



BEDFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL
GUIDANCE ON DEALING WITH
BULLYING & HARASSMENT

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1. Why do we need guidance on dealing with bullying and harassment?

Bedford Borough Council is committed to creating and maintaining a work environment free of harassment and bullying, where everyone is treated with dignity and respect.

Harassment and bullying can have very serious consequences for individuals. It may make them unhappy, cause stress, and affect their health and relationships. It may also affect their work performance and could even cause them to leave their jobs. Serious harassment may be a criminal offence.

This guidance outlines the behaviour expected of Council staff and the procedures and support which are available to raise any concerns of bullying and harassment in the workplace.

2. Who is covered by this guidance?

This guidance applies to all staff, excluding school-based employees. It covers bullying and harassment of and by managers, employees, casual workers, contractors, agency staff and anyone else engaged to work at the Council.

If the complainant or alleged harasser is not directly employed by the Council but engaged to work there, this guidance will apply with any necessary modifications, e.g. where an agency worker is concerned the agency may be involved.

In circumstances where an employee is dealing with a complaint from a member of the public in relation to Council services and the complainant becomes abusive, the employee should be directed to the [Unreasonable Complaints Procedure](#).

3. What are bullying and harassment?

Bullying is defined as any behaviour which is offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting, an abuse or misuse of power that may undermine or humiliate.

Harassment is unwanted conduct related to a relevant protected characteristic, which has the purpose or effect of violating an individual's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that individual". The relevant protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, race (including nationality and ethnic origin), religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

4. What is victimisation?

Victimisation is treating colleagues less favourably because of action they have taken or intend to take, for example making a complaint of bullying or harassment, or giving evidence against a colleague in an investigation.

All members of staff have a right not to be victimised for making a complaint in good faith, even if the complaint is not upheld.

5. What are our responsibilities?

Bedford Borough Council staff has a responsibility to ensure that bullying and harassment does not take place. The Council views any act of bullying or harassment very seriously.

All Council staff members are responsible for their own behaviour and are expected to:

- treat others with dignity and respect;
- consider how their behaviour impacts on others;
- not victimise or attempt to victimise anyone who has made a complaints of bullying or harassment, or provided information to support a complaint;
- report any incidents of bullying or harassment to their line manager or Personnel Services; and
- be aware of their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010.

Line managers should ensure that their staff members are aware of this guidance document and must take action as quickly as possible when they become aware that bullying, harassment or victimisation is happening.

6. What should you do if you feel you are being bullied or harassed?

If you think you are being bullied or harassed, you may be able to resolve matters informally. The person may not realise that their behaviour is unwelcome or upsetting. You may feel able to approach the person yourself, or with the help of a colleague. You should tell the person what behaviour you find offensive and unwelcome, and tell them that you would like it to stop immediately.

The Council encourages employees to discuss workplace problems at an early stage and therefore it may be more appropriate to raise your concerns initially with your line manager or Personnel Services to determine what action should be taken.

If an informal approach does not resolve matters, or you think the situation is too serious to be dealt with informally, you can make a formal complaint by using the Council's [Grievance Procedure](#).

The [Grievance Procedure](#) sets out the process that will be followed to ensure that formal complaints about bullying and harassment are addressed fairly and consistently and as quickly as possible. All complaints will be investigated promptly and, if appropriate, disciplinary proceedings will be brought against the alleged harasser.

7. What happens if a malicious allegation is made?

The Council will treat malicious false allegations of bullying and harassment very seriously and this may result in disciplinary action.

8. What further support and advice are available?

The below additional support can be accessed by individuals affected by bullying, harassment or victimisation be they complainants, alleged perpetrators or witnesses:

- Trade Unions
- [Employee Support Service](#)
- Mediation (please contact the Employee Relations Team)

9. What about confidentiality?

Information shared or obtained during the handling of complaints of bullying and harassment will be treated sensitively. The question of maintaining information in confidence will be discussed with all involved, but it is important to recognise that certain types of information will have to be shared as necessary within the Council in order to help the decision-making or remedy for the individual making the complaint, or during any appropriate disciplinary action taken against the individual responding.

10. What training and monitoring will take place?

Bedford Borough Council is committed to raise awareness of bullying and harassment and its implications in the workplace through providing information and relevant training sessions. Training sessions will help staff understand what they can do to help create and maintain a working environment free of bullying and harassment, and what their rights and responsibilities are when faced with a situation where bullying or harassment occurs. Training will further enable line managers to deal more effectively with complaints of bullying and harassment.

The Council will review the outcomes of cases where complaints of bullying, harassment or victimisation have been made to identify any future learning points. The success of creating and maintaining a workplace free of bullying and harassment will also be monitored by means such as confidential staff surveys.

11. What legislation is relevant?

- Equality Act 2010
- Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
- Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- Health and Safety at Work Act 1974

12. Where can further information be obtained?

The ACAS advice leaflet on Bullying and Harassment at Work: Guidance for Employees provides information about bullying and harassment; summarises employer responsibilities; outlines options and points to sources of further information and advice.