

Caring Hands in the Vale

Bullying and Harassment Policy

Introduction

Caring Hands in the Vale is committed to building and reinforcing a culture where people value each other and treat each other with dignity and respect.

Accordingly, bullying and harassment, whether intentional or unintentional, will not be tolerated. In demonstrating our respect for each other, we are individually and collectively responsible for challenging all forms of bullying and harassment.

Bullying and harassment is unwanted behaviour which causes annoyance and distress to the victim. It can bring about fear, stress, anxiety and demoralisation in the victim and the damage, tension and conflict which results, make for an unpleasant working environment for all. We do not accept such behaviour and anyone found to be in breach of this policy will be dealt with under our disciplinary procedures. Whilst non-contractual, this policy sets out Caring Hands in the Vale's approach to this area of work.

Bullying

Bullying can involve offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, or an abuse or misuse of power through means intended to undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the victim.

Harassment

Harassment can be summarised as unwanted conduct that has the purpose or effect of violating people's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

In both instances, the key is that the actions or comments are viewed as demeaning and unacceptable to the recipient. It does not matter what the perpetrator intended, it is the perception of the recipient that informs whether bullying or harassment has taken place.

How do we recognise it?

Bullying or harassment on the grounds of gender and race are probably the most widely recognised forms of harassment. People can also be subjected to such actions on other grounds including: ethnic origin, nationality and skin colour, sexual orientation, disabilities and learning difficulties, age, health, physical characteristics, marital status, social status, religion and personal beliefs.

Sometimes, such behaviour may be easy to spot, but it can also be less obvious. It may be an isolated incident or persistent behaviour and may be directed towards one or more individuals. It can range from extremes, such as assault, to less obvious forms like ignoring someone. Other forms include: physical contact, unwanted physical conduct, unwanted non-verbal conduct, virtual bullying (via IT, mobile phones, social networking etc), coercion, jokes, offensive language, gossip, slander, letters, posters, graffiti, obscene gestures, isolation, non co-operation, exclusion from social activities, coercion for sexual favours, pestering, spying and stalking.

Such actions may take place at work related events away from the normal workplace. This in no way diminishes the seriousness with which such matters are viewed.

Members of the Steering Group or Community Worker who become aware of bullying or harassment have a responsibility not to ignore it and to take appropriate remedial action.

Dealing with bullying and harassment

Caring Hands in the Vale regards bullying and harassment as serious a disciplinary matter. In certain circumstances, such behaviour may constitute a criminal offence and we will work with relevant authorities to secure prosecution

Employees and volunteers should not ignore behaviour which makes them feel uncomfortable but take appropriate action so that the behaviour stops. For example, minor harassment may well be stopped by the victim making it clear to the harasser that the behaviour is unwelcome, unacceptable and must stop.

However, where approaches by the victim have failed or where more serious bullying or harassment has occurred, the victim should make a formal complaint under our Grievance Procedures. Under these arrangements, there is provision for the complaint to be dealt with informally if that will resolve the matter. However, if such a course of action is not appropriate, then formal investigation will be appropriate and, if the matter is proved, bullying or harassment could constitute gross misconduct and warrant action under our Disciplinary Procedures which can include dismissal.

Investigating allegations

If you wish to report a matter relating to your employment, you should in the first instance speak to your line manager at the earliest opportunity. You may be able to agree a solution informally between you. Your line manager should give a decision within one week.

Should the matter not be satisfactorily resolved (or should it be a serious issue you wish to raise formally from the outset), you should set out the matter in writing, to the Community Worker or Chair of the Steering Group. Your letter should detail the nature of your complaint, information about the frequency of the incident and any witnesses to the events. Where the matter relates to the Community Worker or you feel unable to approach her/him you should talk to a member of the Steering Group.

The Community Worker or Chair of the Steering Group will invite you to a meeting to discuss it with you and explain what course of action will be taken. If the suggested meeting date is not convenient, a new date should be agreed and you have the right to be accompanied by a colleague or trade union representative at that meeting if you make a reasonable request. The role of that colleague will be explained before the meeting.

Depending on the nature of the complaint, the person investigating the matter may be supported, for example for the taking of notes or provision of detailed Human Resources advice, but at all times the matter will be handled confidentially.

Should further investigation be required, the person investigating the matter may appoint a third party to conduct a full examination of the matter and this will be conducted without unreasonable delay. This stage should be handled in its entirety (so far as is practicable) within two weeks

Following investigation and consideration (including interviewing of other parties) your line manager will provide a written outcome. Should you not be satisfied with this decision, you should send a written statement setting out the problem to the Chair of the Steering Group or other member of the Steering Group. You should do this within two weeks of receiving the original decision. The Chair of the Steering Group will arrange for your appeal to be considered (again you have the right to be accompanied by a colleague or trade union representative at this meeting if you make a reasonable request and for a written decision to be issued to you, normally within 48hrs. This decision will be final.

Support and advice

We recognise that people who are being or who have been bullied or harassed may be helped by receiving support and advice from an independent person. The Community Worker or Chair of the Steering Group will be able to provide information about this.

You may choose, in the first instance, to seek support from a colleague, or raise it with the Community Worker or Chair of the Steering Group. Alternatively, you may approach another member of the Steering Group for advice. It would not, of course, be permissible for anyone providing such support to be involved in hearing or investigating the complaint or to be involved in disciplining the perpetrator and this may influence your choice of supporter. There is also a wealth of information available publicly, for instance on the internet.

All allegations of bullying and harassment will be taken seriously and handled confidentially.

Malicious complaints

If it is found that an allegation of bullying or harassment has been made maliciously, the matter will be treated very seriously and disciplinary action taken against the person who made the allegation.

Feel safe in complaining

Whatever the outcome of a complaint of bullying or harassment, no-one who has made a genuine complaint will be allowed to suffer victimisation for reporting the matter. Reference should be made to Caring Hands in the Vales' Whistle-blowing Policy.