resolution has been made and the outcome if this has not been satisfactorily resolved and why
- Detail whether they feel able or not to resolve the issue with support

The manager should:

- Make notes with the permission of the reporting person/people
- Ask questions for clarification
- Be non judgemental
- Not attempt to justify or explain the alleged behaviour
- Explain the Dignity at Work process and next steps

The manager will need to log the stage 1 report with the People, Inclusion and Culture team.

The manager should arrange a meeting to speak with the people the report is about to talk through the allegation(s) using the details from the meeting with the person/people who made the report. The people who the allegations are about may be accompanied by a colleague or their trade union representative at this meeting for support.

At this meeting the manager should:

- Explain that a report has been made through the Dignity at Work policy
- Detail the allegation including specifics
- Explain how this has made the person/people experiencing the behaviour feel
- Ask the people the allegation is about for their own version of events
- Make notes of the alleged people's version of events including specifics
- Establish if the alleged people are willing to meet with the person/people who made the report
- Explain that they will consider next steps considering all the details that have been given by the person/people making the report and the alleged perpetrator(s)

If the manager feels there is conflicting or missing information, they can arrange to speak to any witnesses if these have been detailed by either the person/people making the report or the alleged person/people. They can also take additional advice on how to proceed from a People, Inclusion and Culture team officer.

Stage 1 Report Outcomes

Once the manager has spoken to all parties, including witnesses where appropriate, they should consider the information collated and make a recommendation to resolve or progress the stage 1 report.

If the person/people making the report feels the behaviour was threatening or significant and the manager agrees considering the information gathered from all parties, the manager can decide to progress the matter to a stage 2 report.

The manager can also decide to progress the matter to a stage 2 report in the following circumstances:

- The alleged behaviour was likely of a serious nature that would ordinarily be referred to a fact find investigation in line with the council's disciplinary procedure
- The alleged person/people have existing conduct warnings/documented discussions on file
- The alleged behaviour was likely to have happened and the alleged person/people have shown little or no remorse and/or willingness to resolve the issue
- The alleged behaviour has or is likely to bring the council into disrepute

Alternatively, the manager can recommend a restorative conversation or mediation as a resolution if they feel this is achievable. Both parties need agree to enter into either one of these as part of the recommendation to resolve the issue.

The manager will need to ensure the suggested outcome log of the stage 1 report is updated with the People, Inclusion and Culture team.

Restorative conversation

A restorative conversation brings both parties together to have a conversation facilitated by a manager to try to restore working relationships and/or detriment to how people are feeling.

At the request of either party, an HR Officer can be present to support the manager to facilitate the conversation, ensure that the process is conducted fairly and to advise all parties in respect of HR policy and procedure.

The conversation must be informal and confidential, with all parties willing to find a way forward. The focus of the conversation should not be on apportioning blame. No record of the meeting is required beyond setting out what future actions or behaviours have been agreed. The record should not contain any implied decision that unwanted, inappropriate or unacceptable behaviour has or has not taken place.

If during the discussion it becomes obvious that the matter is more serious, the discussion should be adjourned. All parties should be advised that the matter could be continued with mediation or progressed to a stage 2 report.

The discussion should follow these formats:

Where the alleged person/people have acknowledged their behaviour and wish to apologise:

- Manager outlines the format of the discussion and the intention is to restore working relationships and/or detriment to how people are feeling
- Allow the alleged person/people to speak first to acknowledge their behaviour, apologise and outline future actions or changes they will make
- The person/people making the report are asked if they accept the apology and the future actions or changes
- The person/people making the report can suggest how they feel working relationships can be restored if they do not accept the apology or the future actions
- The alleged person/people are given an opportunity to respond to the suggestions from the person/people making the report

Where the alleged person/people have not previously acknowledged their alleged behaviour and have not indicated they wish to apologise:

- Manager outlines the format of the discussion and the intention is to restore working relationships and/or detriment to how people are feeling
- The person/people making the report are asked to explain the behaviours, how these are unwanted, inappropriate or unacceptable to them and how this has made them feel
- The alleged person/people are asked if they acknowledge or accept this or have any questions that might help them understand the point of view of the person/people making a report
- The person/people making the report are asked if they can suggest changes or actions that would restore the working relationship or detriment to how they are feeling
- The alleged person/people are asked if they accept the suggested changes or actions

If there is agreement that the matter is resolved at the end of the restorative conversation, the matter is considered resolved and the manager should log the outcome with the People, Inclusion and Culture team.

If there is no agreed resolution at the end of the restorative conversation, the manager can suggest mediation as a final attempt to resolve the matter at stage 1. Otherwise, the matter should be referred to stage 2 for a formal fact find investigation.

The manager will need to ensure the outcome log of the stage 1 report is updated with the People, Inclusion and Culture team.

Mediation

Mediation can be a valuable resource in helping to resolve reports of unwanted, inappropriate and unacceptable behaviour. It can be used where informal discussions have failed to resolve the matter satisfactorily or where a person/people making a report feels the matter needs raising more formally.

Both parties must agree to mediation and either side has the right to withdraw during the process. The manager the report is made to will need to arrange mediation through the Council's Mediation Service which can be commissioned via the People, Inclusion and Culture Team

If there is agreement that the matter is resolved at the end of mediation, the matter is considered resolved and the manager should log the outcome with the People, Inclusion and Culture team.

If mediation does not resolve the matter, the matter should be referred to stage 2 for a formal fact find investigation.

Stage 2 Report

A stage 2 report should be made to a director or assistant director in the following circumstances:

- Where the person/people experiencing the unwanted, inappropriate or unacceptable behaviour feels threatened, unsafe or the behaviour is too significant to resolve through self resolution or a stage 1 report
- Where a manager receiving a stage 1 report feels the behaviour is too significant to resolve at stage 1
- Where attempts to resolve the matter at stage 1 have not been successful

The person/people making a report can be supported to make a report through other colleagues, witnesses, staff equality network leads or members or their trade union representatives.

The report should be made in writing (email/teams/letter) explaining that this is a stage 2 report under the Dignity at Work policy.

If the report is received directly from the person/people experiencing the unwanted, inappropriate or unacceptable behaviour, The director/assistant director to whom the report is made should ensure the immediate safety of the people/person making the report and arrange to meet with them as soon as possible and within 1 week of the report being made.

At the meeting the person/people making the report should:

- Clearly describe the behaviour(s) that they have experienced and by whom with clear examples
- Provide specific details (who was involved, where did this happen, what time did this happen, where there any witnesses)
- Describe how this has made them feel
- Detail whether an attempt at self resolution has been made and the outcome if this has not been satisfactorily resolved and why
- Detail whether or not they feel able to resolve the issue with support

The director/assistant director should:

- Make notes with the permission of the reporting person/people
- Ask questions for clarification
- Be non judgemental
- Not attempt to justify or explain the alleged behaviour
- Confirm the person/people making the report feel stage 1 would not resolve the matter
- Explain the Dignity at Work process and next steps

If the stage 2 report is a referral from a manager following attempts to resolve at stage 1. The director/assistant director should arrange a meeting with the stage 1 manager to discuss the matter and detail the steps taken at stage 1. If appropriate the director/assistant director can also speak to the person/people who have experienced the unwanted, inappropriate or unacceptable behaviour before deciding on how to proceed.

The director/assistant director can recommend/decide to proceed with the following:

- Recommend stage 1 resolutions if these have not been attempted and there is agreement from the person/people making the report to attempt these
- Proceed to the council's disciplinary procedure if the alleged behaviour is significant or attempts at stage 1 resolutions have not been successful

A log of the stage 2 report and recommended action should be made through the People, Inclusion and Culture team.

8. Appeals

There is no appeals procedure in direct relation to this policy as this policy provides a framework for informal resolution of dignity at work issues. This policy refers into the council's disciplinary policy and procedures where informal resolution has not been possible and where it is considered appropriate. Once referred into the disciplinary policy and procedures, appeals can be lodged and heard in line with the disciplinary policy.

If a colleague/colleagues feel that procedures under this Dignity at Work policy have been erroneously applied, they are encouraged to initially discuss this with the stage 1 manager or stage 2 director to resolve. A member of the People, Inclusion and Culture team may also be consulted to support resolution. If this attempt at resolving the matter fails, colleagues can refer the matter through the council's grievance policy and procedures.

Appendix 1 – Examples of unwanted, inappropriate or unacceptable behaviours

Examples include (but are not limited to):

AGE	• Considering someone as too young or too old for promotion • Derogatory remarks or assumptions about someone's ability based on age • Pressuring someone to retire.
DISABILITY	• Derogatory language about disability or neurodiversity • Mimicking • Invasive personal questions • Ostracising, avoiding or excluding people • Making assumptions about someone's ability based on disability • Unwanted highlighting or disclosing a person's disability.
GENDER/SEX	• Unwelcome sexual advances • Unwanted touching, standing too close or leering • Sexual jokes • Displaying pornographic photographs, drawings or images • sending emails with material of a sexual nature • Unwanted or derogatory comments about clothing or appearance • Sending sexually explicit emails, text messages or online messages
CARE EXPERIENCED CHILDREN& CARE LEAVERS	• Refusing to recognise the effects of adverse childhood experience (ACE) • Invasive questions about homelife and childhood experiences.
CARERS	• Assumptions that carers want extra time off work. • refusing reasonable flexible working and special leave requests
GENDER INDENTITY	• Transphobic comments. 'jokes' and name calling • verbal or physical abuse or intimidation; • Refusing to recognise correct gender identity • Failing to address a person by their given name and pronouns • Outing a person as transgender/non-binary without their consent or spreading rumours (this may also be a criminal offence); • Excluding a person from conversation or activities; • Asking personally intrusive questions • Using other protected characteristics to justify opinions and actions that are anti-transgender
RACE	• Derogatory comments and language based on race

	• Mimicking or belittling people based on their race • Displaying or sharing racially offensive imagery • Refusing to work with someone because of their race • Ostracising someone because of their race, colour, nationality or ethnic origin;
RELIGION OR BELIEF	• Mocking or deriding people's religious or other beliefs • Unwanted comments on appearance or dress • Unnecessary prevention of people observing their religious needs • Pressure to participate in political/religious groups.
SOCIALLY ECONOMICALLY VULNERABLE	• Expecting contributions to funds for birthdays and special events • intrusive questioning about homelife and finances • Ostracising people for not taking part in social activities outside work
MILITARY VETERANS	• Assuming veterans are unable to learn new ways of working
SEXUAL ORIENTATION	• Language, insults, threats or 'jokes' that are homophobic or biphobic in nature • Unwanted outing or speculation about a person being LGB • Ostracising someone because they are LGB; • Using other protected characteristics to justify anti-LGB opinions and actions

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