

WOLDINGHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Sexual Harassment Policy

February 2025

Introduction

The council is committed to providing a work environment free from all forms of discrimination and harassment, including sexual harassment. This policy outlines the council's zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment and the procedures for reporting and addressing such behaviour.

Legal Duty to Prevent Sexual Harassment

In accordance with the Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023, effective from 26 October 2024, the council has a duty to take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace. This includes:

- Implementing preventive measures such as clear communication of this policy.
- Creating a culture of respect and inclusion.
- Taking proactive steps to identify and mitigate risks of sexual harassment.

Definition of Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is any unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature that makes someone feel offended, humiliated, or intimidated. It can include, but is not limited to:

- Unwelcome sexual advances.
- Inappropriate touching or physical contact.
- Sexual jokes or comments.
- Displaying sexually explicit materials.
- Sending sexually explicit emails or messages.

Scope

This policy applies to all employees as well as volunteers and elected officials associated with Woldingham Parish Council.

Sexual harassment in any form is strictly prohibited. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Making sexual propositions, innuendos, or suggestive comments
- Physical contact of a sexual nature without consent
- Sending sexually explicit messages or materials
- Creating a hostile or offensive work environment based on gender or sexual orientation.

Reporting Procedure

Any employee who believes they have experienced or witnessed sexual harassment is encouraged to report it immediately. Reports can be made to the local government monitor, Tandridge District Council.:

To make a complaint you can:

- Complete a complaint form on the Tandridge District Council website: www.tandridge.gov.uk.
- E-mail customerservices@tandridge.gov.uk.
- Write to Customer Services, Tandridge District Council, Council Offices, 8 Station Road East, Oxted RH8 0BT.
- Visit Tandridge District Council and they will record the complaint.
- Call Tandridge District Council on 01883 722000 and a Customer Services Advisor will complete a form for a customer over the phone.

Reports may be verbal or in writing and will be kept confidential to the extent possible. Retaliation against individuals who report sexual harassment is strictly prohibited and will result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

Investigation Procedure

Upon receiving a report of sexual harassment, the Monitoring Officer of Tandridge District Council will apply the complaints procedures. The Monitoring Officer will normally acknowledge receipt within 5 days and then reviews every complaint and determines whether it merits initial enquiry, normally within 14 days of receipt. The fact-finding stage normally takes no more than 12 weeks. The Monitoring Officer normally will take action within 10 days of receipt of the Investigating Officers report. The Monitoring Officer will then consult their Independent Person to ascertain what action, if any, including the possibility of referral for a hearing, is required.

Communication and Awareness

Woldingham Parish Council is committed to preventing sexual harassment through its policy and building awareness and understanding. Where training is made available through NALC, SALC or similar organisations, these trainings will be offered to Woldingham Parish Council. All employees and elected members will receive an email with a copy of this policy from the Vice-Chair, which details rights and responsibilities regarding sexual harassment prevention and reporting. This policy will be published on the Council website. It is not acceptable for any employee / elected member / volunteer to claim that they do not understand the regulations / requirements.

A risk assessment has been carried out by the Council (see risk assessment documentation) and this will be annually reviewed to ensure it remains appropriate. The risk assessment will be published on the Council website so accessible by all employees / elected members / volunteers / contractors.

Compliance

All employees / elected members / volunteers / contractors are expected to always comply with this policy. Failure to do so may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

Whistleblowing & Retaliation

Woldingham Parish Council will not penalise anyone for whistleblowing and encourages an open-door policy where employees / elected members can discuss concerns without fear of retaliation or reprisals. If there is any form of retaliation the person(s) carrying out such actions will face disciplinary action as appropriate. If a complainant's report is found to be vexatious, malicious in intent the reporter may face disciplinary action which could result in dismissal for gross misconduct.

Review and Revision

This policy will be reviewed periodically and updated as necessary to ensure its effectiveness and compliance with relevant laws and regulations.

Conclusion

Woldingham Parish Council is dedicated to fostering a respectful and inclusive workplace where all employees / elected members and volunteers can thrive. The council takes allegations of sexual harassment seriously and will take prompt and appropriate action to address them.