Mudford Parish Council

Prevention of sexual harassment policy

Mudford Parish Council is committed to providing an inclusive, supportive and safe environment for everyone who works here aligned to our vision and values. This policy applies to all employees, officers, consultants, self-employed contractors, casual workers, agency workers, and volunteers.

The aim of the policy is to prevent, respond to incidents that arise, and take action to effect lasting change by:

- educating colleagues about sexual harassment and their role in developing a culture free from harassment
- fostering a working environment that supports the dignity and respect of all and is free from any form of discrimination, bullying, harassment, and violence
- where sexual harassment does occur, providing a process and procedure for dealing with it to ensure it is properly managed and that colleagues feel safe and supported
- capturing learning from what happened to help create an environment free from sexual harassment
- monitoring our progress in achieving a workplace free from sexual harassment and building continuous improvement into our culture

Everyone has a part to play in being aware of, preventing and dealing with sexual harassment. The Policy sets out the expectations for the behaviour of our colleagues as well as what we can do to protect them from sexual harassment.

Whilst this policy does not form part of any contract of employment or contract to provide services, all colleagues will be made aware of this policy and will be expected to comply with it. The policy will be communicated on a regular basis using a variety of methods including but not restricted to induction, training, and council wide communications.

We do not tolerate sexual harassment at Mudford Parish Council and will treat allegations very seriously and investigate all allegations of sexual harassment put to employees using the Disciplinary Procedure.

The Prevention of Sexual Harassment Policy applies to incidents that take place during and outside working hours, including during off-site business events, work-related social events or via social media.

It explains:

- How we expect colleagues to behave
- How reports will be dealt with

- How we can all help to create a respectful working environment
- How to access impartial emotional support whether you are experiencing the behaviour, you have been accused, or you are supporting a colleague

If an incident of sexual harassment has occurred, please refer to the section of the same name later in this policy for information on reporting options and support.

You may also find it helpful to refer to the following:

- Grievance Policy
- Disciplinary Procedure
- Equality and Diversity Policy
- Health and Safety Policy

By law, all employers must take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment of their employees.

If sexual harassment has occurred, steps must be taken to prevent it from happening again.

What is sexual harassment?

Sexual harassment is unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature.

The law (Equality Act 2010) protects the following people against sexual harassment (and sex-based harassment) at work:

- employees
- agency workers and contractors
- self-employed people hired to personally work for the council
- job applicants

To be sexual harassment, the unwanted behaviour must have either:

- violated someone's dignity, whether it was intended or not
- created an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment, whether this was intended or not.

It can be carried out or experienced by anyone regardless of their sex or gender identity.

You could experience sexual harassment from anyone you encounter because of your job, including someone you work with, a Parish Clerk, or someone else in a position of authority or someone in a high-profile role.

You could also experience sexual harassment from a customer, client, someone from a partner organisation or member of the public.

The person engaging in unwelcome behaviour does not have to intend to be sexually harassing the other person for the behaviour to be considered sexual harassment.

Note: This differs from sex-based harassment which occurs when someone experiences unwanted behaviour that's related to them being a man or woman.

Some examples are included at appendix 1.

We also recognise that certain vulnerable or minority groups may be more at risk from sexual harassment. Where a person has more than one protected characteristic, this may increase the risk of them experiencing sexual harassment. This is because multiple categories of identity such as gender, race, sexuality, trans status, religion and disability can result in harassment based on a combination of different aspects of a person's identity. We refer to this as intersectional harassment.

Types of sexual harassment

Sexual harassment has many forms of variable seriousness. A person sexually harasses someone when they:

- insinuate, propose or demand sexual favours of any kind.
- invade another person's personal space (for example, inappropriate touching).
- stalk, intimidate, coerce, or threaten another person to get them to engage in sexual acts.
- send or display sexually explicit objects or messages.
- use digital technologies to facilitate either virtual or face to face harassment. For example, sharing of unsolicited sexual images, videos, messages, the non-consensual creation and/or distribution of sexual images, or sexual coercion, threats and intimidation online.
- engage in any form of online stalking which includes persistent and unwanted digital communication, surveillance or tracking of an employee online or in person activities and/or location without their consent.
- comment on someone's looks, dress, sexual orientation, or gender in a derogatory or objectifying manner or a manner that makes them uncomfortable.
- make obscene comments, jokes or gestures that humiliate or offend someone.
- pursue or flirt with another person persistently without the other person's willing participation. Also, flirting with someone at an inappropriate time (for example, in a team meeting) is considered sexual harassment, even when these advances may have been welcome in a different setting.

The most extreme form of sexual harassment is sexual assault. This is a serious crime, and Mudford Parish Council will support employees who want to press charges against offenders.

Important information

A key element of sexual harassment is that it is unwelcome.

If a person does not object to inappropriate behaviour at the time it takes place, it should not be assumed that they are giving their consent.

Consent exists where clear and unambiguous consent has been freely given and continues to be given.

Sexual harassment can happen anywhere in the workplace, such as the corridors, toilets, or offices. It can also occur away from the workplace, in client's homes, at conferences, training courses, staff parties and other social events related to work and via social media. It may take place in private or in public.

Whatever form it takes or wherever it takes place, sexual harassment is unwarranted and unwelcome to the individual.

It is possible that a person does not object to inappropriate behaviour at the time due to reasons such as, shock, feeling of shame, powerlessness, embarrassment, lack of confidence and inability to feel that they can challenge the person. In circumstances where intersectionality is relevant, restrictions may also include the ability to understand what has happened, how to access support, or how to make their needs understood. You may find it helpful to refer to the Timescales section.

Remember: each individual experience of sexual harassment will be unique depending on matters such as the nature of the conduct and its impact upon them. No two people's experience and impact will necessarily be the same even concerning the same or a similar incident.

Prevention of sexual harassment

Mudford Parish Council takes its responsibility to create a safe working environment very seriously.

The actions we will take to prevent sexual harassment include:

- Communication that sexual harassment is unacceptable and will not be tolerated
- Clear roles and responsibilities to promote respectful behaviour in the working environment – see the section below
- Identifying a designated lead to support compliance
- Provision of training and examples (see the appendix to this policy) to support understanding
- Provision of support when sexual harassment occurs
- Identification of appropriate remedial action to prevent sexual harassment happening in a similar way in the future

Roles and responsibilities

Duty of Care

The law imposes a duty of care on employers to provide a safe system of work for all workers. This includes a specific obligation to protect the health, safety and welfare of their employees and others who might be affected.

In discharging this legal duty, we recognise that there are certain measures that can help to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace including ensuring that adequate measures are in place to prevent discrimination, bullying and harassment.

Mudford Parish Council is committed to the adoption and operation of such measures, including:

- Good management practices including anti-discrimination management practices, competent and respectful people management, awareness of the conditions that can allow sexual harassment to become prevalent and consistency in taking appropriate preventions and interventions (including prompt and unambiguous action to visibly demonstrate that concerns regarding sexual harassment will be taken seriously).
- Risk assessments that include consideration of factors that can increase the risk of sexual harassment including for example, lone working or public-facing duties.
- Raising awareness about the nature and impacts of sexual harassment, common reactions to sexual harassment and the requirement of respectful behaviour for all to create a culture free from harassment and identify and address incidents when they occur. Awareness of this policy, a copy of which will be made available on the parish council's website.
- Appropriate and targeted training
- Support and confidential reporting options – to the parish clerk or the chair of the Governance and Resources Committee. See the 'If an incident of sexual harassment has occurred' section. Measures will be taken to protect sensitive information as far as possible. See also the 'confidentiality' section.
- Monitoring progress: the policy and our progress against the above objectives will be reported on and by Mudford Parish Council annually.

Employees

All employees are responsible for:

- role modelling appropriate behaviour aligned to this and other Mudford Parish Council policies and our values.

- taking personal responsibility to raise concerns about any sexual harassment in the workplace, whether this was experienced personally or witnessed. Concerns should be raised with the Parish Clerk or Governance and Resources Committee.
- contributing to a respectful and productive working environment.
- treating any allegations or complaints of sexual harassment with appropriate confidentiality.
- ensuring that a person is not victimised for making or being involved in a complaint of sexual harassment.

The Parish Clerk

The Parish Clerk will:

- role model appropriate behaviour.
- undertake training to ensure they understand what sexual harassment is and their responsibilities for eliminating this in the workplace.
- monitor the workplace environment to ensure as far as practicable standards of conduct are always maintained, and that sexual harassment is not tolerated.
- review, amend and update service specific risk assessment documents (where needed), including the risk of third-party sexual harassment and what control or other measures can be taken to avoid and mitigate these risks
- ensure that any contractors or consultants made aware of this policy.
- promote awareness of the sources of support and advice and the complaints procedures with respect to sexual harassment as detailed in this policy.
- treat complaints and behaviour which may constitute sexual harassment seriously and take appropriate and prompt action.
- treat complaints of sexual harassment with appropriate sensitivity and confidentiality.
- ensure that a person is not victimised for making, or being involved in, a complaint of sexual harassment.

Third-party Sexual Harassment

Third-party sexual harassment occurs when one of our colleagues is subjected to sexual harassment by someone who is not part of our workforce but who is encountered in connection with work. This includes our customers, suppliers, and members of the public. These may be clients, people using the service, friends and family of colleagues, delegates at a conference, self-employed contractors or consultants, or colleagues from partner organisations. This list is not exhaustive.

Third-party sexual harassment of our workforce is unlawful and will not be tolerated.

To prevent third-party sexual harassment from occurring, we will:

- inform third parties of our zero-tolerance sexual harassment policy within our relevant documentation and/or on our website
- provide a clear procedure for reporting sexual harassment by third parties
- encourage colleagues to report third party sexual harassment

If you have been subjected to third-party sexual harassment, you are encouraged to report this as soon as possible to the Parish Clerk. Alternatively, you can report instances of third-party sexual harassment by emailing the Chair of the Governance and Resources Committee.

Should a customer sexually harass a member of our workforce, we will do one or more of the following (as appropriate):

- warn the client or customer about their behaviour
- ban the customer
- share information relating to the incident with our partner organisations

Any criminal acts will be reported to the police. This could be by the person who has experienced it but could also be by the Parish Clerk or other designated as appropriate.

We will not tolerate sexual harassment by any member of our workforce against a third party. Complaints/reports of sexual harassment of this kind will be investigated under the disciplinary procedure and may lead to disciplinary action, including termination of employment (dismissal).

Actions to prevent sexual harassment

Training to prevent sexual harassment is part of the mandatory programme for councillors, colleagues and the Parish Clerk. You are encouraged to complete and then refresh your training at the required intervals.

If you have felt at risk of sexual harassment or assault even though it did not happen, you are encouraged to report this to the Parish Clerk and/or the Chair of Governance and Resources Committee. It may be that action needs to be taken to further minimise the risk and prevent incidents.

The Suzy Lamplugh Trust website contains lots of advice about a range of issues including safety when travelling on public transport, staying safe online, personal safety and lone working.

Confidentiality

Disclosures of sexual harassment will be treated in confidence to protect an employee's privacy. However, in some instances, a matter may need to be escalated or referred without agreement from the employee, particularly in circumstances that may:

- constitute a criminal offence,
- constitute an occupational health and safety risk, or
- require disciplinary action

If a matter needs to be escalated or referred, the person handling the matter will notify the person who made the disclosure of who has been informed.

Some further things to think about

Online Stalking or Digital Harassment

In a professional corporate environment, maintaining respectful and secure digital interactions is essential.

Online stalking or digital harassment undermines workplace safety and trust and may be considered as forms of sexual harassment. All employees are expected to uphold professional boundaries and respect digital privacy.

Any reports of online stalking will be taken seriously, investigated promptly, and may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

If you are experiencing online stalking or digital harassment at work from any source, you are encouraged to report this for support and guidance.

Harassment as a Criminal Offence

If the police become involved in a complaint, a review will be undertaken to determine when any internal council processes can commence at the same time as the police involvement.

Malicious Complaints

The prevention of sexual harassment procedure must not be used to raise complaints in a malicious manner, for example, complaints that are intended to cause distress to others or to delay another process.

Inappropriate use of the procedure may result in disciplinary action being taken against the employee who raised the complaint. However, no action will be taken if a complaint which proves to be unfounded is judged to have been made in good faith.

Timescales

Tackling issues at an early stage is key to preventing them from becoming more serious. It's important that you raise the matter with the appropriate person/Parish Clerk at the time the incident occurs to allow it to be dealt with swiftly.

Complaints should be reported without unreasonable delay following the event or action that led to the complaint. I.e. within a three-month timeframe after the incident(s) took place.

However, it's appreciated that for various reasons you may not have felt able to report an incident around that time that it occurred. See also the important information section.

If you make a complaint a long time after an incident, (i.e. more than three months later), we will still take this seriously.

You should be aware that there may be limits on how the complaint can be taken forward. For example, if:

- the person accused of sexual harassment no longer works here
- witnesses no longer work here
- evidence is no longer available

We will investigate (aligned to the Grievance Procedure) and keep you informed. Once the investigation is complete, we'll deal with it as far as is possible and let you know the outcome.

Delaying reporting matters to collate a series or list of events to 'strengthen a claim' is not something we would advise or recommend. Reporting an incident promptly allows for an appropriate intervention to be made to avoid others also being affected.

Due to the nature of harassment allegations, it is difficult to set timescales for addressing complaints. However, wherever we are notified that harassment may have taken place, we will act as soon as reasonably practical and aim to resolve matters in a timely manner.

Sources of information and support

If an incident of sexual harassment has occurred

When reporting an incident, you can choose to:

- raise the matter informally with a Parish Clerk or the Chair of the Governance and Resources Committee, or
- raise a grievance* or
- use the health and safety accident/incident report form to report an incident of harassment, aggressive or threatening behaviour or

* raising a grievance is applicable to incidents that have recently taken place (i.e. within three months). If the incident occurred outside this timeframe, you can still report it and we will investigate it as far as we can. See the timescales section for more information.

You only need report the matter using one of the options listed above. If you are unsure which option to use, please seek advice from the Parish Clerk or the Chair of the Governance and Resources Committee. We are aware that some colleagues may need additional support or reasonable adjustments to report an incident. Please ask for the support you need – the team will do their best to accommodate this.

When making a complaint you can usually choose if you want it to be dealt with informally or formally. However, please be aware that some situations might be too serious to be dealt with informally.

For advice and guidance about an incident or concern, please contact the Governance and Resources Committee.

We know that you may have concerns about your physical and/or mental health. Please be assured that anything you share will be treated with respect and care.

You may also wish to contact your trade union representative or trade union office (subject to membership) for advice and guidance.

If you've been sexually harassed or assaulted and are struggling to cope, some charitable organisations can also provide support. These include:

Samaritans – call free at any time day or night: 116 123. Other options are available via their website.

LGBT Foundation Helpline 0345 3 30 30 30.

Making a Police Report

Reporting sexual assault or violence

Contact the police:

- By calling 999 in an emergency – there is imminent or immediate danger
- Call 101 if it's not an emergency
- report a crime online in England and Wales

When you're reporting a crime, you can ask to speak to a specialist officer who's trained to deal with sexual violence.

Reporting stalking and harassment

Contact the police (see details in the above section). You can also report stalking or harassment online.

It will help if you have details of the incidents including dates, times, and descriptions of the behaviour. Whilst this information is useful, you shouldn't delay reporting the incidents whilst you gather this together.

If someone you know has been the victim of stalking or harassment and doesn't feel able to speak to the police yet, you can report it yourself. The police will record the incident and help you to support the victim if needed.

External Sources

If you have experienced an incident, please take time to get the help and support you need. The following websites may help you to identify the best place for you:

Sexual assault or rape

- Galop – LGBT+ sexual violence support
- Rape Crisis England and Wales provides information and support for sexual assault, rape, violence and harassment
- The Survivors Trust website signposts a range of specialist services to survivors including counselling, support, helplines and advocacy services for women, men, non-binary people and children.
- SurvivorsUK for men and non-binary people affected by rape and sexual abuse.
- Victim Support – in England and Wales

Domestic and sexual abuse, violence and coercion

- South West based, Nextlink offers support to all women who have experienced domestic and sexual violence and abuse.

Stalking and harassment

- Suzy Lamplugh Trust is a charity that provides training, advice and campaigns for personal safety and stalking awareness. It runs the National Stalking Helpline and supports victims of stalking.

- National Stalking Helpline (0808 8020 300) offers practical help for anyone who has been affected by stalking or harassment and has an online tool that can help you identify whether you›re being stalked.

Is there anything missing from this document? Please contact the Chair of the Governance and Resources Committee.

Appendix 1 – Examples

Scenario 1

Luke, Mark and Jerry are chatting over a coffee in the office. The conversation includes details of their sex lives.

Despite being a 'private' conversation, this is not appropriate to the office.

It's not clear if they are all involved in the discussion, but any one of them could view this as harassment.

Other colleagues nearby might also hear the details and be offended or embarrassed.

The conversation could contribute to there being an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment, as per the definition of harassment.

Scenario 2

John tells Isabel that he thinks women should not be in Parish Clerk roles.

This is not sexual harassment but sex-related harassment.

The comment is not sexual, it's about women and their role in the workplace. This is disrespectful and potentially hostile to Parish Clerks who are women.

Scenario 3

Sally shares a picture of June wearing a bikini with her colleagues via their Whatsapp group.

This could disrespect or objectify June in which case it is sexual harassment.

Even if June knew about sharing the picture and is okay with it – it's not appropriate to the workplace and could be viewed as sexual harassment by those who see the picture.

Scenario 4

Balwant compliments Terry on his appearance and asks if he would like to go for a drink after work.

If this is a new conversation and is done politely and respectfully, this is not sexual harassment.

If Balwant has done this repeatedly and will not take no for an answer, then this is sexual harassment.

Scenario 5

Jack tells Tim that he thinks Nigel is in a relationship with Brian.

If the tone of the conversation is of a sexual nature or is disapproving it may constitute sexual harassment. Such behaviour can contribute to a hostile work environment, making others feel uncomfortable, marginalised and unsafe.

Gossiping about colleagues in this way is inappropriate whether this is a same sex relationship or not and whether it is true or not.

Scenario 6

Susie is walking to her next meeting when offensive comments are made to her about her appearance by a contractor working nearby.

If the comments are of a sexual nature and Susie or anyone nearby finds the comments offensive, they may be viewed as sexual harassment.

The comments should be reported to allow action to be taken. This is likely to involve the third-party employers.

Parish Council Structure Note: Mudford Parish Council currently only employs the Parish Clerk. The Chair of the Governance and Resources Committee acts as the point of contact for employment matters concerning the Parish Clerk. Any future employees should normally report concerns under this policy to the Parish Clerk unless the concern relates to the Parish Clerk, in which case it should be reported directly to the Chair of the Governance and Resources Committee.

This Policy was adopted by Mudford Parish Council at a meeting held on 26th November 2026 and will be reviewed every two years, or sooner if required.