

Ousden Parish Council

Sexual and General Harassment Policy and Procedure

1. Ousden 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.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. Whatever form it takes, personal harassment is always taken seriously and is totally unacceptable.
5. Ousden Parish Council recognises that personal harassment can exist in the workplace, as well as outside, and that this can seriously affect councillors and employees' lives by interfering with their job performance or by creating a stressful, intimidating and unpleasant working environment.
6. We deplore all forms of personal harassment and seek to ensure that the parish council environment is sympathetic to all our councillors and employees. The aim of this policy is to inform councillors and employees of the type of behaviour that is unacceptable and provide councillors and employees who are the victims of personal harassment with a means of redress.
7. We recognise that we have a duty to implement this policy and all councillors employees 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

8. Personal harassment takes many forms and councillors and employees may not always realise that their behaviour constitutes harassment. Personal harassment is unwanted behaviour by one employee 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.
9. These examples are not exhaustive and action will be taken against councillors and employees committing any form of personal harassment.

Examples of sexual harassment

10. Sexual harassment can take place in many forms and can go undetected for a period of time where employees 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 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.

11. Sexual harassment can also take place where someone 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.

Examples of victimisation

Victimisation takes place when someone is treated unfavourably as a direct result of raising a genuine complaint of discrimination or harassment. Furthermore, any councillor or employee who supports or assists another councillor or employee to raise a complaint is also subjected to victimisation if they are treated unfavourably.

Third party harassment

Ousden Parish Council operates a zero tolerance policy in relation to harassment perpetrated against one of its councillors or employees by a third party. All councillors and employees are encouraged to report instances of harassment that involve a third party in line with our reporting procedure, as outlined below.

If we find 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 parish council meetings
- reporting the individual's actions to the police.

In addition to this, Ousden Parish Council will endeavour to take all reasonable steps to deter and prevent any form of harassment from third parties taking place.

12. Responsibilities

Employee responsibilities

12.1 Ousden Parish Council requires its councillors and employees to behave appropriately and professionally at all times when working or carrying out Parish Council business. This may extend to events outside of working hours which are classed as work-related such as social events. Councillors and employees should not engage in discriminatory, harassing or aggressive behaviour towards any other person at any time.

12.2 Any form of harassment or victimisation may lead to disciplinary action and for employees 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 Ousden Parish Council outside of a work situation, including on social media

12.3 A breach of this policy will be treated as a disciplinary matter

13. Ousden Parish Council's responsibilities

13.1 Ousden Parish Council will be responsible for ensuring that councillors and employees understand the rules and policies relating to the prevention of harassing and bullying behaviour when carrying out duties at work or on behalf of Ousden Parish Council and during council related social events.

13.2 Where an incident is witnessed, or a complaint is made under this policy, Ousden Parish Council will take prompt action to deal with this matter. All incidents will be deemed serious and dealt with in a sensitive and confidential manner.

Complaining about harassment and/or bullying

14. Informal method

- 14.1 We recognise 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 the issue to be raised through Ousden Parish Council's normal grievance procedure. In these circumstances councillors or employees are encouraged to raise such issues with a councillor of their choice as a confidential helper.
- 14.2 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.

15. Formal method

- 15.1 Where the informal approach fails or if the harassment is more serious, you should bring the matter to the attention of the Chairman as a formal written grievance and again your confidential helper can assist you in this. 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.
- 15.2 Where it is not possible to make the formal complaint to the Chairman, for example where they are the alleged harasser, we would encourage you to raise your complaint to the Vice-chairman or another parish councillor of your choice.
- 15.3 An investigation will take place and the findings reported within 15 working days of the complaint to the Chairman who will hold a grievance meeting.
- 15.4 You will be invited to attend a meeting, at a reasonable time and location, to discuss the matter once the person hearing the grievance has had opportunity to read the report. You have the right to be accompanied at such a meeting by a colleague and you must take all reasonable steps to attend. Those involved in the investigation will be expected to act in confidence and any breach of confidence will be a disciplinary matter.
- At least 3 councillors will be present at the meeting, the chair (or vice-chair in their absence) and two other councillors, and they will be authorised to make a decision on behalf of Ousden Parish Council.
- 15.5 You will be able to put your case forward at the meeting and the Chairman will explain the outcome of the investigation. You have a right to appeal the outcome, which is to be made to Chairman within 15 working days of receiving the outcome.
- 15.6 If the decision is that the allegation is well founded, the harasser will be liable to disciplinary action in accordance with Ousden Parish Council's disciplinary procedure up to and including dismissal for employees.
- 15.7 Ousden 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.