# Widdrington Station & Stobswood Parish Council

## Dignity at Work Policy

This policy forms part of the Council's Employee Handbook. Any amendments to this policy will be incorporated into the Employee Handbook and re-issued to employees. Employees will be required to confirm that they have read, understood, and will comply with the policy.

This policy is written in accordance with the **Equality Act 2010**, relevant employment legislation, and guidance issued by the **National Association of Local Councils (NALC)** and the **Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC)**.

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## 1. Policy Statement

Widdrington Station & Stobswood Parish Council is committed to providing a working environment in which all employees, councillors, contractors, and volunteers are treated with dignity and respect.

The Council will not tolerate bullying, harassment, victimisation, or any form of inappropriate behaviour at work. Such behaviour undermines individual dignity, morale, and effectiveness and may constitute unlawful conduct.

This policy applies to behaviour in the workplace, during work-related activities, meetings, training, social events, and in any work-related communication, including electronic and online communications.

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## 2. Scope of the Policy

This policy applies to:

- All employees of the Council;
- Councillors;
- Temporary staff, contractors, and agency workers;
- Volunteers;
- Anyone else working on behalf of, or representing, the Council.

The Council will also take reasonable steps to protect employees from bullying or harassment by third parties, including members of the public, contractors, or suppliers.

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# 3. Definitions

## Bullying

Bullying is offensive, intimidating, malicious, or insulting behaviour, or an abuse or misuse of power, which has the effect of undermining, humiliating, or injuring the recipient. Bullying may be persistent or an isolated incident and may be intentional or unintentional.

Examples of bullying include, but are not limited to:

- Persistent unwarranted criticism or humiliation;
- Shouting, aggression, or intimidating behaviour;
- Excluding someone from work-related activities;
- Spreading malicious rumours;
- Abuse of authority or position.

## Harassment

Harassment is unwanted conduct related to a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010, which has the purpose or effect of violating a person’s dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment.

Harassment may be verbal, non-verbal, physical, written, or electronic.

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# 4. Victimisation

Victimisation occurs when an individual is treated unfavourably because they have made, or supported, a complaint under this policy or the Equality Act 2010, or because they are suspected of doing so.

Victimisation is unlawful and will not be tolerated.

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# 5. Standards of Behaviour

All individuals covered by this policy are expected to:

- Treat others with courtesy, dignity, and respect;
- Consider the impact of their behaviour on others;
- Avoid behaviour that could reasonably be perceived as bullying or harassment;
- Challenge inappropriate behaviour where it is safe to do so;
- Cooperate fully with any investigation carried out under this policy.

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## 6. Informal Resolution

The Council recognises that some concerns may be resolved informally.

Where appropriate, an individual who feels they are being subjected to bullying or harassment may choose to:

- Raise the matter directly with the person concerned, explaining that the behaviour is unwelcome; or
- Seek support from the Clerk (or, in the case of a complaint involving the Clerk, the Chair of the Council) to address the issue informally.

Informal resolution is voluntary and does not prevent an individual from raising a formal complaint.

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## 7. Formal Complaints Procedure

Where informal resolution is not appropriate or has been unsuccessful, a formal complaint may be raised.

Formal complaints should be submitted in writing to:

- The Clerk, or
- The Chair of the Council where the complaint concerns the Clerk.

The complaint should set out the nature of the behaviour, relevant dates, and any supporting evidence.

The Council will investigate complaints promptly, fairly, and sensitively, following its Grievance Procedure. Confidentiality will be maintained as far as reasonably practicable.

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## 8. Investigations

Investigations will be carried out objectively and without unreasonable delay.

Both the complainant and the person complained about will be given the opportunity to present their account and provide evidence.

Where appropriate, the Council may appoint an independent investigator.

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## 9. Outcomes and Disciplinary Action

If a complaint is upheld, appropriate action will be taken.

For employees, this may include disciplinary action up to and including dismissal, in accordance with the Council’s Disciplinary Procedure.

For councillors, the matter may be dealt with under the Council’s Code of Conduct and, where appropriate, referred to the Monitoring Officer.

For third parties, appropriate steps will be taken to prevent further incidents, which may include restricting access to Council premises or terminating contracts.

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## 10. Malicious or Vexatious Complaints

Complaints made in good faith will not result in any detriment to the complainant, even if they are not upheld.

However, where a complaint is found to be deliberately false or made in bad faith, disciplinary action may be taken.

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## 11. Support

The Council recognises that bullying and harassment can be distressing.

Employees may seek support from the Clerk, Chair of the Council, or other appropriate sources during and after the complaints process.

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## 12. Monitoring and Review

The Council will monitor the operation of this policy to ensure it remains effective and compliant with current legislation and NALC/SLCC guidance.

This policy will be reviewed periodically and updated where necessary.