

# Hungerford Town Council

## Dignity at Work Policy

**Adopted by Full Council:** 1<sup>st</sup> June 2026

**Minute reference:** FC20260098

**Review date:** [date, usually every 2–3 years or earlier if legislation/guidance changes]

**Policy owner:** Town Clerk

**Applies to:** Councillors, employees, contractors, volunteers, and others working with or on behalf of the Council

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## 1. Purpose

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

The Council will not tolerate bullying, harassment, victimisation, discrimination, intimidation or unacceptable behaviour towards employees, councillors, volunteers, contractors, residents, service users or members of the public.

This policy sets out the standards of behaviour expected and the steps the Council will take where concerns are raised.

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## 2. Scope

This policy applies to behaviour:

- at Council meetings, committee meetings, working groups and civic events;
- in the Council office, cemetery, allotments, public facilities and other Council-managed locations;
- during site visits, training, conferences or external meetings;
- by email, telephone, letter, messaging apps, social media or online meetings;
- between councillors, employees, volunteers, contractors, residents and others engaging with the Council;
- outside normal working hours where the behaviour is connected to Council business or affects working relationships.

This policy does not replace the Council's:

- Employee Grievance Procedure;
- Disciplinary Procedure;
- Complaints Procedure;
- Councillor Code of Conduct;
- Social Media Policy;

- Member-Officer Protocol, if adopted;
- Safeguarding, Health and Safety, Equality or Data Protection policies.

Where more than one procedure may apply, the Town Clerk, Mayor or F&GP Committee Chair or an appointed adviser should determine the most appropriate route.

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### 3. Policy statement

The Council expects all those covered by this policy to:

- treat others with dignity, fairness and respect;
- listen to different views without personal attack;
- raise concerns appropriately and constructively;
- avoid behaviour that could reasonably be seen as intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive;
- respect professional boundaries between councillors and staff;
- support a working culture where concerns can be raised without fear of retaliation.

The Council recognises that robust debate, scrutiny and constructive challenge are part of democratic local government. However, challenge must be directed at issues, decisions and performance — not through personal abuse, bullying, harassment or intimidation.

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### 4. Definitions

#### Bullying

Bullying may be characterised as offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, or an abuse or misuse of power, which undermines, humiliates, denigrates or injures the recipient.

Bullying can be a one-off incident or a pattern of behaviour. It may be carried out face-to-face, in writing, by telephone, online, through social media or through third parties.

Examples may include:

- shouting, swearing or aggressive behaviour;
- persistent criticism without justification;
- personal insults, ridicule or humiliation;
- spreading malicious rumours;
- deliberately excluding someone from relevant communications or meetings;
- setting unreasonable deadlines or demands;
- undermining someone's role or authority;
- pressuring staff to act outside proper procedures;
- making threats about employment, reputation or position.

## Harassment

Harassment includes unwanted conduct related to a protected characteristic which has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

Protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are:

- age;
- disability;
- gender reassignment;
- marriage and civil partnership;
- pregnancy and maternity;
- race;
- religion or belief;
- sex;
- sexual orientation.

Harassment may also include unwanted conduct of a sexual nature.

## Victimisation

Victimisation occurs where someone is treated badly because they have made, supported or may make a complaint about discrimination or harassment, or because they have raised concerns under this policy.

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## 5. Examples of unacceptable behaviour

Unacceptable behaviour may include, but is not limited to:

- discriminatory, sexist, racist, homophobic, transphobic, ageist or ableist language or conduct;
- unwanted physical contact or personal attention;
- intrusive questioning about personal matters;
- mocking, belittling or humiliating a person;
- aggressive, abusive or threatening communications;
- repeated unreasonable complaints or demands directed at an individual;
- misuse of Council procedures to intimidate or harass;
- public criticism of employees in a way that undermines their role;
- councillors giving direct instructions to employees outside agreed management arrangements;
- employees, councillors or others using social media to attack, ridicule or intimidate;
- retaliation against someone who has raised a concern.

This list is not exhaustive.

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## 6. Reasonable management and democratic scrutiny

This policy is not intended to prevent:

- reasonable management of employees;
- legitimate performance management;
- lawful and appropriate disciplinary action;
- councillors scrutinising decisions, finances or services;
- residents making legitimate complaints;
- robust but respectful political debate.

However, such actions must be carried out properly, proportionately and respectfully.

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## 7. Responsibilities

**All councillors, employees and others covered by this policy must:**

- behave respectfully and professionally;
- consider the impact of their behaviour on others;
- challenge unacceptable behaviour where safe and appropriate;
- report serious or repeated concerns;
- co-operate with any investigation or resolution process;
- maintain confidentiality where required.

**Councillors must:**

- comply with the Councillor Code of Conduct;
- respect the professional role of the Town Clerk and staff;
- avoid placing staff under improper pressure;
- raise staffing matters through the correct Council channels;
- not use their position to bully, harass or intimidate.

**Employees must:**

- comply with their employment contract and Council policies;
- raise concerns promptly through the appropriate procedure;
- support a respectful workplace.

**The Town Clerk must:**

- promote this policy and advise on appropriate procedures;
- take reasonable steps to address unacceptable behaviour;
- ensure staff are supported where concerns arise;
- keep appropriate confidential records.

### **The Council must:**

- provide a safe working environment;
- take concerns seriously;
- ensure fair and proportionate handling of complaints;
- provide training where needed;
- review patterns of behaviour and workplace culture.

## **8. Raising concerns informally**

Where appropriate, a person who feels they have been treated unacceptably may try to resolve the matter informally by:

- explaining to the person concerned that their behaviour is unwelcome;
- asking them to stop or change their behaviour;
- seeking support from the Town Clerk, Mayor, or F&GP Committee Chair or another appropriate person;
- using mediation, where suitable and agreed by those involved.

Informal resolution will not be appropriate in every case, particularly where behaviour is serious, repeated, threatening, discriminatory or involves a significant power imbalance.

## **9. Formal routes for concerns**

The appropriate formal route will depend on who is involved.

### **Employee about employee**

Concerns should normally be handled under the Council's Grievance Procedure. If misconduct may have occurred, the Disciplinary Procedure may also apply.

### **Employee about councillor**

The concern should be raised with the Town Clerk, Mayor/Chair or F&GP Committee Chair, depending on the circumstances.

Possible routes may include:

- informal resolution;
- consideration under this policy;
- support through the Council's employment procedures;
- referral to the Monitoring Officer where the matter may involve a breach of the Councillor Code of Conduct;
- external HR, SLCC, BALC or legal advice where appropriate.

### **Councillor about employee**

Concerns about an employee's conduct or performance must be raised through the Town Clerk, or through the Mayor or F&GP Committee Chair if the concern relates to the Town Clerk. Councillors must not seek to manage, discipline or direct employees individually.

### **Councillor about councillor**

Concerns may be raised informally where appropriate. Where the matter may involve the Councillor Code of Conduct, the complaint should be referred to the Monitoring Officer at the principal authority.

### **Resident, contractor or third party about councillor or employee**

Concerns should normally be handled under the Council's Complaints Procedure, unless the matter is better addressed through employment procedures, contract management arrangements or the Code of Conduct process.

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## **10. Serious or urgent concerns**

Where behaviour involves threats, violence, harassment, safeguarding concerns, hate incidents, serious health and safety risks or potential criminal conduct, the Council may take immediate protective action. This may include:

- ending a meeting or interaction;
- restricting contact arrangements;
- providing staff support;
- seeking HR, legal or sector advice;
- reporting to the police or another relevant authority where appropriate.

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## **11. Confidentiality**

Concerns raised under this policy will be handled sensitively and confidentially so far as reasonably possible.

Information will only be shared with those who need to know in order to manage, investigate or resolve the matter. Absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, particularly where formal action, safeguarding, legal duties or health and safety concerns arise.

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## **12. Support**

The Council will consider appropriate support for those affected, which may include:

- access to line management or committee support;
- temporary adjustments to working arrangements;

- mediation where suitable;
  - signposting to occupational health or an employee assistance service, if available;
  - advice from HR, SLCC, BALC or a sector solicitor;
  - support in managing contact with individuals whose behaviour is unacceptable.
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### **13. False, malicious or vexatious complaints**

The Council will take all concerns seriously. However, complaints that are knowingly false, malicious or vexatious may themselves be treated as misconduct and considered under the appropriate Council procedure.

A complaint will not be treated as false or vexatious simply because it is not upheld.

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### **14. Records and data protection**

The Council will keep appropriate records of concerns, actions taken and outcomes. Records will be held securely and in accordance with the Council's data protection policies and retention schedule.

Personal data will be handled in accordance with UK data protection requirements.

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### **15. Training and awareness**

The Council will ensure that councillors and employees are made aware of this policy. Training may be provided as part of councillor induction, staff induction, code of conduct training, employment training or wider governance training.

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### **16. Review**

This policy will be reviewed at least every [two/three] years, or sooner if there are changes in legislation, sector guidance, Council procedures or operational need.

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### **17. Adoption**

This policy was adopted by Hungerford Town Council at a meeting held on **1/6/26**.