



# Employee Handbook

## MARDEN PARISH COUNCIL – EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK

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## EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK ISSUES AND UPDATES

Page Number	Amendments	Issue Number	Date
1-44	Draft	1	December 2022
1-45	Final draft for adoption	2	March 2023
1-45	Document provided to employees	3	May 2023
1-45	Reviewed – no amendments	4	March 2024
2-62	<p>Page Numbering amended</p> <p>Holiday Entitlement:  2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph: deleted first two sentences: added new sentence</p> <p>New 7<sup>th</sup> paragraph  Deleted old paragraphs 7 (Office Staff) and 10 (Caretakers)</p> <p>New Policy: Leave Policy</p> <p>Health, Safety, Welfare and Hygiene:  Amendment to Refreshment  Making Facilities: all staff able to access whilst office is open</p> <p>Lone Worker Policy:  3<sup>rd</sup> paragraph: add “..... is conducted once a year (or more frequent if required) ....”</p> <p>New Policy: Sexual Harassment Policy  New Policy: Workplace Stress Management Policy</p> <p>Updated edition provided to all staff along with 2025 holiday/TOIL form</p>	5	January 2025
1-92	Font changed Policies moved to Appendices Page 38 onwards	6	May 2025
6	Additional item added – Right to Work	7	June 2025
6 21 21 73	<p>Additional item added – “Right to Work”</p> <p>Carer’s Leave added</p> <p>Neonatal Leave added</p> <p>Neonatal Leave Policy added</p>	7	June 2025

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Welcome to Our Team**

We would like to wish you every success during your employment whether you recently joined us or whether you are an existing employee. We hope that your experience of working here will be positive and rewarding.

This Employee Handbook is designed both to introduce you to our organisation and to be of continuing use during your employment.

We ask that you study carefully the contents of this Employee Handbook as, in addition to setting out our rules and regulations, it also contains information on some of the main employee benefits that may be available to you and the policies and procedures relating to your employment. If you require any clarification or additional information please refer to the Clerk.

Please note that we provide equal opportunities and are committed to the principle of equality in accordance with legislative provisions. We expect your support in implementing these policies. We will not condone any unlawful discriminatory act or attitude in the course of your employment or in your dealings with the public, suppliers, contract workers, or with fellow employees. Acts of unlawful discrimination, harassment or victimisation will result in disciplinary action.

General amendments to the Employee Handbook will be issued from time to time.

## **JOINING OUR ORGANISATION**

### **Induction**

At the start of your employment with the Parish Council, you are required to complete an induction programme, during which all our policies and procedures (including Health and Safety) will be explained to you. Information relating to these will be given to you at the induction.

### **Job Description**

Amendments may be made to your job description from time to time in relation to our changing needs and your own ability.

### **Staff Appraisal Scheme**

We have a staff appraisal scheme in place for the purpose of monitoring staff performance levels with a view to maximising the effectiveness of individuals, details of which are available separately. Should there be any concern about your performance, other than matters of a disciplinary nature, the Parish Council undertakes to work with you to seek to ensure that necessary training, mentoring and support is provided to ensure that agreed standards of performance are reached in a reasonable agreed time frame.

### **Job Flexibility**

During holiday periods, etc. it may be necessary for you to take over some duties normally performed by colleagues. This flexibility is essential for operational efficiency as the type and volumes of work are always subject to change.

### **Staff Meetings, Training and Other Activities**

We hold regular update meetings and, when necessary, training sessions. It is a condition of your employment that you attend these meetings and training sessions.

### **Disclosure and Barring Certificate(s)**

Your initial employment is not conditional upon the provision of a satisfactory Disclosure and Barring Certificate of a level appropriate to your post. However, you may be required to undertake criminal record checks from time to time during your employment as deemed appropriate by the Parish Council

Data collected about criminal convictions will be processed in line with the Data Protection Act. You may read more about the data we hold on you, why we hold it and the lawful basis that applies in the employee privacy notice.

### **Convictions and Offences**

During your employment, you are required to immediately report to the Clerk/Chairman any convictions or offences with which you are charged, including traffic offences. Data collected about criminal convictions will be processed in line with the Data Protection Act. You may read more about the data we hold on you, why we hold it and the lawful basis that applies in the employee privacy notice.

### **Other Policies and Procedures**

The Parish Council has a number of other policies and procedures that will have been explained to you during your induction. Copies of these will have been provided to you separately or are available on request from the office.

**Right to Work**

Prior to your employment you will be required to provide details for MPC to undertake checks for your eligibility to work. Two items of ID (one photo) will be required. This will be checked via .gov website.

**Right to Drive**

Prior to your employment, if your position requires you to drive the Council's vehicle, you will need to provide details of your driving licence to enable MPC to check whether you have a clean driving licence.

## **ADMINISTRATION**

### **Salaries and Wages etc.**

#### Payment

a) The Deputy Clerk, Administrative Assistant, Village Caretaker and Parish Groundsman's salaries are paid by bank transfer on the 25th of the current month (or the last working day before the 25th).

The Clerk's salary is paid monthly on 10th of each month (or the last working day before the 10th).

b) You will receive a payslip showing how the total amount of your pay has been calculated. It will also show the deductions that have been made and the reasons for them, e.g. Income Tax, National Insurance, etc.

c) Any pay queries that you may have should be raised with the Clerk.

#### Overpayments

If you are overpaid for any reason, the total amount of the overpayment will normally be deducted from your next payment but if this would cause hardship, arrangements may be made for the overpayment to be recovered over a longer period.

#### Income Tax and National Insurance

At the end of each tax year, you will be given a form P60 showing the total pay you have received from us during that year and the amount of deductions for Income Tax and National Insurance. You may also be given a form P11D showing non-salary benefits. You should keep these documents in a safe place as you may need to produce them for tax purposes.

#### Pay Reviews

Salaries are reviewed annually and follows our Pay Policy (see separate document).

### **Lateness/Absenteeism**

You must attend for work punctually at the specified time(s) and you are required to comply strictly with any time recording procedures relating to your area of work.

All absences must be notified in accordance with the sickness reporting procedures laid down in this Employee Handbook.

Lateness or absence may result in disciplinary action and/or loss of appropriate payment.

### **Timesheets**

You are required to complete and submit timesheets as directed in order to ensure that you receive the correct payment. Incorrectly completed, or late submission of, timesheets may result in incorrect or delayed payment of wages. Deliberate

falsification of timesheets will be regarded as a disciplinary offence and may lead to your summary dismissal.

**Pension Scheme**

We operate a contributory pension scheme to which you will be auto-enrolled into (subject to the conditions of the scheme). The scheme enables you to save for your retirement using your own money, together with tax relief and contributions from the Parish Council.

## **HOLIDAY ENTITLEMENTS AND CONDITIONS**

### **Annual Holidays**

Your annual holiday entitlement is shown in your individual Statement of Main Terms of Employment (Form SMT).

No annual leave is permitted to be carried over into the next leave year unless in extenuating circumstances which must be agreed by the HR Sub-Committee. No payment in lieu will be made in respect of untaken holidays other than in the event of termination of your employment.

Holiday dates will normally be allocated on a "first come - first served" basis whilst ensuring that operational efficiency and appropriate staffing levels are maintained throughout the year.

You should give at least four weeks' notice of your intention to take holidays of a two week and one week's notice is required for odd single days.

You may not normally take more than two working weeks consecutively.

Your holiday pay will be at your normal basic pay unless shown otherwise on your Statement of Main Terms.

All staff must complete the holiday request form and have it signed by the Clerk/Chairman of HR Sub-Committee before any firm holiday arrangements are made (please see Leave Policy)

### **Public/Bank Holidays**

Your entitlement to public/bank holidays is shown in your individual Statement of Main Terms of Employment.



## **SICKNESS/INJURY PAYMENTS AND CONDITIONS**

### **Notification of Incapacity for Work**

You must notify us by telephone on the first day of incapacity at the earliest possible opportunity and by no later than 10am. Text messages are acceptable method of notification. Other than in exceptional circumstances notification should be made personally to the Clerk/Chairman.

You should try to give some indication of your expected return date and notify us as soon as possible if this date changes. The notification procedures should be followed on each day of absence unless you are covered by a medical certificate.

If your incapacity extends to more than seven calendar days you are required to notify us of your continued incapacity once a week thereafter, unless otherwise agreed.

### **Evidence of Incapacity**

Medical certificates are not issued for short-term incapacity. In these cases of incapacity (up to and including seven calendar days) you must sign a self-certification absence form on your return to work.

If your sickness has been (or you know that it will be) for longer than seven days (whether or not they are working days) you should obtain a medical certificate and forward this to us without delay. Subsequently you must supply us with consecutive medical certificates to cover the whole of your absence.

In some situations, in line with government guidance, an extension of self-certification of absence will be temporarily accepted. You will be informed of any such changes should these apply.

### **Payments**

You are entitled to statutory sick pay (SSP) if you are absent for four or more consecutive days because of sickness or injury provided you meet the statutory qualifying conditions. SSP is treated like wages and is subject to normal deductions.

Qualifying days are the only days for which you are entitled to SSP. These days are normally your working days unless otherwise notified to you. The first three qualifying days of absence are waiting days for which SSP is not payable. Where a second or subsequent period of incapacity (of four days or more) occurs within 56 days of a previous period of incapacity, waiting days are not served again.

Any contractual sickness/injury payments are shown in your individual Statement of Main Terms of Employment.

Any days of contractual sickness/injury payments that qualify for SSP will be offset against SSP on a day-to-day basis. A deduction will be made for any other state benefits received if you are excluded or transferred from SSP.

If you are entitled to any payments in excess of SSP and your entitlement expires, full or part payment may be allowed at our discretion where it is considered that there are special circumstances warranting it.

Where the circumstances of your incapacity are such that you receive or are awarded any sum by way of compensation or damages in respect of the incapacity from a third party, then any payments which we may have made to you because of the absence (including SSP) shall be repaid by you to us up to an amount not exceeding the amount of the compensation or damages paid by the third party and up to, but not exceeding, any amount paid by us.

The Council has a sick pay scheme which is shown in your individual Statement of Main Terms of Employment.

### **Return to Work**

You should notify the Clerk/Chairman as soon as you know on which day you will be returning to work if this differs from the date of return previously notified or as stated on your medical certificate.

If you have been suffering from an infectious or contagious disease or illness such as rubella or hepatitis you must not report for work without clearance from your own doctor.

On return to work after any period of sickness/injury absence (including absence covered by a medical certificate), you are also required to complete a self-certification absence form and hand this to the Clerk/Chairman.

Upon returning to work after any period of sickness/injury absence, you may be required to attend a "return to work" interview to discuss the state of your health and fitness for work. Information arising from such an interview will be treated with the strictest confidence.

### **General**

Submission of a medical certificate or sickness self-certification absence form, although giving us the reason for your absence may not always be regarded by us as sufficient justification for accepting your absence. Sickness is just one of a number of reasons for absence and although it is understandable that if you are sick you may need time off, continual or repeated absence through sickness may not be acceptable to us.

In deciding whether your absence is acceptable or not we will take into account the reasons and extent of all your absences, including any absence caused by sickness/injury. We cannot operate with an excessive level of absence as all absence, for whatever reason, reduces our efficiency.

We will take a serious view if you take sickness/injury leave which is not genuine, and it will result in disciplinary action being taken. In addition, we will take a serious view if you are found to be undertaking any activity during sickness absence which we reasonably believe is inconsistent with being incapable of work at that time

despite the presence of an illness, injury or medical condition. Disciplinary action will be taken in this instance.

If we consider it necessary, we may ask your permission to contact your doctor and/or for you to be independently medically examined by our Occupational Health Specialists, Health Assured Limited.

Whilst on absence due to sickness or incapacity you are not permitted to undertake any paid work for another employer or for any business established by you without express permission from the Parish Council.

## **OTHER BENEFITS**

### **Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)**

We recognise that sometimes you may face certain challenges in your work and home life that are difficult to deal with. We subscribe to a confidential and professional life management service that provides you with a qualified counsellor who can offer personal support for any practical or emotional challenges you may be facing. The service is initially provided via telephone and online advice but face to face meetings will be arranged where this is felt clinically appropriate. This service is totally confidential. You can use the Health Assured App or call 0800 0474097. More details of this service are available from the Clerk.

### **Bright Exchange**

We currently subscribe to an online HR tool, Bright HR. Through Bright HR you have exclusive access to Bright Exchange. Bright Exchange is an online marketplace exclusive to Bright HR users giving you access to hundreds of products, services and special offers from a wide range of different companies. You can use your Bright HR credentials to log in to Bright Exchange and take advantage of these offers. More details are available from the Clerk.

## **SAFEGUARDS**

### **Rights of Search**

Although we do not have the contractual right to carry out searches of employees and their property (including vehicles) whilst they are on our premises or business, we would ask all employees to assist us in this matter should we feel that such a search is necessary.

Where practicable, searches will be carried out in the presence of a colleague of your choice who is available on the premises at the time of the search. This will also apply at the time that any further questioning takes place.

We reserve the right to call in the police at any stage.

### **Confidentiality**

All information that:

- a) is or has been acquired by you during, or in the course of your employment, or has otherwise been acquired by you in confidence;
- b) relates particularly to our business, or that of other persons or bodies with whom we have dealings of any sort; and
- c) has not been made public by, or with our authority;

shall be confidential, and (save in the course of our business or as required by law) you shall not at any time, whether before or after the termination of your employment, disclose such information to any person without our prior written consent.

You are to exercise reasonable care to keep safe all documentary or other material containing confidential information, and shall at the time of termination of your employment with us, or at any other time upon demand, return to us any such material in your possession.

You must make yourself aware of our policies on data protection in relation to personal data and ensure compliance with them at all times.

### **Data Protection**

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the current Data Protection Act regulates our use of your personal data. As an employer, it is our responsibility to ensure that the personal data we process in relation to you is done so in accordance with the required principles. Any data held shall be processed fairly and lawfully and in accordance with the rights of data subjects.

We will process data in line with our privacy notices in relation to both job applicants and employees.

You have several rights in relation to your data. More information about these rights is available in our "Policy on your rights in relation to your data". We commit to

ensuring that your rights are upheld in accordance with the law and have appropriate mechanisms for dealing with such.

We may ask for your consent for processing certain types of personal data. In these circumstances, you will be fully informed as to the personal data we wish to process and the reason for the processing. You may choose to provide or withhold your consent. Once consent is provided, you are able to withdraw consent at any time.

You are required to comply with all Parish Council policies and procedures in relation to processing data. Failure to do so may result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.

### **Parish Council Property and Copyright**

All written material, whether held on paper, electronically or magnetically which was made or acquired by you during the course of your employment with us, is our property and, where appropriate, our copyright. At the time of termination of your employment with us, or at any other time upon demand, you shall return to us any such material in your possession.

### **Statements to Media**

Any statements to reporters from newspapers, radio, television, etc. in relation to our business is defined in our Communications Policy.

### **Virus Protection Procedures**

In order to prevent the introduction of virus contamination into the software system, the following must be observed:

- a) unauthorised software including public domain software, USBs, external hard drives, CDs or internet downloads must not be used; and
- b) all software must be virus checked using standard testing procedures before being used.

### **Use of Computer Equipment**

In order to control the use of the Parish Council's computer equipment and reduce the risk of contamination the following will apply:

- a) the introduction of new software must first of all be checked and authorised by the Clerk/IT Support before general use will be permitted;
- b) only authorised staff should have access to the Parish Council's computer equipment;
- c) only authorised software may be used on any of the Parish Council's computer equipment;
- d) only software that is used for business applications may be used;
- e) no software may be brought onto or taken from the Parish Council's premises without prior authorisation;

f) unauthorised access to the computer facility will result in disciplinary action; and

g) unauthorised copying and/or removal of computer equipment/software will result in disciplinary action, such actions could lead to dismissal.

## STANDARDS

### Wastage

We maintain a policy of "minimum waste" which is essential to the cost-effective and efficient running of our organisation.

You are able to promote this policy by taking extra care during your normal duties by avoiding unnecessary or extravagant use of services, time, energy, etc. The following points are illustrations of this:

- a) handle machines, equipment and stock with care;
- b) turn off any unnecessary lighting and heating. Keep doors closed whenever possible;
- c) ask for other work if your job has come to a standstill; and
- d) start with the minimum of delay after arriving for work and after breaks.

The following provision is an express written term of your contract of employment:

- a) any damage to vehicles, stock or property that is the result of your carelessness, negligence or deliberate vandalism will render you liable to pay the full or part of the cost of repair or replacement;
- b) any loss to us that is the result of your failure to observe rules, procedures or instruction, or is as a result of your negligent behaviour or your unsatisfactory standards of work will render you liable to reimburse to us the full or part of the cost of the loss; and
- c) in the event of an at fault accident whilst driving one of our vehicles you may be required to pay the cost of the insurance excess up to a maximum of £250.00.

In the event of failure to pay, we have the contractual right to deduct such costs from your pay.

### Standards of Dress

As you are liable to come into contact with members of the public, it is important that you present a professional image with regard to appearance and standards of dress. Where uniforms are not provided, you should wear clothes and footwear appropriate to your job responsibilities, and they should be kept clean and tidy at all times.

Where uniforms are provided, these must be worn at all times whilst at work and laundered on a regular basis. Upon termination of your employment you will be required to return any uniform which has been provided to you. Failure to return such items will result in a deduction for the cost of the uniform from your pay. This is an express written term of your employment.

**Clear Desk Procedure**

We operate a Clear Desk Procedure outside of the business hours. During business hours we acknowledge the need for files and documents and wherever possible they should be maintained in a professional, efficient and orderly manner. At the end of the working day, employees are expected to tidy their desks and to lock away all office papers in the desk locker or filing cabinets provided.

The purpose of the procedure is to:

- a) Demonstrate the right image when members of the public/Cllrs visit the Parish Council;
- b) Ensure confidential and sensitive information is kept secure and our data protection policies are adhered to at all times to ensure compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation and the current Data Protection Act; and
- c) Ensure efficiency and effectiveness.

Failure to comply with this policy may result in disciplinary action being taken.

**Housekeeping**

Both from the point of view of safety and of appearance, work areas must be kept clean and tidy at all times.

## **HEALTH, SAFETY, WELFARE AND HYGIENE**

### **Safety**

You should make yourself familiar with our Health and Safety Handbook and your own health and safety duties and responsibilities, as shown separately.

You must not take any action that could threaten the health or safety of yourself, other employees, or the public.

Protective wear and other equipment that may be issued for your protection because of the nature of your job must be worn and used at all appropriate times. Failure to do so could be a contravention of your health and safety responsibilities. Once issued, this protective wear/equipment is your responsibility.

You should report all accidents and injuries at work, no matter how minor, in the accident book and to the Clerk.

You must ensure that you are aware of our fire and evacuation procedures and the action you should take in the event of such an emergency.

### **Refreshment Making Facilities**

We provide refreshment making facilities in the Parish Office for all staff to be able to use (whilst office is open), which must be kept clean and tidy at all times.

### **Alcohol and Drugs**

Under legislation we, as your employer, have a duty to ensure so far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety and welfare at work of all our employees and similarly you have a responsibility to yourself and your colleagues. The use of alcohol and drugs may impair the safe and efficient running of the business and/or the health and safety of our employees.

If your performance or attendance at work is affected as a result of alcohol or drugs, or we believe you have been involved in any drug related action/offence, you may be subject to disciplinary action and, dependent on the circumstances, this may lead to your dismissal.

### **No Smoking**

Smoking during working hours, including on the premises or in Parish Council vehicles, is not permitted. You may only smoke during authorised breaks. You may only smoke in the designated smoking area. This includes the use of e-cigarettes.

### **Hygiene**

Any exposed cut or burn must be covered with a first-aid dressing.

If you are suffering from an infectious or contagious disease or illness such as rubella or hepatitis you must not report for work without clearance from your own doctor.

Contact with any person suffering from an infectious or contagious disease must be reported before commencing work.

**Personal Hygiene**

Your highest attention to your own personal hygiene is requested at all times, as you work in close proximity with fellow employees and members of the public.

**Fitness for Work**

If you arrive for work and, in our opinion, you are not fit to work, we reserve the right to exercise our duty of care if we believe that you may not be able to undertake your duties in a safe manner or may pose a safety risk to others, and send you away for the remainder of the day with or without pay and, dependent on the circumstances, you may be liable to disciplinary action.

**Manual Handling**

You are required, in accordance with the Manual Handling Regulations 1992, to advise us of any condition which may make you more vulnerable to injury.

## **GENERAL TERMS AND PROCEDURES**

### **Changes in Personal Details**

You must notify us of any change of name, address, telephone number, etc., so that we can maintain accurate information on our records and make contact with you in an emergency, if necessary, outside normal working hours.

### **Other Employment**

If you already have any other employment or are considering any additional employment you must notify us so that we can discuss any implications arising from the current working time legislation.

### **Maternity/Paternity/Adoption Leave and Pay**

You may be entitled to maternity/paternity/adoption leave and pay in accordance with the current statutory provisions. If you (or your partner) become pregnant or are notified of a match date for adoption purposes you should notify the Clerk at an early stage so that your entitlements and obligations can be explained to you.

### **Parental/Shared Parental Leave**

If you are entitled to take parental leave or shared parental leave in respect of the current statutory provisions, you should discuss your needs with the Clerk who will identify your entitlements and look at the proposed leave periods dependent upon your child's/children's particular circumstances and the operational aspects of the business.

### **Parental Bereavement Leave**

In the unfortunate event that you experience the loss of a child, you may be entitled to parental bereavement leave and pay in accordance with the current statutory provisions. You should discuss your circumstances with the Clerk and agree time off.

You are reminded that you have access to the Employee Assistance Programme, a confidential telephone counselling service offered by the Parish Council where you can talk to a trained counsellor about your circumstances. You can access this by accessing online resources or calling the number provided, further details are available from the Clerk.

### **Carer's Leave**

If you are entitled to take carer's leave there is a statutory entitlement of a maximum of 5 days unpaid leave in every 12 months if you have a dependant with long-term caring needs (ie disability).

### **Neonatal Care Leave and Pay**

In the unfortunate event that when your child is born they have to spend an additional 7 days in neonatal care during the first 28 days of being born. (See Neonatal Care Policy for more information).

### **Flexible Working**

You have the right to request flexible working in accordance with the current statutory provisions. Further information on the application process can be obtained from the Clerk.

### **Time Off for Dependants**

You may be entitled to take a reasonable amount of unpaid time off during working hours to take action that is necessary to provide help to your dependants. Should this be necessary you should discuss your situation with the Clerk who, if appropriate, will agree the necessary time off.

### **Bereavement Leave**

Reactions to bereavement may vary greatly according to individual circumstances and the setting of fixed rules for time off is therefore inappropriate. You should discuss your circumstances with the Clerk and agree appropriate time off.

### **Jury Service**

If you are required to undertake jury service or to attend court you must advise the Clerk in order that the necessary arrangements for your work can be made. You are normally eligible for loss of earnings, travel and subsistence allowances. You will be permitted reasonable time off to carry out such public duty, but you should not volunteer for jury service beyond 14 days without referral and permission from the Clerk.

### **Employee's Property and Lost Property**

We do not accept liability for any loss of, or damage to, property that you bring onto the premises. You are requested not to bring personal items of value onto the premises and, in particular, not to leave any items overnight. Articles of lost property should be handed to the Clerk who will retain them whilst attempts are made to discover the owner.

### **Friends and Relatives Contact / Telephone Calls / Mobile Phones**

You should discourage your friends and relatives from either calling on you in person or by telephone except in an emergency. Personal telephone calls, either via the office landline, mobile or personal mobile, both incoming and outgoing, should be kept to a minimum. They should not interfere with your duties during working hours.

It is illegal to hold and use a mobile phone, sat nav, tablet or any device that can send and receive data whilst driving.

It is our Parish Council policy that you should not hold and use a mobile phone, sat nav, tablet or any device that can send and receive data whilst driving. You should ensure you are safely parked and you have turned off the engine before making or receiving any telephone calls. In the event of you being unable to answer a call because you cannot find a safe place to stop, you must return the call as soon as conveniently possible after you have safely parked and turned off the engine.

You can use a device held in your hand in the following circumstances only:

- you need to call 999 or 112 in an emergency and it is unsafe or impractical to stop
- you are safely parked
- you are making a contactless payment in a vehicle that is not moving, for example at a drive-through restaurant
- you are using the device to park the vehicle remotely.

You can use devices with hands-free access, such as a built-in sat nav, provided you do not hold the device at any time during usage.

### **Parish Council Mobile Phones**

The Parish Council mobile phones are to be used for business purposes only except in the case of an emergency. Therefore, any unauthorised personal use may be repayable by you and may result in disciplinary action in accordance with our procedures. The Parish Council reserves the right to deduct the appropriate sums from your pay in the event that repayments are not made. The Parish Council reserves the right to monitor all communications made on Parish Council mobile phones in order to ensure compliance with our policies and procedures. For further conditions relating to Parish Council mobile phones please refer to the mobile phone policy.

### **Parish Council Tools/Equipment**

The Parish Council provides the tools and/or equipment necessary to carry out your duties. You should keep these in good repair and take all reasonable steps to ensure that they are secure at all times. You must report any lost, damaged or mislaid tools and/or equipment to the Clerk. You must return all Parish Council tools and/or equipment upon termination of employment by either party. Failure to return any tools and/or equipment, or any loss or damage suffered as a result of your negligence, will result in a deduction to cover the cost of the tools and/or equipment being made from monies due to you.

### **Behaviour at Work**

You should behave with civility towards fellow employees, and no rudeness will be permitted towards members of the public. Objectionable or insulting behaviour, or bad language will render you liable to disciplinary action. You should use your best endeavours to promote the interests of the business and shall, during normal working hours, devote the whole of your time, attention and abilities to the business and its affairs. Any involvement in activities which could be construed as being in competition with us is not allowed.

### **Behaviour Outside of Work**

The Parish Council recognises the importance of work/life balance. However, owing to the nature of the business, the Parish Council insists on employing staff of the highest integrity, we expect you to maintain these standards outside of working hours. Activities that result in adverse publicity to ourselves, or which cause us to lose faith in your integrity, may give us grounds for your dismissal.

### **Driving Licence**

If driving is a necessary part of your role it is imperative that you maintain a valid driving licence suitable for the vehicle you operate at all times during your employment. You are required upon request to produce your driving licence to the management. We may also require you to provide us with the ability to access your driving licence details online. If at any time your licence is endorsed, or you are disqualified from driving, we must be informed immediately. If you are required to

drive as part of your job and we are unable to find alternative employment, your employment may be terminated.

Prior to the commencement of your employment a driving licence check will be made with DVLA and subsequent checks, approximately 6-12 monthly, will be made during your employment.

Data collected about driving licences will be processed in line with the Data Protection Act. You may read more about the data we hold on you, why we hold it and the lawful basis that applies in the employee privacy notice.

### **Fines**

Any fines imposed by relevant authorities including (but not limited to) speeding and parking will be payable by the employee. The Parish Council takes no responsibility for the payment of fines incurred by the employee during their employment.

### **Car Insurance**

If your position requires you to use your own car for business purposes, you must ensure that your car insurance provides adequate cover. Proof of adequate insurance, Driving Licence, Tax and an MOT Certificate must be produced for scrutiny by the Parish Council, upon renewal and at any time when so requested.

### **Third Party Involvement**

We reserve the right to allow third parties to chair any meeting, for example disciplinary, capability, grievance, this is not an exhaustive list. Where we are required to share special category data to any third parties as part of that hearing, we ensure that a relevant condition of processing is met and we do not rely upon your consent for the processing.

### **Recording of Formal Meetings**

We reserve the right to record any formal meetings whether conducted by us or a third party, a copy of the recording can be made available on request. All personal data collected for this purpose will be processed in line with the current Data Protection Act.

## WHISTLE-BLOWERS

### Introduction

Under certain circumstances, employees are protected from suffering any detriment or termination of employment if they make disclosures about organisations for whom they work.

### Qualifying Disclosures

Certain disclosures are prescribed by law as “qualifying disclosures”. A “qualifying disclosure” means a disclosure of information that the employee genuinely and reasonably believes is in the public interest and shows that the Parish Council has committed a “relevant failure” by:

- a) committing a criminal offence;
- b) failing to comply with a legal obligation;
- c) a miscarriage of justice;
- d) endangering the health and safety of an individual;
- e) environmental damage; or
- f) concealing any information relating to the above.

These acts can be in the past, present or future, so that, for example, a disclosure qualifies if it relates to environmental damage that has happened, is happening, or is likely to happen. The Parish Council will take any concerns that you may raise relating to the above matters very seriously.

The Employment Rights Act 1996 provides protection for workers who ‘blow the whistle’ where they reasonably believe that some form of illegality, injustice or breach of health and safety has occurred or is likely to occur. The disclosure has to be “in the public interest”. We encourage you to use the procedure to raise any such concerns.

### The Procedure

In the first instance you should report any concerns you may have to the Chairman who will treat the matter with complete confidence. If you are not satisfied with the explanation or reason given to you, you should raise the matter with the appropriate official organisation or regulatory body.

Alternatively, in the first instance you can report any concerns you may have to the Health Assured external whistleblowing service by calling the 24 hour confidential helpline. A trained Health Assured advisor will then pass on the details of your concerns to the Parish Council’s named contact. You can request updates on the process or remain anonymous. If you are not satisfied with the explanation or reason given to you, you should raise the matter with the appropriate official organisation or regulatory body.

If you do not report your concerns to the Chairman or the Health Assured whistleblowing service you should take them direct to the appropriate organisation or body.

**Treatment by Others**

Bullying, harassment or any other detrimental treatment afforded to a colleague who has made a qualifying disclosure is unacceptable. Anyone found to have acted in such a manner will be subject to disciplinary action.

## **CAPABILITY PROCEDURES**

### **Introduction**

We recognise that during your employment with us your capability to carry out your duties may deteriorate. This can be for a number of reasons, the most common ones being that either the job changes over a period of time and you fail to keep pace with the changes, or you change (most commonly because of health reasons) and you can no longer cope with the work.

### **Job Changes/General Capability Issues**

If the nature of your job changes or if we have general concerns about your ability to perform your job we will try to ensure that you understand the level of performance expected of you and that you receive adequate training and supervision. Concerns regarding your capability will normally first be discussed in an informal manner and you will be given time to improve.

If your standard of performance is still not adequate you will be warned in writing that a failure to improve and to maintain the performance required could lead to your dismissal. We will also consider the possibility of a transfer to more suitable work if possible.

If there is still no improvement after a reasonable time and we cannot transfer you to more suitable work, or if your level of performance has a serious or substantial effect on our organisation or reputation, you will be issued with a final warning that you will be dismissed unless the required standard of performance is achieved and maintained.

If such improvement is not forthcoming after a reasonable period of time, you will be dismissed with the appropriate notice.

### **Personal Circumstances/Health Issues**

Personal circumstances may arise which do not prevent you from attending for work but which prevent you from carrying out your normal duties (e.g. a lack of dexterity or general ill health). If such a situation arises, we will normally need to have details of your medical diagnosis and prognosis so that we have the benefit of expert advice. Under normal circumstances this can be most easily obtained by asking your own doctor for a medical report. Your permission is needed before we can obtain such a report and we will expect you to co-operate in this matter should the need arise. When we have obtained as much information as possible regarding your condition and after consultation with you, a decision will be made about your future employment with us in your current role or, where circumstances permit, in a more suitable role.

There may also be personal circumstances that prevent you from attending work, either for a prolonged period(s) or for frequent short absences. Under these circumstances, we will need to know when we can expect your attendance record to reach an acceptable level. This may again mean asking your own doctor for a medical report or by making whatever investigations are appropriate in the circumstances. When we have obtained as much information as possible regarding your condition, and after consultation with you, a decision will be made about your

future employment with us in your current role or, where circumstances permit, in a more suitable role.

**Short Service Staff**

We retain discretion in respect of the capability procedures to take account of your length of service and to vary the procedures accordingly. If you have a short amount of service, you may not be in receipt of any warnings before dismissal.

## DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES

### Introduction

It is necessary to have a minimum number of rules in the interests of the whole organisation.

The rules set standards of performance and behaviour whilst the procedures are designed to help promote fairness and order in the treatment of individuals. It is our aim that the rules and procedures should emphasise and encourage improvement in the conduct of individuals, where they are failing to meet the required standards, and not be seen merely as a means of punishment. We reserve the right to amend these rules and procedures where appropriate.

Every effort will be made to ensure that any action taken under this procedure is fair, with you being given the opportunity to state your case and appeal against any decision that you consider to be unjust.

The following rules and procedures should ensure that:

- a) the correct procedure is used when requiring you to attend a disciplinary hearing;
- b) you are fully aware of the standards of performance, action and behaviour required of you;
- c) disciplinary action, where necessary, is taken speedily and in a fair, uniform and consistent manner;
- d) you will only be disciplined after careful investigation of the facts and the opportunity to present your side of the case. On some occasions we may implement temporary measures in order that an uninterrupted investigation can take place. These measures may include, for example:

- working in a different department, or from a different office or site
- a change to your usual duties
- working with different members of the public
- working from home
- suspension on contractual pay.

This list is not exhaustive, and we may implement other measures which are appropriate to the circumstances. None of these measures are to be regarded as disciplinary action or a penalty of any kind.

Where an employee on temporary suspension tells us that they are sick, the employee will be considered to be on sickness absence, rather than suspension, until the employee notifies us that they are no longer sick, at which point suspension will resume where appropriate;

- e) other than for an "off the record" informal reprimand, you have the right to be accompanied by a fellow employee at all stages of the formal disciplinary process;

f) you will not normally be dismissed for a first breach of discipline, except in the case of gross misconduct; and

g) if you are disciplined, you will receive an explanation of the penalty imposed and you will have the right to appeal against the finding and the penalty.

### **Disciplinary Rules**

It is not practicable to specify all disciplinary rules or offences that may result in disciplinary action, as they may vary depending on the nature of the work. In addition to the specific examples of unsatisfactory conduct, misconduct and gross misconduct shown in this handbook, a breach of other specific conditions, procedures, rules etc. that are contained within this handbook or that have otherwise been made known to you, will also result in this procedure being used to deal with such matters.

### **Rules Covering Unsatisfactory Conduct and Misconduct**

(These are examples only and not an exhaustive list.)

You will be liable to disciplinary action if you are found to have acted in any of the following ways:

- a) failure to abide by the general health and safety rules and procedures;
- b) smoking in designated non-smoking areas;
- c) consumption of alcohol during working hours;
- d) persistent absenteeism and/or lateness;
- e) unsatisfactory standards or output of work;
- f) rudeness towards members of the public or other employees, objectionable or insulting behaviour, harassment, bullying or bad language;
- g) failure to devote the whole of your time, attention and abilities to our business and its affairs during your normal working hours;
- h) unauthorised use of e-mail and internet;
- i) failure to carry out all reasonable instructions or follow our rules and procedures;
- j) unauthorised use or negligent damage or loss of our property;
- k) failure to report immediately any damage to property or premises caused by you;
- l) use of our vehicles without approval or the private use of our vehicles without authorisation;
- m) failure to report any incident whilst driving our vehicles, whether or not personal injury or vehicle damage occurs;

n) if your work involves driving, failure to report immediately any type of driving conviction, or any summons which may lead to your conviction;

o) carrying unauthorised goods or passengers in our vehicles or the use of our vehicles for personal gain; and

p) loss of driving licence where driving on public roads forms an essential part of the duties of the post.

### **Serious Misconduct**

Where one of the unsatisfactory conduct or misconduct rules has been broken and if, upon investigation, it is shown to be due to your extreme carelessness or has a serious or substantial effect upon our operation or reputation, you may be issued with a final written warning in the first instance.

You may receive a final written warning as the first course of action, if, in an alleged gross misconduct disciplinary matter, upon investigation, there is shown to be some level of mitigation resulting in it being treated as an offence just short of dismissal.

### **Rules Governing Gross Misconduct**

Occurrences of gross misconduct are very rare because the penalty is dismissal without notice and without any previous warning being issued. It is not possible to provide an exhaustive list of examples of gross misconduct. However, any behaviour or negligence resulting in a fundamental breach of contractual terms that irrevocably destroys the trust and confidence necessary to continue the employment relationship will constitute gross misconduct. Examples of offences that will normally be deemed as gross misconduct include serious instances of:

a) theft or fraud;

b) physical violence or bullying;

c) deliberate damage to property;

d) deliberate acts of unlawful discrimination or harassment;

e) possession, or being under the influence, of excessive alcohol, drugs\* at work and/or testing positive for drug use in a test carried out in line with our policy; and

\*For this purpose, the term 'drugs' is used to describe both illegal drugs and other psychoactive (mind-altering) substances which may or may not be illegal.

f) breach of health and safety rules that endangers the lives of, or may cause serious injury to, employees or any other person.

g) serious breach of confidentiality.

h) bring MPC into disrepute

(The above examples are illustrative and do not form an exhaustive list.)

### **Disciplinary Procedure**

Disciplinary action taken against you will be based on the following procedure:

<b>OFFENCE</b>	<b>FIRST OCCASION</b>	<b>SECOND OCCASION</b>	<b>THIRD OCCASION</b>	<b>FOURTH OCCASION</b>
<u>Unsatisfactory Conduct</u>	Formal Verbal Warning	Written Warning	Final Written Warning	Dismissal
<u>Misconduct</u>	Written Warning	Final Written Warning	Dismissal	
<u>Serious Misconduct</u>	Final Written Warning	Dismissal		
<u>Gross Misconduct</u>	Dismissal			

We retain discretion in respect of the disciplinary procedures to take account of your length of service and to vary the procedures accordingly. If you have a short amount of service you may not be in receipt of any warnings before dismissal.

If a disciplinary penalty is imposed it will be in line with the procedure outlined above, which may encompass a formal verbal warning, written warning, final written warning, or dismissal, and full details will be given to you.

In all cases warnings will be issued for misconduct, irrespective of the precise matters concerned, and any further breach of the rules in relation to similar or entirely independent matters of misconduct will be treated as further disciplinary matters and allow the continuation of the disciplinary process through to dismissal if the warnings are not heeded.

### **Disciplinary Authority**

The operation of the disciplinary procedure contained in the previous section, is based on the following authority for the various levels of disciplinary action. However, the list does not prevent a higher level of seniority progressing any action at whatever stage of the disciplinary process.

**PERSON AUTHORISED TO TAKE DISCIPLINARY ACTION  
IN THE CASE OF:**

	<u>MANAGEMENT</u>	<u>OTHER EMPLOYEES</u>
<u>Formal Verbal Warning</u>	HR Chairman	The Clerk / HR Chairman
<u>Written Warning</u>	HR Chairman	The Clerk / HR Chairman
<u>Final Written Warning</u>	HR Chairman	The Clerk / HR Chairman
<u>Dismissal</u>	HR Chairman	The Clerk / HR Chairman

**Period of Warnings**

Formal verbal warning

A formal verbal warning will normally be disregarded for disciplinary purposes after a three month period.

Written warning

A written warning will normally be disregarded for disciplinary purposes after a six month period.

Final written warning

A final written warning will normally be disregarded for disciplinary purposes after a twelve month period.

**General Notes**

If you are in a supervisory or Managerial position then demotion to a lower status at the appropriate rate may be considered as an alternative to dismissal except in cases of gross misconduct.

In exceptional circumstances, suspension from work without pay for up to five days as an alternative to dismissal (except dismissal for gross misconduct) may be considered by the person authorised to dismiss.

Gross misconduct offences will result in dismissal without notice.

You have the right to appeal against any disciplinary action.

## **CAPABILITY / DISCIPLINARY APPEAL PROCEDURE**

You have the right to lodge an appeal in respect of any capability/disciplinary action taken against you.

If you wish to exercise this right you should apply in writing to the Chairman of the HR Sub-Committee within five working days.

An appeal against a formal warning or dismissal should give details of why the penalty imposed is too severe, inappropriate or unfair in the circumstances.

The appeal procedure will normally be conducted by separate Cllr who has not previously been connected with the process, or alleged offence, so that an independent decision into the severity and appropriateness of the action taken can be made.

If you are appealing on the grounds that you have not committed the offence then your appeal may take the form of a complete re-hearing and reappraisal of all matters so that the person who conducts the appeal can make an independent decision before deciding to grant or refuse the appeal.

You may be accompanied at any stage of the appeal hearing by a fellow employee, or an appropriate accredited official employed by the Trade Union. The result of the appeal will be made known to you in writing, normally within five working days after the hearing.

## **GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE**

It is important that if you feel dissatisfied with any matter relating to your employment you should have an effective means by which such a grievance can be aired and, where appropriate, resolved.

Nothing in this procedure is intended to prevent you from informally raising any matter you may wish to mention. Informal discussion can frequently solve problems without the need for a written record. However, if you wish to raise a formal grievance you should normally do so in writing from the outset.

You have the right to be accompanied at any stage of the procedure by a fellow employee, or an appropriate accredited official employed by the Trade Union, who may act as a witness or speak on your behalf to explain the situation more clearly.

If you feel aggrieved at any matter relating to your work (except personal harassment, for which there is a separate procedure following this section), you should first raise the matter with the HR Chairman or other member of the HR Sub-Committee explaining fully the nature and extent of your grievance. You will then be invited to a meeting at a reasonable time and location at which your grievance will be investigated fully. You must take all reasonable steps to attend this meeting. You will be notified of the decision, in writing, normally within ten working days of the meeting, including your right of appeal.

If you wish to appeal you must inform the HR Sub-Committee Chairman within five working days. You will then be invited to a further meeting, which you must take all reasonable steps to attend. As far as reasonably practicable, the Parish Council will be represented by a separate Cllr who has not previously been connected with the process so that an independent decision into the severity and appropriateness of the action taken can be made. than attended the first meeting (unless the most Senior Manager attended that meeting).

Following the appeal meeting you will be informed of the final decision, normally within ten working days, which will be confirmed in writing.

## **TERMINATION OF EMPLOYMENT**

### **Resignations**

All resignations must be supplied in writing, stating the reason for resigning your post.

### **Terminating Employment Without Giving Notice**

If you terminate your employment without giving or working the required period of notice, as indicated in your individual Statement of Main Terms of Employment, you will have an amount equal to any additional cost of covering your duties during the notice period not worked deducted from any termination pay due to you. This is an express written term of your contract of employment. You will also forfeit any contractual accrued holiday pay due to you over and above your statutory holiday pay, if you fail to give or work the required period of notice.

### **Return of Marden Parish Council's Property**

On the termination of your employment you must return all our property which is in your possession or for which you have responsibility. Failure to return such items will result in the cost of the items being deducted from any monies outstanding to you. This is an express written term of your contract of employment.

### **Return of Marden Parish Council's Vehicle**

On termination of your employment you must return your Parish Council vehicle/any Parish Council vehicle in your possession to our premises. Failure to return the vehicle will result in the cost of its recovery being deducted from any monies outstanding to you. This is an express written term of your contract of employment.

### **Garden Leave**

If either you or the Parish Council serves notice on the other to terminate your employment the Parish Council may require you to take "garden leave" for all or part of the remaining period of your employment.

### **NB.**

During any period of garden leave you will continue to receive your full pay and any other contractual benefits.

## **AMENDING THIS DOCUMENT**

MPC reserve the right to update and/or amend this document. If this is the case this will be discussed with employees and new copies made available.

## **OTHER POLICIES AND DOCUMENTS**

A separate handout is provided in regard to Health and Safety.

Other policies, relevant to your role, will be provided to you during the course of your employment.

Risk assessments are written by the Clerk for duties and activities undertaken during your employment of MPC or on its behalf. These will be provided to you if required for your work.

If there are any discrepancies or you wish to discuss anything within this document please contact the Clerk or the Chairman of HR Sub-Committee.

# **EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK**

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## **ANTI-BRIBERY POLICY**

### **Introduction**

Bribery is a criminal offence. The Parish Council prohibits any form of bribery. We require compliance, from everyone connected with our business, with the highest ethical standards and anti-bribery laws applicable. Integrity and transparency are of utmost importance to us and we have a zero-tolerance attitude towards corrupt activities of any kind, whether committed by employees or by third parties acting for or on behalf of the Parish Council.

### **Policy**

It is prohibited, directly or indirectly, for any employee or person working on our behalf to offer, give, request or accept any bribe i.e. gift, loan, payment, reward or advantage, either in cash or any other form of inducement, to or from any person or Parish Council in order to gain commercial, contractual or regulatory advantage for the Parish Council, or in order to gain any personal advantage for an individual or anyone connected with the individual in a way that is unethical.

### **Suspicion**

If we suspect that you have committed an act of bribery or attempted bribery, an investigation will be carried out and, in line with our disciplinary procedure where appropriate, action may be taken against you which may result in your dismissal, or the cessation of our business arrangement with you.

### **Reporting**

If you, as an employee or person working on our behalf, suspect that an act of bribery or attempted bribery has taken place, even if you are not personally involved, you are expected to report this to the Chairman. You may be asked to give a written account of events.

Staff are reminded of the Parish Council's Whistle-Blowers section on page 24 of this Handbook.

### **Gifts and Hospitality**

We realise that the giving and receiving of gifts and hospitality as a reflection of friendship or appreciation where nothing is expected in return may occur, or even be commonplace, in our industry. This does not constitute bribery where it is proportionate and recorded properly.

No gift should be given nor hospitality offered by an employee or anyone working on our behalf to any party in connection with our business without receiving prior written approval from the Clerk.

Similarly, no gift or offer of hospitality should be accepted by an employee or anyone working on our behalf without receiving prior written approval from the Clerk.

### **Record Keeping**

A record will be made by the Clerk of every instance in which gifts or hospitality are given or received.

As the law is constantly changing, this policy is subject to review and the Parish Council reserves the right to amend this policy without prior notice.

## COMMUNICATION POLICY & PROCEDURE

### Introduction

Marden Parish Council is committed to engaging with all residents on a regular basis through the following channels: social media, website, noticeboards, Marden Parish Council Newsletter (see separate policy) and a weekly e-newsletter.

### Social Media and Website Policy

This Policy is intended to help employees and Cllrs of Marden Parish Council to make appropriate decisions about the use of social media and use of computers.

This Policy outlines the standards which should be observed when using social media and computers, the circumstances in which use of social media will be monitored and the action which will be taken in respect of breaches of this Policy.

This Policy is intended to:

- Introduce various forms of social media
- Set down rules governing the basic use of social media
- Provide guidance in relation to the use of social media and to highlight some of the pitfalls to avoid
- Guidance on the personal use of Marden Parish Council computers
- Email usage for staff and councillors

All Cllrs and employees are expected to comply with this policy at all times to protect the privacy, confidentiality and interests of Marden Parish Council and anyone, or company, Marden Parish Council is dealing with.

Only those persons authorised by the Parish Clerk are permitted to post material, or use the Council's logo, heading or imagery on social media and websites in the Council's name and on its behalf.

Examples of social media:

- Facebook: mainly a website which allows users to create profiles, upload photos and videos, send messages and keep in touch with friends, family and colleagues
- Twitter (X): for telling people what one is doing or thinking
- WhatsApp: for MPC groups for providing reminders of meetings, bank authorisations etc.
- Instagram: for showing people pictures
- YouTube: for showing people videos
- LinkedIn: for work networking

Currently Marden Parish Council uses:

- Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/MardenParishCouncil/>)
- Website ([www.mardenkent-pc.gov.uk](http://www.mardenkent-pc.gov.uk))
- Twitter (X) (@mardenkentpc)
- Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/mardenparishcouncil/>)

## **Social Media (Facebook, Twitter (X) and Instagram)**

### Engaging with the Council on social media:

The Council encourages members of the public, local organisations and community groups, members of the press, local councillors and others in our wider community to follow the Council through social media accounts.

We also encourage everyone in our community to share content from our corporate social media accounts with their own social media networks. This is especially important for example, during emergency situations or where sharing timely information is essential.

Individuals and organisations are responsible for the content that they choose to post to their social media accounts. This includes content created by others that individuals or organisations choose to repost, retweet or share.

In order to ensure that all discussions on any Marden Parish Council social media platform are productive, respectful, energised and consistent with the Council's mission and goals, we ask you to follow these guidelines:

- The Council will treat everyone with courtesy and respect on its social media channels, and we therefore ask for the same in return from those who choose to engage with us.
- We ask that Council employees and Cllrs are treated courteously. Council employees and Cllrs should never be subjected to bullying or other forms of abuse or harassment.
- Council employees and Cllrs have the right to carry out their civic duties and work without fear from being attacked or abused. Any behaviour whether that be verbal, physical or in writing, which causes either Cllrs or Council employees to feel uncomfortable, embarrassed or threatened, is unacceptable.
- Share freely and be generous but be aware of copyright laws; be accurate and give credit where credit is due.
- Stay on topic.
- Refrain from using any Social Media page for commercial purposes or to market products.

Social Media sites are not monitored 24/7. However, we will endeavour to ensure that any emerging themes or helpful suggestions are passed to the relevant people.

Sending a message/post via Social Media will not be considered as contacting the Parish Council for official purposes and we will not be obliged to monitor or respond to requests for information through any Social Media channel. Please do not include personal/private information in any Social Media posts or messages. Any issues you wish raised with the Parish Council please contact the office via email ([clerk@mardenkent-pc.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@mardenkent-pc.gov.uk) or [deputyclerk@mardenkent-pc.gov.uk](mailto:deputyclerk@mardenkent-pc.gov.uk))

Reporting a civility and respect-related issues:

- Council employees and others operating the Council's social media accounts will, at all times, be mindful of the Council's relevant policies, procedures and processes, including the Code of Conduct.

- The Council will record and report abuse directed at the Council. The Council may, for example, create screenshots of comments and keep a record of abusive or threatening communications, any may take further action as appropriate.
- Council employees and Cllrs should not have to put up with abusive or threatening behaviour. When subjected to such behaviour, the Council reserves the right to enact its relevant social media policies and may, for example, delete content, block individuals or report individuals to social media platforms when appropriate to do so.
- The Council may need to report issues of poor conduct directly to social media platforms. For instance, if someone has created a “fake account” or if someone is persistently abusive to the Council.
- The Council reserves the right to report criminal matters it notices on social media to the Police. For instance, hate crime/speech or threats of violence.
- Please get in touch with the Council if you feel that a Cllr, a Council employee or a user of our social media has failed to act in a civil and respectful way on our social media.

You can contact Alison Hooker, the Clerk in the following ways: Parish Office, Marden Memorial Hall, Goudhurst Road, Marden, Kent, TN12 9JX, telephone 01622 832305 or email [clerk@mardenkent-pc.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@mardenkent-pc.gov.uk).

We retain the right to remove comments or content that includes:

- Obscene or racist content
- Personal attacks, insults or threatening language
- Potentially libellous statements
- Plagiarised material, any material in violation of any laws, including copyright
- Private, personal information published without consent
- Information or links unrelated to the content of the forum
- Commercial promotions or spam.

Any publisher can hide a comment and should email the Communication Sub-Group to advise them. If a social media user persistently contravenes the policy, the Clerk/Deputy Clerk will contact the Communication Sub-Group members to agree if further action writing should be taken. Following this, the Clerk/Deputy Clerk may contact the users either by email or by private message to tell them their comment is inappropriate and does not comply with our Communication policy. If further comments that contravene our Communication policy the social media user will be blocked from the Marden Parish Council social media page for one month.

Marden Parish Council is not responsible for the accuracy of content posted by any subscriber to any forum; opinions expressed in comments on Marden Parish Council’s social media forums do not necessary represent those of Marden Parish Council.

All comments, once posted, become the property of Marden Parish Council and we reserve the right to reproduce, distribute, publish, display or edit. Derivative work can also be created from such postings or content, and used for any purpose, in any form and on any other media.

Marden Parish Council is not responsible, liable for and does not endorse the privacy practices of any Social Media platform or any other linked websites. The use of Marden Parish Council social media platforms and any linked websites are at the users own risk.

Marden Parish Council assumes no responsibility or liability for any injury, loss or damage incurred as a result of any use or reliance upon the information and material contained within or downloaded from any websites.

Social Media platforms may occasionally be unavailable and Marden Parish Council accepts no responsibility for this lack of service.

Only public events will be published/shared on Marden Parish Council's social media pages.

No profit-making activities will be published/shared on Marden Parish Council's social media pages.

The presence of any advertisement on these Social Media platforms is not an endorsement of the authenticity or quality of the goods, services or website and Marden Parish Council will not be held responsible for any claims arising in that respect.

MPC will not engage in/with, and we discourage posts or comments on, issues of a political nature.

Comments should not advertise commercial products or services.

By choosing to comment and/or utilise any Marden Parish Council Social Media site, users are deemed to agree to this policy.

This Policy may be revised at any time.

### **Use of Social Media by Employees and Cllrs (on personal and work accounts)**

When using social media Cllrs and employees should not represent their personal views as being either the views or the policies of the Parish Council, nor should they represent their views as being those of other Cllrs or employees unless with those Cllrs or employees' express permission.

Cllrs and employees should refrain from personal criticism in social media of other Cllrs/employees and individuals or organisations with whom the Parish Council has dealings (in accordance with the Nolan principles of conduct in public life (*The 7 Principles of Public Life: Selflessness; Integrity; Objectivity; Accountability; Openness; Honesty and Leadership* ([www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life)))).

## **Use of WhatsApp**

### Introduction

Marden Parish Council has agreed that it would be advantageous for Cllrs and employees of the Council to have access to WhatsApp messaging groups for the sharing of information outside of formal Council meetings.

Membership of these groups is discretionary and does not replace the decision-making framework of properly convened meetings and the Council's scheme of delegation.

These groups will only be for Cllrs and employees of MPC. Any members of the public who are on any of the Sub-Committees/Sub-Groups will be contacted separately via text/email from an Officer to provide the information given in the WhatsApp conversation.

Mobile phone numbers of Cllrs and employees will be visible to everyone in the group.

### **Purpose**

Marden Parish Councillors and employees who have given their consent for their data to be processed in this way will be added to WhatsApp groups as appropriate.

A general group will be set up and all Parish Councillors, who have given their consent, and employees will be members of this group. Additional groups can be set up for individual Sub-Committees/Sub-Groups if appropriate.

It is for the sharing of information only, for example issuing reminders about meetings, reminders to authorise bank payments, to arrange a meeting date of a Sub-Group. Decisions relating to Parish Council business will NOT be taken via this medium.

This is not a platform for Cllrs to give apologies to meetings. These should be sent by Cllrs to the relevant Clerk via email.

### **Employees**

The Parish Clerk, or Deputy Clerk, will be the sole administrators of all groups created on behalf of Marden Parish Council.

Other employees may also be members of the groups as appropriate.

Employees will usually respond within their normal working hours but may, at their own discretion, respond at other times.

### **Access and Erasure Requests**

Cllrs and employees have the right to request modification of the information kept on record (eg mobile phone numbers) by Marden Parish Council and for their removal from any of the WhatsApp groups at any time.

Cllrs and employees phone numbers must not be passed on via the WhatsApp group, or any other medium, (eg messages must not be forwarded to phone numbers not already in the group or via any other method).

When a Cllr, or employee, leaves MPC their details will be deleted from any WhatsApp group.

### **Data Security**

Cllrs and employees must ensure that any devices used for WhatsApp communication are secure, with up-to-date software and strong passwords.

### **Agreement to Process Data**

Cllrs and employees acknowledge that they have read and understood Marden Parish Council's Privacy Notice [Policies & Procedures - Marden Parish Council - Marden Parish Council, Marden, Tonbridge \(mardenkent-pc.gov.uk\)](https://www.mardenkent-pc.gov.uk/policies-procedures).

Cllrs will inform the Clerk by email to confirm whether they wish their mobile number to be used for a WhatsApp group or not.

MPC employees, who use social media, are requested to sign the agreement at the end of this document to agree that the Council may process and share personal information, including mobile phone number, for statutory purposes, in relation to the activities of Marden Parish Council. This information will not be passed on to third parties without the employee's permission.

### **Use of Marden Parish Council Website**

This part of the policy reflects the Council's intentions on how the website will be managed, and how the content and links to external sites will be determined.

Marden Parish Council is committed to providing and promoting access to news, history and information relevant to the Parish of Marden for public access and one of the ways is to maintain a website.

The office staff will maintain the website content to ensure it is up to date. All correspondence to the council via the website will be acknowledged within five working days of receipt by the Clerk or the Deputy Clerk.

#### Content:

The Clerk and Deputy Clerk will evaluate all potential content requests from outside bodies to ensure it is appropriate for the Parish Council website.

#### Photographs:

The photo gallery is used to store and display photographs of interest appropriate to Marden and is editable by the office staff. Photographs of children can be used on the website without consent only where individuals cannot be identified (eg from a distance). Marden Parish Council will obtain consent of parent/carer of children if identifiable photos are used. Personal details of children will never be shown in photographs or included in any accompanying text. Photographs showing adults in group situations or where individuals are unidentifiable are used without seeking

consent from those individuals involved. They will be removed however upon request by an individual involved.

#### Website Links:

Marden Parish Council's website contains hyperlinks to other public and private organisation websites. External links are identified in the link text or an accompanying description. To be included websites must meet the following criteria:

- i. The primary intent of the website is to educate or inform;
- ii. The site's owner or sponsor is easily identifiable, and contact information is provided;
- iii. The site does not charge for access;
- iv. The site does not promote a specific political or social agenda;
- v. The site provides useful information on local services for the community;
- vi. Only Marden, surrounding parishes and local & central government website links will be published.

Since website content may change or disappear entirely without notice, the council cannot be held responsible for the content or accuracy of external websites.

#### **Personal Use of Computers**

Computers are provided to Council employees to carry out authorised business functions. The equipment should not be used by anyone other than a staff member or someone authorised to act on behalf of the Parish Council.

#### **Acceptable Use**

Marden Parish Council accepts that some personal use, including use of the internet emails will occur. This should only occur when computers are not needed for office work and within user's own time. Nevertheless, as a generality, personal use should not be frequent or excessive. It is sensible advice to point out that when the office computer equipment is used for personal purposes it should only be used for those things the user would not mind their employer knowing about.

The office computers or services must not be used for outside business interests.

Personal usage should be within the bounds of law and decency. Appropriate courtesy and respect should be given to others.

No sexually explicit or racist material, indecent images of children or any material likely to cause offence or embarrassment to others should be created, downloaded or accessed. Only chat rooms or social networking sites directly related to work purposes, such as Data Protection and Freedom of Information should be visited.

Failure to abide by the terms of this Policy may result in disciplinary action for staff.

#### **Access for Information Request Compliant (see also GDPR Policy)**

Only Cllrs and employees who have agreed to this Policy may use Council owned computers.

Copies of non-work related emails or other documents on any work computers, would possibly be made available if the office receives a request under the General Data Protection Regulations and the Freedom of Information Act.

### **Email Usage**

The following is basically an Advice Note for Cllrs and employees setting down what is good practice in the use of the emailing facility as far as Marden Parish Council matters are concerned.

In drawing up this advice, it is acknowledged that Cllrs own private email accounts cannot be monitored in any way. There are, however, certain protocols which should be observed such as, for example, contact with the press. All Cllrs have a mardenkent-pc.gov.uk email account for Council business. Personal emails should not be used for Council work.

It should be noted also that despite extensive enquiries no precedent has been found amongst Town and Parish Councils for a defined email usage policy for Cllrs. Council employees who have access to council-owned computers can however be subject to a strictly defined email policy.

The Cllrs are recommended to follow this protocol when using email correspondence in the course of discharging their duties and responsibilities as Parish Cllrs.

In the interests of good practice Cllrs should refrain from creating unnecessary email congestion by sending messages of a trivial nature to the Council's email address or by copying emails to persons who do not need to see them.

Cllrs should be aware that they must never forward information of a confidential nature to outside parties.

Cllrs are reminded that Standing Order 22 states that written statements or written articles (which of course includes email messages) to the press should be in accordance with the Council's Press and Media Policy. Cllrs should bear in mind at all times that decisions of the Council are binding on all Cllrs and that comments should be confined to matters on which the Council has reached agreement. More details concerning this will be found in the Council's policy document relating to contact with the press and other media.

One aspect to be borne in mind is that Cllrs should always consider how they would feel if an email message originating from them were to be read out and used as evidence in court. Under current law email messages may in certain circumstances have to be disclosed in litigation.

Cllrs will be aware that distributing or disseminating email messages which might be considered discriminatory, offensive or abusive would constitute unacceptable behaviour.

Inappropriate use of email could be considered a breach of the Cllrs Code of Conduct.

**Noticeboard Policy**

See separate Noticeboard Policy for details.

**Agreement**

A copy of is made available to all Cllrs and employees of Marden Parish Council. Cllrs adoption of this policy at an annual Full Council meeting (as dated on the end of this document) gives acknowledgement that all abide by the contents.

Officers, and any other MPC employees, by reading this policy, agree with its content and that the Council may process and share their personal information, including mobile phone number, for statutory purposes, providing information and corresponding with them in relation to the activities of Marden Parish Council. These details will not be passed to a third party without their prior agreement.

## DIGNITY AT WORK POLICY

Marden Parish Council (MPC) believes that civility and respect are important in the working environment, and expect all councillors, officers and the public to be polite and courteous when working for, and with the council.

### Purpose

MPC 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. We aim to create a workplace where there is zero tolerance for harassment and bullying.

In support of this objective, MPC has signed up to the Civility Pledge, as a commitment to civility and respect in our work, and politeness and courtesy in behaviour, speech, and in the written word. Further information about the Civility and Respect Pledge is available from the [NALC & SLCC websites](#).

We recognise that there is a continuum where unaddressed issues have the potential to escalate and become larger, more complex issues and this policy sets out how concerns will be managed however the emphasis of this policy is on resolution and mediation where appropriate, rather than an adversarial process.

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 covers bullying and harassment of and by clerks/chief officers and all employees engaged to work at MPC. Should agency staff, or contractors have a complaint connected to their engagement with MPC this should be raised to their nominated contact, manager, or the Parish Council Chairman, in the first instance. Should the complaint be about the Chairman the complaint should be raised to the Parish Council Vice-Chairman.

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.

Complaints about other employment matters will be managed under the council's grievance policy.

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 are bullied or harassed by employees, councillors, members of the public, suppliers or contractors.

### **This Position of 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. [Council] will not tolerate bullying or harassment in our workplace or at work-related events outside of the workplace, whether the conduct is a one-off act or repeated course of conduct, and whether harm is intended or not. Neither will we tolerate retaliation against, or victimisation of, any person involved in bringing a complaint of harassment or bullying. You should also be aware that, if you have bullied or harassed someone (e.g. physical violence, harassment), in some circumstances the treatment may amount to a crime punishable by a fine or imprisonment.

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]*, equality opportunities policy, and all other policies and procedures set by the Council.

We expect you to demonstrate respect by listening and paying attention to others, having consideration for other people's feelings, following protocols and rules, showing appreciation and thanks, and being kind.

Allegations of bullying and harassment will be treated seriously. Investigations will be carried out promptly, sensitively and, as far as possible, confidentially. See the grievance policy for further details regarding the process. 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.

#### Harassment:

Where a person is subject to uninvited conduct that violates their dignity, in connection with a protected characteristic  
Behaviour that creates a hostile, humiliating, degrading or similarly offensive environment in relation to a protected characteristic

#### Bullying:

Behaviour that leaves the victim feeling threatened, intimidated, humiliated, vulnerable or otherwise upset. It does not need to be connected to a protected characteristic.

### **What Type of Treatment amounts to Bullying or Harassment?**

'Bullying' or 'harassment' are phrases that apply to treatment from one person (or a group of people) to another that is unwanted and that 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 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
- Unwanted nicknames, especially related to a person's 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 or 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. We all have the right to determine what offends us. Some behaviour will be clear to any reasonable person that it is likely to offend – for example sexual touching. Other examples may be less clear, however, you should be aware that harassment will occur 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 (such as offensive jokes or comments based on the assumption someone is gay, even if they are not) or due to their association with someone else (such as harassment related to their partner having a disability for example). See *the MPC's equality and diversity Policy*

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 from your manager or colleagues/Councillors 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 that 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 and the council 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 your nominated manager in the first instance or, with the clerk/or a councillor. 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/chief officer or the chair of the council in the first instance. They will then decide how best to deal with the situation, in consultation with you. There are two possible avenues for you, informal or formal. The Informal Resolution is described below. Formal concerns regarding potential breaches of the Councillors Code of Conduct must be investigated by the Monitoring Officer.

MPC will consider reasonable measures to protect your health and safety. Such measures may include a temporary change in duties or change of work location, not attending meetings with the person about whom the complaint has been made etc.

*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/chief officer or a councillor. 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*

If you are being bullied or harassed by a colleague or contractor, there are two possible avenues for you, informal or formal. These are described below.

#### 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/chief officer, your nominated manager or a colleague to put this on your behalf or to be with you when confronting the perpetrator(s).

If the above approach does not work or if you do not want to try to resolve the situation in this way, or if you are being bullied by your own nominated manager, you should raise the issue with the Chairman. (If your concern relates to the Chairman, you should raise it with the Vice-Chairman. The Chairman (or another appropriate person) will discuss with you the option of trying to resolve the situation informally by telling the alleged perpetrator, without prejudicing the matter, that there has been a complaint that their behaviour is having an adverse effect on a member of the council staff such behaviour is contrary to our policy for employees, the continuation of such behaviour could amount to a serious disciplinary offence.

It may be possible for this conversation to take place with the alleged perpetrator without revealing your name, if this is what you want. The person dealing with it will also stress that the conversation is confidential.

In certain circumstances we may be able to involve a neutral third party (a mediator) to facilitate a resolution of the problem. The chair (or another appropriate person) will discuss this with you if it is appropriate.

If your complaint is resolved informally, the alleged perpetrator(s) will not usually be subject to disciplinary sanctions. However, in exceptional circumstances (such as extremely serious allegation or in cases where a problem has happened before) we may decide to investigate further and take more formal action notwithstanding that you raised the matter informally. We will consult with you before taking this step.

#### 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 or the Chairman. A formal complaint may ultimately lead to disciplinary action against the perpetrator(s) where they are employed.

The Clerk or Chairman 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.

Where your complaint relates to potential breaches of the Councillors Code of Conduct, these will need to 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.

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.

MPC 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 understand better your complaint (see the grievance policy for further information, and details of your right to be accompanied).

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 is a non-contractual policy and procedure which will be reviewed from time to time.

## DISPLAY SCREEN EQUIPMENT POLICY

### Policy Statement

Marden Parish Council (MPC) takes the health, safety and welfare of its staff seriously. It is our policy to provide a working environment that is safe, comfortable and maximises the effectiveness of employees. This will include full compliance with applicable health and safety legislation, best practice guidance and professional standards.

MPC understands that the Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 apply to work with display screen equipment (DSE). Compliance with the DSE regulations are in addition to the general duties on employers contained within the Health and Safety at Work, etc Act 1974.

### Policy Background

Typical of many modern businesses, numerous job roles in the Council involve the use of computers or other display screen equipment. In this respect, it is known that workers who use DSE as a significant part of their role may experience problems such as fatigue, eye strain, upper limb problems and backache if they overuse DSE or if they sit at poorly designed workstations with a poor posture.

The Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 were introduced by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) to help control the risks of injury from using DSE. The regulations require employers to ensure that staff who use DSE as a significant part of their job role have properly set up workstations, take regular breaks and have access to appropriate eye tests.

MPC recognises that the DSE regulations do not technically apply to staff who use equipment infrequently or for short periods of time. However, the organisation takes the view that the regulations and their associated guidance represent good practice for all people who work with DSE, including those who work occasionally with equipment such as computers and laptops.

In this organisation, the following definitions will therefore apply:

- DSE: any alphanumeric or graphic display screen, regardless of the display process involved, including computers on workstations, laptops, tablets, other hand-held scanners and readers, and smartphones.
- DSE user: any employee who uses DSE as part of their normal work.
- Workstations: the immediate work environment around DSE where people work, including workstations, chairs, keyboards, printers and other peripherals and accessories.

### General Policy

In the Council:

- the use of DSE will be subject to risk assessment — the assessment will be followed by the provision, maintenance and monitoring of appropriate control measures to minimise any hazards;
- individual DSE users and their workstations will be assessed and appropriate control measures introduced to reduce any risks identified — these might include changes to DSE equipment itself (eg a new mouse, screen or keyboard) or changes to chairs, workstations, lighting, posture, etc;
- workstation assessments will be regularly reviewed as appropriate, or reviewed wherever there have been changes such as where a member of staff moves to a new workstation or uses a temporary or shared workstation;
- staff using DSE will be encouraged to take regular breaks from DSE work for a short period each hour i.e. by a change of work activity to something that does not involve DSE use;
- staff who use DSE for a significant part of their working time will be eligible for an annual eyesight test — a set contribution will be made by the Council towards new glasses needed for DSE work and the organisation will meet in full the cost of the tests and of any special corrective appliances which need to be prescribed where normal glasses or lenses are not sufficient for an employee to carry out their work;
- all new staff will be made aware of this policy during their induction and general DSE safety awareness will be included in health and safety training;
- DSE workstation risk assessments should identify any reasonable adjustments which need to be made under the Equality Act 2010 — these might include specialist IT equipment or adaptations to chairs and workstations required for staff who have disabilities or ongoing health issues.

## **Responsibilities**

### Line managers

Line managers have day-to-day responsibility for workers. They must:

- carry out “a suitable and sufficient analysis” of DSE workstations;
- plan DSE users’ activities so that work is periodically broken up by activity changes;
- provide DSE users with appropriate eye and eyesight tests at their request and at the employer’s cost;
- provide DSE users with adequate health and safety training;
- inform DSE users about the health and safety aspects of their workstations.

### Employees

Employees must:

- participate in relevant health and safety training;
- tell their manager if they have any issues with their DSE equipment, and about any discomfort or health condition they think is due to DSE use;
- comply with safe systems of DSE work, e.g. by taking regular screen breaks where the employer has deemed them necessary;
- co-operate with the employer in the use and care of DSE, e.g. workstation accessories or spectacles provided for DSE use.

### **Monitoring**

Representatives of the HR Sub-Committee will work with the Clerk to review and investigate any incidents, accidents or staff health issues that may be related to DSE work. The results of any review and any lessons learnt will be used to inform and improve safety procedures.

## **E-MAIL AND INTERNET POLICY**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of the Internet and E-mail policy is to provide a framework to ensure that there is continuity of procedures in the usage of internet and e-mail within the Parish Council. The internet and e-mail system have established themselves as an important communications facility within the Parish Council and have provided us with contact with professional and academic sources throughout the world. Therefore, to ensure that we are able to utilise the system to its optimum we have devised a policy that provides maximum use of the facility whilst ensuring compliance with the legislation throughout.

### **Internet**

Where appropriate, duly authorised staff are encouraged to make use of the Internet as part of their official and professional activities. Attention must be paid to ensuring that published information has relevance to normal professional activities before material is released in the Parish Council name. Where personal views are expressed a disclaimer stating that this is the case should be clearly added to all correspondence. The intellectual property right and copyright must not be compromised when publishing on the Internet. The availability and variety of information on the Internet has meant that it can be used to obtain material reasonably considered to be offensive. The use of the Internet to access and/or distribute any kind of offensive material, or material that is not work-related, leaves an individual liable to disciplinary action which could lead to dismissal.

### **Procedures – Acceptable/Unacceptable Use**

Unauthorised or inappropriate use of the internet system may result in disciplinary action which could result in summary dismissal.

The internet system is available for legitimate business use and matters concerned directly with the job being done. Employees using the internet system should give particular attention to the following points:

- a) comply with all of our internet standards;
- b) access during working hours should be for business use only; and
- c) private use of the internet should be used outside of your normal working hours.

The Parish Council will not tolerate the use of the Internet system for unofficial or inappropriate purposes, including:

- a) accessing websites which put our internet at risk of (including but not limited to) viruses, compromising our copyright or intellectual property rights;
- b) non-compliance of our social networking policy;
- c) connecting, posting or downloading any information unrelated to their employment and in particular pornographic or other offensive material; or

d) engaging in computer hacking and other related activities, or attempting to disable or compromise security of information contained on the Parish Council's computers.

You are reminded that such activities (c and d) may constitute a criminal offence.

### **E-Mail**

The use of the e-mail system is encouraged as its appropriate use facilitates efficiency. Used correctly it is a facility that is of assistance to employees. Inappropriate use however causes many problems including distractions, time wasting and legal claims. The procedure sets out the Parish Council's position on the correct use of the e-mail system.

### **Procedures – Authorised Use**

Unauthorised or inappropriate use of the e-mail system may result in disciplinary action which could include summary dismissal.

The e-mail system is available for communication and matters directly concerned with the legitimate business of the Parish Council. Employees using the e-mail system should give particular attention to the following points:

- a) all comply with Parish Council communication standards;
- b) e-mail messages and copies should only be sent to those for whom they are particularly relevant;
- c) e-mail should not be used as a substitute for face-to-face communication or telephone contact. Abusive e-mails must not be sent. Hasty messages sent without proper consideration can cause upset, concern or misunderstanding;
- d) if the e-mail is confidential the user must ensure that the necessary steps are taken to protect confidentiality. The Parish Council will be liable for infringing copyright or any defamatory information that is circulated either within the Parish Council or to external users of the system; and
- e) offers or contracts transmitted by e-mail are as legally binding on the Parish Council as those sent on paper.

The Parish Council will not tolerate the use of the e-mail system for unofficial or inappropriate purposes, including:

- a) any messages that could constitute bullying, harassment or other detriment;
- b) personal use (e.g. social invitations, personal messages, jokes, cartoons, chain letters or other private matters);
- c) on-line gambling;
- d) accessing or transmitting pornography;
- e) transmitting copyright information and/or any software available to the user; or

f) posting confidential information about other employees, the Parish Council or its members of the public or suppliers.

### **Monitoring**

We reserve the right to monitor all e-mail/internet activity by you for the purposes of ensuring compliance with our policies and procedures and of ensuring compliance with the relevant regulatory requirements. This includes monitoring of any additional accounts you may be requested to set up for the purposes of performing your work tasks, which are subject to the same rules as your work email account. Information acquired through such monitoring may be used as evidence in disciplinary proceedings. Monitoring your usage will mean processing your personal data. You may read more about the data we hold on you, why we hold it and the lawful basis that applies in the employee privacy notice.

### **Use of Social Networking Sites**

Any work-related issue or material that could identify an individual who is a client or work colleague, which could adversely affect the Parish Council, a client or our relationship with any client must not be placed on a social networking site. This means that work related matters must not be placed on any such site at any time either during or outside of working hours and includes access via any computer equipment or mobile device.

When using any social media platform employees should not represent their personal views as being either the views or the policies of Marden Parish Council, nor should they represent their views as being those of other employees or Cllrs unless with those employees or Cllrs express permission.

Employees should refrain from personal criticism in social media of other employees or Cllrs and individuals or organisations with whom the Parish Council has dealings.

### **Keyholding/Alarm Setting**

If you are an allocated keyholder, you must ensure that all procedures and guidelines are followed when securing the building prior to leaving. The keys and any security measure such as alarm codes must be kept safe at all times. You must not give the keys or alarm code to any third party unless authorisation is obtained from the Clerk. Any loss or damage caused as a result of your failure to follow procedures or your negligence in ensuring the safekeeping of the keys and alarm code will result in disciplinary action which could lead to your summary dismissal. We also reserve the right to deduct the cost of any loss, repair or replacement from any monies owing to you.

Any breaches or security issues including the loss or theft of keys must be reported immediately to the Clerk.

To satisfy the requirements of our insurers and to protect us from fire and theft, you must secure all properties and premises when unattended. The last person to leave the premises must ensure lights and appropriate electrical equipment are switched off, windows and doors are secure and alarms are set accordingly.

**Closed Circuit TV (CCTV)**

CCTV (including with the use of audio recording) is operated on the Parish Council premises for several reasons, including the prevention of crime and the safety of employees and members of the public.

We reserve the right to use any evidence obtained in this manner in any disciplinary issue. We will ensure all personal data obtained in this way is processed in line with the current Data Protection Act. You may refer to the employee privacy notice for more information on the data we hold, the reasons we hold it and the lawful basis which applies.

## **EQUALITY, INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY POLICY**

### **Statement of Policy**

The terms equality, inclusion and diversity are at the heart of this policy. 'Equality' means ensuring everyone has the same opportunities to fulfil their potential free from discrimination. 'Inclusion' means ensuring everyone feels comfortable to be themselves at work and feels the worth of their contribution. 'Diversity' means the celebration of individual differences amongst the workforce. We will actively support diversity and inclusion and ensure that all our employees are valued and treated with dignity and respect. We want to encourage everyone in our business to reach their potential.

We recognise that discrimination is unacceptable and although equality of opportunity has been a long standing feature of our employment practices and procedure, we have made the decision to adopt a formal policy. Breaches of the policy will lead to disciplinary proceedings and, if appropriate, disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.

The aim of the policy is to ensure no job applicant, employee or worker is discriminated against either directly or indirectly on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation.

We will ensure that the policy is circulated to any agencies responsible for our recruitment and a copy of the policy will be made available for all employees and made known to all applicants for employment.

The policy will be communicated to all private contractors reminding them of their responsibilities towards the equality of opportunity.

The policy will be implemented in accordance with the appropriate statutory requirements and full account will be taken of all available guidance and in particular any relevant Codes of Practice.

We will maintain a neutral working environment in which no employee or worker feels under threat or intimidated.

### **Recruitment and Selection**

The recruitment and selection process is crucially important to any equality, inclusion and diversity policy. We will endeavour through appropriate training to ensure that employees making selection and recruitment decisions will not discriminate, whether consciously or unconsciously, in making these decisions.

Promotion and advancement will be made on merit and all decisions relating to this will be made within the overall framework and principles of this policy.

Job descriptions, where used, will be revised to ensure that they are in line with this policy. Job requirements will be reflected accurately in any personnel specifications.

We will adopt a consistent, non-discriminatory approach to the advertising of vacancies.

We will not confine our recruitment to areas or media sources which provide only, or mainly, applicants of a particular group.

All applicants who apply for jobs with us will receive fair treatment and will be considered solely on their ability to do the job.

All employees involved in the recruitment process will periodically review their selection criteria to ensure that they are related to the job requirements and do not unlawfully discriminate.

Short listing and interviewing will be carried out by more than one person where possible.

Interview questions will be related to the requirements of the job and will not be of a discriminatory nature.

We will not disqualify any applicant because they are unable to complete an application form unassisted unless personal completion of the form is a valid test of the standard of English required for the safe and effective performance of the job.

Selection decisions will not be influenced by any perceived prejudices of other staff.

### **Training and Promotion**

Senior staff will receive training in the application of this policy to ensure that they are aware of its contents and provisions.

All promotion will be in line with this policy.

### **Monitoring**

We will maintain and review the employment records of all employees in order to monitor the progress of this policy.

Monitoring may involve:

the collection and classification of information regarding the race in terms of ethnic/national origin and sex of all applicants and current employees;

the examination by ethnic/national origin and sex of the distribution of employees and the success rate of the applicants; and

recording recruitment, training and promotional records of all employees, the decisions reached and the reason for those decisions.

The results of any monitoring procedure will be reviewed at regular intervals to assess the effectiveness of the implementation of this policy. Consideration will be given, if necessary, to adjusting this policy to afford greater equality of opportunities to all applicants and staff.

## LEAVE POLICY

This policy sets out how the annual leave of paid members of staff is worked out and what their entitlement is.

Marden Parish Council staff holiday year begins on 1st January and ends on 31st December each year.

Contractual leave entitlement is shown in an employee's contract of employment; and depend upon the particular conditions of service and length of continuous service.

The Council will allocate agreed holiday dates on a 'first come' – first served' basis whilst ensuring that operational efficiency and appropriate staffing levels are maintained throughout the year. The Council cannot guarantee that holiday will be sanctioned if less than two weeks' notice is given.

Your holiday pay will be at your normal basic pay unless shown otherwise on your contract of employment.

If you become sick or injured during a period of annual holiday, you will be regarded as being on sick leave from the date of a medical certificate and you may take such days as annual holiday at a later date.

In the event of the termination of your employment any holidays accrued but not taken will be paid for. However, in the event of you having taken holidays in the current year, which have not been accrued pro-rata, then the appropriate payments will be deducted from your final pay. This is an express written term of your contract of employment.

### **Public/Bank Holidays**

Your entitlement to public/bank holidays and to any additional payment for working on a public/bank holiday is shown in your contract of employment.

### **Annual Leave Entitlement Part-time and Casual Employees**

What the Law Says:

- at least 5.6 weeks statutory holiday entitlement must be provided to employees (28 days inclusive of bank holiday entitlement) per Working Time Directive.
- part-time employees are entitled to the same amount of holiday (pro rata) as full-time employees.
- Temporary or casual employees are entitled to the same amount of holiday as permanent employees.
- employers can define the times when employees can take their leave - for example a Christmas shut down, school holiday or to meet changing business requirements
- If employment ends employees have the right to be paid for any leave due but not taken

- there is no legal right to paid public holidays

### **How Marden Parish Council (MPC) administers annual leave:**

The philosophy underpinning the annual leave provision of the Council and also the Working Time Regulations is to ensure that all employees are adequately rested from time to time. This has positive benefits for their health and safety. The philosophy is undermined if employees allow their leave to stockpile.

MPC therefore seeks to encourage employees to take their annual leave evenly throughout the year in the interests of their health and wellbeing and the consequent efficiency benefits to the Council as a whole.

### **The Leave Year**

The leave year runs from 1<sup>st</sup> January to 31<sup>st</sup> December each year. Each annual leave year will stand on its own and leave may not normally be carried forward from one year to the next (see below). In exceptional circumstances, only the HR Sub-Committee may approve the carry forward of a maximum of one week of contractual annual leave.

The annual leave entitlement for employees joining or leaving the Council is proportionate to their completed service during the leave year.

An employee returning from maternity leave may carry forward their full balance of contractual annual leave, where their maternity leave spans two leave years and where the employee has been unable to take the previous year's leave due to their period of maternity leave. The carried forward leave must be added to the end of the maternity leave period and cannot be used at any other time.

Full time employees will be afforded a substitute day's leave in respect of each bank or public holiday that falls within both ordinary and additional maternity leave. For part-time employees, the total annual leave entitlement already includes the bank and public holiday entitlement.

Statutory annual leave will accrue whilst an employee is absent due to sickness at the same rate of accrual that would occur had the employee been at work. This accrued leave may be taken upon an employee's return to work, even where the employee has been absent for a full leave year or where the period of sickness spans two leave years.

### **Procedures for taking leave**

Appropriate request forms and procedures should be followed for approval of holiday dates.

Employees wishing to take leave must always obtain the approval of the Clerk (in regard to the Clerk's requests approval should be from the Chairman of HR Sub-Committee (or in their absence the Vice-Chairman of HR Sub-Committee) before taking such leave. Such requests must be made as far in advance as practicable in order to enable planning for adequate staffing levels and meeting cover within the Council.

The minimum holiday request should be for half a day.

The Council will allocate agreed holiday dates on a 'first come –first served' basis whilst ensuring that operational efficiency and appropriate staffing levels are maintained throughout the year. There is no guarantee that holiday will be approved if less than two weeks' notice is given. Any holiday arrangements should not be booked until agreement has been received.

The Clerk and Deputy Clerk may not take leave at the same time unless there are extenuating circumstances agreed by the HR Sub-Committee.

Once agreed the annual leave dates must be entered onto the shared calendar by either the staff member or the Clerk.

New starters to the Council who request leave, and who have not completed six months of service, are required to sign an undertaking to repay any excess leave entitlement should they leave the Council's service.

### **Leave Entitlement**

All employees receive 2 additional statutory days per the National Joint Council For Local Government Services' Green Book.

Employees working part-time (or compressed hours) will have an entitlement pro-rated to the annual leave of comparable full-time employees. The calculation of this entitlement is always proportional to the number of basic contracted hours.

No annual leave can be carried over to the next year (or paid for) unless there are extenuating circumstances agreed by the HR Sub-Committee

### **Annual Leave – Leaving the Council**

Employees leaving the employment of the Council may not take any outstanding annual leave entitlement during their period of notice unless agreed with the HR Sub-Committee. This includes any statutory leave entitlement under the Working Time Regulations. Payment in lieu of outstanding leave will be included in final pay.

If an employee has taken in excess of his/her annual leave entitlement on termination of employment, an appropriate deduction will be made from the final pay.

Where an employee has been absent from work due to sickness and where their contract is subsequently terminated prior to them having returned to work from that period of sickness absence, they will receive a payment in lieu of outstanding statutory leave.

### **Time Off In Lieu (TOIL)**

The Council acknowledges that its employees may be required to work additional hours in order to meet the requirements of their role and/or the council. In recognition of this requirement, and the subsequent flexibility required of its employees, the Council provides Time Off In Lieu (TOIL) to the employee. Staff members are

required to work with their line manager to manage the accrual of TOIL appropriately and to minimise the amount accumulated whenever possible.

TOIL is accrued when an employee is required to work outside of their normal core working hours, as defined by their employment contract.

The following list is not exclusive but covers the majority of reasons why an employee would accrue TOIL:-

Meeting with councillors that cannot take place during core office hours

Staffing an event taking place on an evening or weekend

Travelling in the early morning or evening to attend a conference, training or external meeting

Working additional hours to meet deadlines

\*TOIL is accumulated on single time. For every one hour worked, one hour of TOIL would be accumulated.

TOIL is only acceptable when agreed between staff and managers.

Staff should try to seek alternatives to avoid accruing excessive TOIL and to arrange meetings and travel time within core working hours whenever practical and reasonable.

Any claim for TOIL must have the prior approval of the Clerk/Chairman of HR Sub-Committee. Only in exceptional circumstances can TOIL be awarded after an event has taken place, but the employee will be required to explain to the HR Sub-Committee why they were not able to obtain prior approval.

Approved TOIL must be recorded on the relevant form including the reason for the additional hours being worked. The TOIL sheet must be updated and signed by the Clerk/Chairman of HR Sub-Committee.

Up to one week's accumulated TOIL can be carried over to the following year.

On leaving the Council's employment, an employee cannot receive payment in lieu of taking TOIL. Employees will be supported to be able to take any outstanding TOIL during the notice period.

It is therefore the responsibility of staff to manage their own TOIL appropriately.

## LONE WORKER POLICY

The Parish Council will avoid the need for employees to work alone where reasonably practicable. However, some staff are required to work by themselves for significant periods of time. The Parish Council will take all reasonable steps to ensure the health and safety of employees working alone.

This policy applies to all staff including temporary and self-employed.

The Parish Council will ensure that a risk assessment is conducted once a year (or more frequently if required) and that arrangements are in place prior to employees working alone.

The Clerk will ensure that:

- b) emergency procedures are in place so that members of staff working alone can obtain assistance if required;
- c) a risk assessment is completed by a person competent to do so prior to employees working alone;
- d) any employee working alone is capable of undertaking the work alone;
- e) arrangements are in place so that someone else is aware of a lone worker's whereabouts at all times;
- f) persons working alone are provided with adequate information, instruction and training to understand the hazards and risks and the safe working procedures associated with working alone; and
- g) training records are kept.

The person conducting the lone working assessment will:

- a) give consideration to the greater risks to expectant mothers and young persons;
- b) involve the employee who is working alone in the assessment process and the development of safe working methods;
- c) advise the employee undertaking the lone working of the findings of the assessment;
- d) ensure there are arrangements for monitoring incidents relating to lone working and the HR Sub-Committee regularly reviews the effectiveness of the policy;
- e) ensure staff are given appropriate support involved in any incident; and
- f) maintain a file of all lone working.

Employees working alone will:

- a) follow the safe working arrangements developed by the Parish Council for lone working;
- b) take reasonable steps to ensure their own safety and that of others;
- c) takes part in training; and
- d) inform their Line Manager of any incidents or safety concerns.

### **Leading Statutory Authority**

Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 (SI 1999/3242).

Employers have a general duty under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 to ensure the health, safety and welfare of their employees as far as is reasonably practicable, which includes providing safe systems, a safe place of work and suitable arrangements for employees' welfare.

Regulation 3 of the Management of Health and Safety at work Regulations 1999 requires a suitable and sufficient assessment of risks arising from work activities (including lone working) to be undertaken.

Regulation 13 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 requires employers to consider the physical and mental capabilities of employees when deciding on the tasks they will undertake.

Lone working is not permitted under certain legislation. It is prudent for employers to review any regulations specific to their business prior to allowing lone working.

In relation to a lone working risk assessment consideration should be given to:

- a) the remoteness of the workplace;
- b) potential communication problems;
- c) the likelihood of a criminal attack;
- d) potential for verbal and physical abuse;
- e) vulnerability of lone workers to feelings of isolation, stress and depression;
- f) whether all the plant, equipment, materials, etc. can be handled safely by one person;
- g) whether the person is medically fit and suitable to work alone;
- h) how the lone worker will be supervised;

i) how the lone worker will obtain help in an emergency such as an assault, vehicle breakdown, accident or fire; and

j) whether there is adequate first-aid cover.

**Office Alarm**

There may be occasions when there may be a call out due to the office alarm being activated. In such a case any keyholder attending should be accompanied by another person.

## **PANDEMIC POLICY**

### **Introduction**

The Parish Council is committed to ensuring the health and safety of its workforce and the following procedure sets out the contingency measures that the Parish Council will bring into effect in the event of a pandemic outbreak. The following procedure aims to ensure that the Parish Council will be able to continue its business operations to the best of its abilities in such an event while protecting, as far as is reasonably practicable, our employees.

In outlining its procedures however, the Parish Council expects all of its employees to take reasonable care for themselves and others, to behave responsibly and sensibly, and to act at all times in line with the latest guidance from the Government.

### **Communication**

During a pandemic, the Parish Council will nominate a senior member of staff who will be responsible for communicating important messages to our workforce, including on the impact of the pandemic on our operations and the Parish Council's response to it, and to whom all questions from the workforce should be directed.

Communication may be undertaken by group meeting, email or by letter, or by other digital means if it is no longer possible to operate from the workplace.

### **Business Travel**

The Parish Council recognises that there may be restrictions placed upon travel so will consider every business trip that is planned for the near future on an individual basis and identify if alternatives to making the trip can be considered, where possible. This may include postponing the trip or holding meetings digitally.

If travel is deemed necessary, we will conduct a full risk assessment into the risks associated with the trip with involvement from employees who are being asked to travel.

### **Employee Travel**

During a pandemic, certain countries may be identified as posing a particularly high risk to visitors. The Parish Council accepts that some of its employees will have made plans to travel which may include pre-booked and paid for holidays. We would therefore ask that employees consider, for their health reasons, whether travelling to these countries is the best thing to do. If a decision is made to travel, we ask that employees let the Clerk know of the countries to be visited so that their return can be managed appropriately.

If you would like to cancel any pre-booked annual leave, you should discuss this with the Clerk however please be aware that we are under no obligation to allow you to change or cancel any previously booked holiday.

### **Infection Control Measures and Period of Self-Isolation**

We expect all employees to follow all guidelines issued from the World Health Organisation or as advised by the UK Government or any other authority, in both daily life and whilst at work. This includes any social distancing measures. In

addition, depending on the nature of the pandemic, the Government may require people to self-isolate, which means staying at home and not having contact with other people.

In this situation, the following applies:

- All employees should keep up to date on Government guidance on who should self-isolate.
- If you are required to self-isolate, you must inform the Clerk at the earliest opportunity. The Clerk will keep in contact with you during this period. You must not attend work during the isolation period.
- Where feasible, we may consider whether you can work from home during this period.

Details of any payment being made during this time will be advised to you at the start of the self-isolation and will be in accordance with Government guidance at the time.

### **Becoming Ill**

If you become ill from the threat to health, you should take and follow medical advice on the length of your sickness absence. Prior to returning to work you should ensure you are symptom free. You must not return before you are completely recovered. The Clerk will keep in touch during your absence and will confirm your return date with you.

Our normal sickness absence and sick pay procedure will apply. You are required to produce a medical certificate for illnesses lasting more than seven calendar days, however, we appreciate that you may not be in a position to obtain a medical certificate in usual timescales, therefore you should provide it as soon as is reasonably practicable. In some situations, in line with government guidance, an extension of self-certification of absence will be temporarily accepted. You will be informed of any such changes should these apply.

Alternative medical certificates may be accepted, where it is confirmed by the UK Government that such are acceptable as evidence.

### **Attendance at Work**

Unless you are sick or are in self-isolation in accordance with Government guidance and have followed our usual reporting procedures in relation to absence, or not attending work under our specific instruction, you are expected to attend work as normal. However, if there is a reason why you think you may have been exposed to a threat to your health, or you begin to feel ill whilst at work, you should let the Clerk know.

The Parish Council's leave and absence policies will be continuously reviewed as the status of the pandemic changes.

### **Working at Home or Another Location**

It may be necessary for us to require you to work from an alternative work location if, for example, instructions from a third party mean that entry into our current workplace is not permitted. Your flexibility in this regard will be expected, however, all instructions of this nature will be reasonable.

The Parish Council will consider, as part of its general approach to maintaining normal business operations, whether employees are to work from home and will take into consideration Government guidance on this issue. Obviously, this may not be possible in every case due to the nature of the business and individual roles. However, where applicable, we will assess the viability of this option, taking into consideration any equipment needed, at the relevant time and, as a result, you may be required to work from home for a temporary period. Employees should not assume that they will be permitted to work from home and advance authorisation will be needed in every case.

### **Temporary Business Closure**

Depending on the impact of the pandemic, it may become clear that the business is temporarily unable to continue its operations as normal. In some cases, we may be advised or required to close the business by the UK Government or other authority. In this scenario, we may be forced to close all, or part, of the business temporarily until such a time as we are able to resume operations. Whilst we will do everything we can to ensure that this does not happen, including the implementation of temporary home working where the nature of the role allows, we may be in a position where we are unable to provide you with work as normal. Where this happens, we may be left with no option but to place you on lay off, short time working or designate you as a furloughed worker during which time there will either be a reduction in your hours, or you will cease to do all work for the Parish Council. Any payments made to employees during lay off, short time working or furlough will be subject to legislation and Government guidance in place at the relevant time.

### **Returning to Work**

In the event that our business closes, we will closely monitor the situation in order to ascertain a time at which it may re-open, or if it has remained open but we have implemented a period of home-working, a time at which we are able to re-open the normal workplace. We will take into consideration guidance from the UK Government or other relevant authorities when making this assessment, including giving utmost priority to whether it is safe to do so and we will keep you updated on the current situation. When the decision has been made to re-open, we will endeavour to give you as much notice of this as possible. Heads of department will be responsible for contacting their team members to ensure that the time and date on which you are required to return to work has been communicated, as well as any additional health and safety measures that we require you to observe on your return. Unless otherwise directed, you will be required to return to the location at which you were working prior to the shutdown/home working period, and on the same hours of work.

On the first day back in the workplace, managers will hold meetings with their teams to welcome you back and deliver any important messages about any adjustments to working that may still be required, for example, in respect of health and safety measures, in the delivery of our service to the public. The Clerk will remain the initial

point of contact for any questions that you may have about the delivery of our service on your return. If you work part-time, or are not able to return on the re-open day due to sickness or other absence, the Clerk will arrange a return to work meeting with you on your first day back.

Any equipment that you were provided with for the specific purpose of carrying out your duties at home during the shutdown/home working period, including but not limited to mobile phones and laptops, must be returned to us. You must also ensure that any Parish Council documentation or information used or printed out in your home is returned or brought into the workplace.

If you were already a home-worker prior to the shutdown/wider home-working period, the Clerk will arrange a digital return to work discussion with you.

## **PAY POLICY**

### **Marden Parish Council Employed Staff**

All staff (both office and grounds staff) are appointed to a grade within the range for the position set out in the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) 2004 National Agreement on Pay and Conditions of Service.

National Joint Council (NJC) salaries are reviewed annually and the Parish Council will award any increase agreed at the national negotiations. These awards normally take effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April.

A member of the HR Sub-Committee reviews individual performance of staff at least annually and reports back to the Committee. The HR Sub-Committee will determine if an inflationary only increase (based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI)) should apply or whether an incremental increase should apply.

Criteria for an incremental increase:

- Progression towards a professional qualification relevant to the role
- Extent to which the jobholder has performed the role. Has the jobholder met expectations or exceeded expectations?
- How has the jobholder dealt with difficult situations during the year, how many have there been and how have they handled them?
- Has the jobholder improved processes or services delivered by MPC? Has this resulted in cost containment?
- Has the jobholder been instrumental in MPC receiving any awards or accreditations during the year?
- Has the Council, or any individual Councillor received any feedback about the employee?

Additionally, in the case of exceptional performance the HR Committee can recommend to the Council that a non-consolidated annual bonus of up to, but no more than, £1000 can be made. (This would be subject to normal PAYE/NIC deductions).

### **Play Scheme Staff**

Play Scheme staff are employed for two weeks each year for the Summer Play Scheme and will have an hourly rate in line with the National Living Wage set by the UK Government.

## SEXUAL HARASSMENT POLICY

### Introduction

Marden Parish Council recognises 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.

Marden Parish Council recognises that personal harassment can exist in the workplace, as well as outside, and that this can seriously affect employees/councillor's/volunteer's working lives by interfering with their job performance or by creating a stressful, intimidating and unpleasant working environment.

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

The Parish Council recognises that we have a duty to implement this policy and all employees/councillors/volunteers 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/councillors/volunteers may not always realise that their behaviour constitutes harassment. Personal harassment is unwanted behaviour by one employee/councillor/volunteer 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/councillors/volunteers 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/councillors/volunteers 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/councillor/volunteer 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/councillor/volunteer 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/councillor/volunteer is treated unfavourably as a direct result of raising a genuine complaint of discrimination or harassment. Furthermore, any employee/councillor/volunteer who supports or assists another employee/councillor/volunteer to raise a complaint is also subjected to victimisation if they are treated unfavourably.

### **Third party harassment**

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

If the parish council finds 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, Marden Parish Council will endeavour to take all reasonable steps to deter and prevent any form of harassment from third parties taking place.

## **Responsibilities**

### Employee/Councillor/Volunteer responsibilities

Marden Parish Council requires its employees/councillors/volunteers to behave appropriately and professional 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/councillors/volunteers 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

### Marden Parish Council's responsibilities

Marden Parish Council will be responsible for ensuring all members of staff, councillors and volunteers, understand the rules and policies relating to the prevention of harassing and bullying behaviour at work and during work-related social events. We will promote a professional and positive workplace whereby managers and councillors are alert and proactively identify areas of risk and incidents of harassment, sexual harassment and bullying.

We will also take into account aggravating factors, such as abuse of power over a more junior colleague/councillor/volunteer, when deciding what disciplinary action to take.

Where an incident is witness, or a complaint is made under this policy, Marden Parish 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.

## **Complaining about harassment and/or bullying**

### Informal method

Marden 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 the Clerk or the Chairman of the Parish Council (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 follow the grievance procedure laid out in the HR Employee's Handbook. 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.

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.

Marden 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.

## WORKPLACE STRESS MANAGEMENT POLICY

### Introduction

Across the Country, more workdays are lost through stress than any other health issue. Therefore, Marden Parish Council believes that it is in the best interests of the Council and the community that the Council strives to make optimum use of the skills and talents of its employees. It recognises that, in delivering services to its residents, employees are subject to pressures and that, in the way it manages its human resources, the Council is committed to ensuring that pressures are not excessive nor to a level that can cause harm to an individual.

The Council also recognises that:-

<b>Demands:</b>	workload, work patterns and the work environment.
<b>Control:</b>	the amount of say staff have in how they do their work.
<b>Support:</b>	encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by Peninsula.
<b>Relationships:</b>	positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour.
<b>Role:</b>	the understanding by employees and the avoidance of conflicting roles.
<b>Change:</b>	the organisation and management of large and small change within the organisation are key to the control of adverse pressures or stress at work and is committed to work with staff and their representatives to protect the health, safety and welfare of all employees.

Marden Parish Council's aims and objectives are only achievable with the sustained effort, support and commitment of all its members and staff.

The Parish Council's belief in the pursuit of excellence in all its dealings with customers, employees and other bodies is stated in its health and safety policies and these encourage all staff to not only be aware of their own legal responsibilities but to be actively involved in developing a positive and progressive safety culture. The need to minimise work-related stress and alleviate its effects when it occurs is paramount in the context of the safety culture and this document is intended to define Marden Parish Council's policy for minimising the risks to health and safety at work from the effects of stress.

In formulating this policy, the Council recognises that:

- anyone can suffer from stress;
- that stress is not a mental illness, but the natural reaction people have to excessive pressures and demands imposed on them;
- that ill-health effects can often be caused by stress due to problems outside work; which may then affect the employee's performance and relationships at work and that, as the employer, it can take positive steps to assist staff by examining the context to work and content of work to control the stress levels at source before referring those affected for counselling sessions;

- that there are in fact beneficial effects of reasonable pressure and challenge, which stimulate and motivates the workforce;
- people have a varying ability to deal with the pressures encountered in life and some people are particularly vulnerable, but if the emotional and physical demands on a person are greater than their capacity to cope with them, ill-health may occur.

The likelihood of harm occurring will be influenced by factors such as age, experience, training, current state of health and financial or personal relationship problems. In a few cases where breakdown occurs, the individual may take a long time to recover or may never fully return to his or her previous state of health.

It is not possible to predict individual responses to all sources of stress at work, since some people are stimulated by challenges that may overwhelm others. However, certain factors are known to be associated with adverse effects on health and well-being, which may be physical, psychological or a combination of each.

The Parish Council acknowledges its duties under health and safety legislation. The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 requires the Council to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of all its employees. Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, the Council is required to make a suitable and sufficient assessment of the risks to the health and safety of its employees to which they are exposed whilst they are at work.”

“Risks to health” includes stress and the Council accepts its legal duties to take reasonable steps to make sure it does not cause or exacerbate work related stress to an unacceptable level to its employees. In particular, it will address the following statutory obligations:-

- duty to carry out a suitable and sufficient risk assessment;
- duty to apply the principles of prevention;
- duty to ensure employees’ capability and to provide training; and
- duty to ensure welfare of young people.

Although there is no legal duty on the Council to prevent ill-health caused by stress due to problems outside work (e.g. domestic and personal issues), the Council recognises that non-work problems can make it difficult for people to cope with the pressures of work and that their performance at work might suffer. Therefore, the Council will try its utmost to empathise with employees’ domestic situations without undue interference and to support employees where possible, with a view to enabling the employee to achieve their full capability.

Whenever feasible, the Council will encourage and support employees to take steps to manage their own stress. Support may be through the application of Council policies– such as *Dignity and Respect at Work* or *Discipline*, and/or by encouraging staff to consult their own General Practitioner, or other medical support as may be appropriate.

## Statement of Intent

Marden Parish Council strives to create an environment where staff are able to undertake stimulating, challenging and satisfying work which does not adversely affect their health and well-being. Our employment policies are designed to support staff to be successful in their day-to-day activities and their future development.

The Council recognises that there are occasions when pressures at work and/or home can affect people's behaviour and their ability to achieve the required standards of performance within their job. Stress can have far reaching effects both on the health and the performance of an individual employee as well as on colleagues and the organisation.

Through MPC's HR Support (Peninsula) it offers employees Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) which offers private, confidential counselling, advice and emotional support via telephone or online. Details can be found in the individual employee's personal info folder or from the Clerk.

## What Is Stress?

A certain amount of both physical and mental stimulation is essential for healthy living. Too much or too little can cause overload or boredom which are unhealthy and classed as stress.

Stress occurs when there is an imbalance between the demands/pressures on an individual and their ability to cope. It is a reaction people experience when faced with excessive pressures or other types of demand that are placed upon them. It arises when they worry that they cannot cope. It can affect people who have too much work and cannot deal with it as much as those who have too little work and become bored and disillusioned.

The Health and Safety Executive defines stress as "the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demands placed on them". Defining stress in this way focuses attention on the work-related causes and the control measures required. It also acknowledges the distinction that pressure, if managed properly, may be positive, rather than stress, which can be harmful.

## Responsibilities

### Employer's Responsibilities

To carry out and record risk assessments, where appropriate, to minimise the stress hazards involved in any work activity.

To implement effective control measures, precautions, employment adjustments and training to reduce the health risks associated with stress hazards and to communicate such controls to the staff concerned.

To ensure that changes in working procedures are planned and relevant systems and controls are in place to ensure that:

- the changes are risk assessed;
- appropriate consultation takes place;
- the process is managed sensitively;

- effective communication is maintained throughout.

To ensure that adequate training is given relating to the identification and risk assessment of stress hazards and appropriate controls to minimise them.

To encourage staff to raise problems, which are likely to cause health or stress hazards in the workplace, and to jointly initiate appropriate action (e.g. through supervision, one-to-one or performance and development review scheme).

To ensure the work environment, job design and facilities provided to carry out tasks are, as far as reasonability practicable, suitable and adequate for the work undertaken.

To ensure that, in the event of a member of staff being absent from work as a result of stress in their job:

A review of the risk assessment has been completed.

Any further controls identified following the assessment process are implemented.

### Employee Responsibilities

To acknowledge that the management of health and stress hazards in the workplace is a joint responsibility between Marden Parish Council and its employees.

To take personal preventative action in terms of stress management.

To highlight to the Council through the correct procedure working practices and environments which, if allowed to continue, may lead to stress or other health related hazards.

To identify health and stress related hazards in themselves, at the earliest opportunity, and to seek appropriate help.

To avoid harmful ways of coping with stress, such as being aware that excessive drinking and smoking can increase stress levels.

To respect the needs of others and to take responsibility for actions which may have an effect on the health of other individuals.

To ensure annual leave and flexible working are used to good effect in reducing stress hazards.

### **Strategies to Deal with Stress**

#### General

There is no single way of preventing stress or ensuring that work issues do not contribute to stress. As previously outlined, people do not necessarily react in the same way to pressure/demands. Equally, if staff are showing signs of stress, this should not be seen as a sign of 'failure' or 'inadequacy'. We all from time-to-time display signs of stress but it is how we cope with the stress that is the important factor.

There are a number of strategies that can be used both by staff and managers to identify and deal with potential stressful situations and to look at ways of helping staff who are experiencing stress.

It is the responsibility of the Council to ensure that:

- they set clear objectives, have good communication channels, involve staff in decision making, provide management support and appropriate training;
- all jobs are risk assessed regularly and that measures are put into place to address jobs with high demands/pressures;
- staff are treated with respect and dignity, training is available in interpersonal skills, effective systems are in place for dealing with interpersonal conflict e.g. bullying/harassment;
- they set realistic deadlines, plan and agree working hours, look at flexibility in work schedules;
- tasks and responsibilities are well defined, ways of avoiding boring repetitive jobs are considered, skills are used appropriately, suitable training is provided;
- they seek help/advice when required

It is each employee's responsibility to ensure that they are fit for work and should:

- highlight to the Council in an appropriate way, any health or stress related matters that may affect their work;
- avoid harmful ways of coping with stress, e.g. excessive drinking, smoking, drug taking;
- respect the needs of others;
- ensure that they take adequate breaks and get sufficient sleep;
- ensure that annual leave and flexible working hours are used to good effect;

### **Action by the Council and Employees**

#### Action by employees

Employees have duties under Section 7 the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 to co-operate with their employer to enable the employer to comply with statutory duties for health and safety.

Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, employees must inform the Council of any work situation which might present a serious and imminent danger. Employees should also notify any shortcomings in the health and safety arrangements, even when no immediate danger exists, so that the employer can take remedial action if needed.

To the above end, employees are encouraged to participate in the risk assessment process and MUST inform the Council in the appropriate way of any proposed or existing policies, procedures and practices, which might affect or is already affecting the staff with stress. If the Council is not made aware of a problem, then they cannot be of assistance.

Mental and physical health are closely linked. All employees therefore are encouraged by the Council to adopt a healthy lifestyle, which enables a more holistic

management and control of stressful situations. In particular, the following are promoted:

- Healthy eating;
- Stopping smoking;
- Keeping to Government's recommendations as regards alcohol consumption;
- Reducing caffeine intake;
- Regular exercise;
- Inclusion of relaxation techniques in daily routines; and
- Developing a support network for sharing and discussing concerns.

Individuals can benefit greatly from becoming more aware of their own range of feelings and reactions, particularly the causes of stressful situations in their home and work, learning from past experiences and ways of dealing with them.

It is important for individuals to recognise when they need help and support from friends, family, colleagues or, ultimately, from professionals. People can gain immensely from sharing experiences with a network of support individuals and / or groups and thus be able to make the necessary adjustments to deal with stressful situations.

### **Joint Action by the Council and Employees**

Because the causes, effects and solutions to stress-related problems involve so many factors and are very dependent on individuals, a rigid procedure for handling such issues cannot be provided. However, the following procedure provides a framework for management action:

#### Initial action when stress is suspected

Where an employee's work performance and / or behaviour becomes a cause for concern, or both factors indicate STRESS as a primary factor, or where an employee considers that they are affected by undue pressure, then the Clerk or Chairman of the Council should:-

- Discuss the matter fully with the employee with a view to monitoring work performance or behaviour over a defined period of time, agreed by the Clerk, Chairman of the Council and employee
- Discuss managerial concerns with the employee and explore the causal factors. Some problems may be resolved at this stage. This should form part of the appraisal system but should not be put off until the next appraisal meeting if the issues are currently a cause for concern. Regular team meetings and one-to-one meetings should be in place to ensure issues are discussed frequently and any remedial actions taken.

The manager should carry out a risk assessment (or revise an existing one).

Where appropriate, employees who agree to suitable recommendations or treatment will have the support of the organisation.

The manager should maintain periodic contact with the employee throughout any absence to monitor progress and assess changes in support requirements.

Recommendations for changes in an employee's work, or working environment, made by the Council's advisers, will be accommodated, where reasonably practicable, by the organisation. This will enable the individual to continue to be supported at work during treatment or successfully return to work after a period of absence.

The Line Manager will monitor the individual's progress during the period of supported employment, or a defined period on return to work, and assess the need for continued support. Where an employee has suffered a stress-related illness and is not under medical supervision, the employee may be required to undergo a medical assessment before returning to work. A decision must then be taken on future work position, following the outcome of a risk assessment in the workplace.

### Unacknowledged Stress Problems

Where stress-related problems or behaviour are seen to affect an employee's ability to do the job, but are not acknowledged or acted upon by the individual, then the Clerk or Chairman of the Council should:

- Discuss deficiency in work performance / behaviour with the employee, making him / her aware that a problem exists.
- Discuss the available options for promotion of improvement, which may involve a suitable referral, changes to the workplace or task, and / or take other appropriate action or intervention.

At all stages of the process, the parties should conduct themselves in an appropriate manner as regards confidentiality, use of language and respect for the individuals.

### **Signs and Effects of Stress**

All staff are encouraged to become aware of signs of stress in others so that any early symptoms can be resolved. Stress can become noticeable and show one or more of the following symptoms:

#### Personal / Physical Effects

Body Language	Increased smoking
Tone of voice	Increased coffee drinking
Tearfulness	Alcohol or drug abuse
Tense posture	Weight change / skipping meals
Nail biting	Breathlessness
Frowning	Increased colds and other infections
Twitching	Trembling and shaking
Changing sleeping patterns	Pallor or blushing, skin rashes
Blurred vision	Raised heart rate
Aches in neck/shoulders	Raised breathing rate
Increased sweating	Headaches
Tiredness	Dizziness
Lowering of resistance to infection	Anxiety or depression

### Workplace effects

Increased absenteeism	Social withdrawal
Reduced efficiency and output	Conflict with other staff
Poor time management	Mood swings and loss of temper
Frustration/aggression	Lack of self esteem
Poor decision making	Over-reactions
Impaired judgement	Failure to meet deadlines
Low morale/commitment	Poor quality of work
Lateness for work/meetings	Poor performance
Clock watching/leaving early	Increased errors and/or accidents
Working increasingly long hours but for diminished returns	Unexpected difficulties with training or examinations

Clearly, the presence of one or more of the above does not in itself necessarily mean that a person is suffering from stress (e.g. poor time-keeping and time management). Managers may, however, need to deal with the issues because the rest of the team could become affected (e.g. an increase in absenteeism due to alcohol intake 'the night before' would lead to increased workload for the rest of the team).

Over a longer period, the effects of stress may also contribute to chronic health problems such as raised blood pressure, heart disease and stomach ulcers. Responses to stress vary in individuals; over time, some may primarily experience physical symptoms while others may experience psychological disturbance. These effects however are usually short lived and cause no long lasting harm. If the pressures recede, there is often a quick return to normal.

In cost terms, sickness, absenteeism, reduced productivity and loss of trained Human Resources, with associated replacement and recruitment costs, can add up to a lot of money that could be better spent in other areas. Therefore, once a stress-related problem has been recognised, it is often cost-beneficial for the organisation, and the manager, to do something about it. Indirect costs related to decline in the quality of service and increased demand on health service resources are difficult to quantify but should also be recognised.

### **Causes and Risk Factors**

The process of risk assessment involves identification of hazards as its first step. The Health and Safety Executive have identified seven broad categories of "risk factors" for stress. These are outlined below and amplified further within the Stress Audit and Risk Assessment paperwork. It is important to recognise that **stress** is often the result of the combined effect of a number of different inter-related factors, as well as striking the right work-life balance.

### **Culture**

The work culture is an important factor to consider. Communication, support and mutual respect form the essence of this risk factor. The way these issues are embraced influences how committed the employees feel towards the organisation and how committed they feel the organisation is to their welfare. It also affects how willing the employees are to share matters of concern.

## **Demands**

Demands on individuals are often quoted as the main cause of stress and can be broken down into:

- (1) work overload;
- (2) work underload;
- (3) physical environment; and
- (4) psychosocial environment.

### **Work overload**

Work-overload happens when there is an excessive and unreasonable amount of work to do in time available or when the work is beyond the capability of the employee. The latter can happen if the employee has been asked to undertake a task without knowledge or the intellectual or physical capacity to do the work or if they have been set an impossible task regardless of resource or ability.

The effects of excessive work overload on employees may lead to problems such as detrimental effects to performance at work, on family and social life.

Work-overload can also occur when tasks are set with unreasonable deadlines or conflicting priorities.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 requires employers to take into account an employee's capability and training when work is allocated. Providing adequate training for the job is an important factor, especially stressed in these Regulations for young workers who may not be experienced enough to deal with demanding, aggressive and violent people or who may find it difficult to make decisions under pressure.

### **Work-underload**

It is also the case that a reasonable degree of challenge and pressure keeps staff interested in the work and motivated. Job under-load, associated with little work or constant, boring and under-stimulating work can lead to dissatisfaction and stress.

### **Physical Environment**

The following physical factors can have an effect on a person's well-being at work, noise, temperature, ventilation, humidity, lighting, hygiene and welfare facilities. Excessive exposure to adverse conditions has been shown to cause fatigue, headaches, irritability, effects on attention span and ability to concentrate, as a result of which employees make greater number of errors, their performance is compromised and their health is jeopardised.

### **Psycho-Social Environment**

The Council's function inherently involves dealing with the public, as a result of which the staff can be exposed to aggressive or violent behaviour. Being sworn at, threatened or physically assaulted, is likely to affect employees emotionally and physically. Marden Parish Council recognises this and has a robust and supportive policy on Aggression at Work.

### **Control**

The less that staff are involved with discussions about their work, the more they tend to become dissatisfied. Research has shown a correlation between non-participation and stress and ill-health. Marden Parish Council believes that the revised Performance and Development Plan will increase staff consultation and staff involvement in their work as well as departmental and corporate plans.

### **Relationships**

Positive interaction with others at work is an important factor in motivation, support and encouragement. Negative interaction, however, can take the form of bullying and harassment from managers, supervisors, peers and subordinates. Bullying and harassment are unacceptable to Marden Parish Council and policies and procedures are in place to combat this potential source of stress at work (see Dignity at Work Policy).

### **Bullying**

The HSE refer to bullying as “persistent unacceptable behaviour (or a single, grossly unacceptable act) by one or more individuals working in the organisation against one or more employees”. It includes:

- Any act or threat of physical violence;
- Persistent or gross verbal abuse (including shouting or swearing);
- Insubordination;
- Victimisation, humiliation or ridicule;
- Libel, slander or malicious gossip;
- Spying, pestering, or other inappropriate intrusive questioning, particularly into personal or domestic life;
- Setting impossible or arbitrary objectives or deadlines;
- Excessive supervision;
- Unjustified fault finding;
- Unreasonably withholding information that the employee should have an expectation of being given; exclusion from meetings that the employee should have a reasonable expectation of attending or other forms of unreasonable ignoring of the employee;
- Refusing, without reasonable cause, reasonable requests for leave or training; or
- Maliciously preventing career development.

### **Harassment**

HSE’s definition of ‘harassment’ means unwanted conduct based on sex (including transgender status), race, colour, religion, nationality, ethnic or national origin or disability that affects the dignity of people at work.

### **Change**

It is inevitable for most organisations to have to undergo change to keep up with central government requirements, new technology, restructuring and new working practices. Poor management of change can lead to individuals feeling anxious about their employment status and reporting work-related stress.

Subtler, frequent, changes can affect staff just as much as a large-scale change, if not properly managed. Social changes (e.g. if staff are now working with a completely different group of people) may have more of an impact on the individual than technological or geographical changes.

## **Role**

Stress can be produced if a person's role in the organisation is not clearly defined and misunderstood and if the expectations placed on them conflict. Role conflict and 'role ambiguity' are two potentially stressful areas to be considered:-

### Role Conflict

Role conflict exists when an individual is torn by conflicting job demands or by doing things he or she does not really want to do or things that the individual does not believe are part of their job. Workers may often feel themselves torn between two groups of people who demand different types of behaviour or who believe the job entails different functions.

### Role Ambiguity

Role ambiguity arises when individuals do not have a clear picture about their work objectives, their co-workers' expectations of them and the scope and responsibilities of their job. Often this ambiguity results simply because a manager or supervisor has never adequately explained what is required of them or because the job has changed without this being acknowledged in the job description.

A wide range of situations can create role ambiguity. For example, entering a new job or department, a promotion or transfer, a new manager, the first supervisory responsibility or adapting to a change in the structure of the organisation.

## **Support, training and factors unique to the individual**

As mentioned in paragraph 2.3 above, the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 require that every employer provides adequate health and safety information, instruction, and training. This can be extended to the staff receiving sufficient training to undertake the core functions of their jobs, without which they could be affected by stress.

When new members of staff are recruited, so far as possible, they should be matched to the job (in terms of skills, ability, capability and commitment) and should receive appropriate induction, during which they are made aware of various corporate policies including the policy on work-related stress.

The way that both new and existing staff are supported is key to reducing, or moderating, work-related stress. Support includes offering help in times of crisis and informally congratulating a member of the team for a job well done.

Low social support at work has been associated with poor mental health, poor health functioning and increased sickness absence. However, high social support at work has a protective effect, being associated with reduced risk of both short and long spells of sickness absence. Marden Parish Council values its staff and strives to guide managers at all levels through positive Human Resource intervention.

Managers should adopt a positive attitude even when the work has not been completed to the standards required. Provision of constructive and supportive advice, instead of reprimanding the staff, is more likely to be productive – the staff will learn from past mistakes instead of becoming anxious about undertaking similar tasks in the future.

Managers should take into account the 'make-up' of the team, appreciating that some members may thrive on working to tight deadlines, whilst others may like to plan their work so that they know what they have to do and when. Therefore, as far as possible, managers should try to cater for these individual differences by talking to their staff as a team; there might be scope to allocate the work in a way that suits all team members or that the work is managed in a different way for different people.

Finally, the HSE advises that stress prevention rather than stress management is the answer. "Do not try to train staff to become 'stress-resistant'".