



The Village Council is committed to providing a safe, respectful and inclusive environment for everyone who works with or represents the Council. Sexual harassment will not be tolerated under any circumstances. This expectation applies to employees, councillors, contractors, volunteers, and anyone acting on behalf of the Council and covers conduct in the workplace, during council business, at meetings, training, conferences, site visits, work-related social events and in online communications.

All concerns will be taken seriously and handled sensitively and confidentially.

1. Swillington Village 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. The Council recognises that personal harassment can exist in the workplace, as well as outside, and that this can seriously affect employees' working lives by interfering with their job performance or by creating a stressful, intimidating and unpleasant working environment.
6. The Council deplores all forms of personal harassment and seeks to ensure that the working environment is sympathetic to all its employees. The aim of this policy is to inform employees of the type of behaviour that is unacceptable and provide employees who are the victims of personal harassment with a means of redress.
7. This policy covers all areas of the Council.
8. The Council recognises that it has a duty to implement this policy and all employees and Councillors 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

9. Personal harassment takes many forms and individuals may not always realise that their behaviour constitutes harassment. Personal harassment is unwanted behaviour by one person 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 from employees than is reasonably feasible
- Blocking promotion or other development/advancement of employees

10. These examples are not exhaustive and disciplinary action at the appropriate level will be taken against individuals committing any form of personal harassment.

Examples of sexual harassment

11. Sexual harassment can take place in many forms and can go undetected for a period of time where individuals do not understand that particular behaviour is classed as sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is unwanted behaviour related to sex, of a sexual nature, by one person 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

12. Sexual harassment can also take place where a person 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. Whether less favourable treatment occurs as a result will be examined broadly and includes areas such as blocking promotion and refusal of training opportunities or other development opportunities.

Examples of victimisation

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

Third-party harassment

14. The Council operates a zero-tolerance policy in relation to harassment perpetrated against one of its employees by a third party, such as a member of the public or visitor to any Council premises. Employees who feel that they are affected by this are encouraged to report any and all instances of harassment that involve a third party in line with the Council's reporting procedure as outlined below.

15. If the Council finds the allegation is well-founded, it will take steps it deems necessary in order to remedy the complaint. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Warning the individual about the inappropriate nature of their behaviour
- Banning the individual from Council premises
- Reporting the individual's actions to the police

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

Responsibilities

Individual responsibilities

16. The Council requires its employees and Councillors to behave appropriately and professionally at all times during the working day or on Council business, and this may extend to events outside of working hours or meetings, which are classed as work-related, such as social events. Individuals should not engage in discriminatory, harassing or aggressive behaviour towards any other person at any other time.

17. Any form of harassment or victimisation may lead to further action if it is committed:

- In a work/Council situation
- During any situation related to the Council, such as a social event
- Against a colleague, Councillor, or other person connected to the Council outside of a work situation, including on social media
- Against anyone outside of a work situation where the incident is relevant to their suitability to carry out the role

18. A breach of this policy by an employee will be treated as a disciplinary matter and may lead to action including dismissal. A breach of this policy by a Councillor will be treated as a breach of the [Code of Conduct](#) and may lead to action including a referral to the Monitoring Officer.

Council responsibilities

19. The Council will be responsible for ensuring all employees and Councillors understand the rules and policies relating to the prevention of harassing and bullying behaviour at work and during work-related social events. It will promote a professional and positive workplace whereby employees are alert and proactively identify areas of risk and incidents of harassment, sexual harassment and bullying.

20. The Council will also take into account aggravating factors, such as abuse of power over a more junior colleague, when deciding what disciplinary action to take.

21. Where an incident is witnessed, or a complaint is made under this policy, the 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

Informal method

22. The Council recognises 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 employees to raise the issue through its normal grievance procedure. In these circumstances employees are encouraged to raise such issues with the Clerk, Chair of the Council, Chair of the Staffing Committee or any councillor that they feel they can trust (whether that person has a direct supervisory responsibility for the employee) as a confidential helper.

23. If an employee is the victim of minor harassment they should make it clear to the harasser on an informal basis that their behaviour is unwelcome and ask the harasser to stop. If the employee feels unable to do this verbally then they should hand a written request to the harasser, and their confidential helper can assist the employee in this.

Formal method

24. Where the informal approach fails or if the harassment is more serious, an employee should bring the matter to the attention of the Council's staffing committee as a formal grievance in accordance with the Council's [Grievance Policy](#) and again their confidential helper can assist them in this. If possible, the employee 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 the employee to stop the alleged harassment

25. Where it is not possible to make the formal complaint to the staffing committee, for example where the alleged harasser is the Chair of that committee, the Council encourages the employee to raise their complaint to the Chair of the Council/Vice-Chair of the Staffing Committee or another trusted councillor.

26. On receipt of a formal complaint the Council will take action to separate the individual from the alleged harasser to enable an uninterrupted investigation to take place.

27. The Council is committed to ensuring employees are not discouraged from using this procedure and that no employee will be victimised for having brought a complaint forward.

Date of policy: April 2026

Approving committee: Full Council

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APPENDIX 1 – GENERAL & SEXUAL HARASSMENT RISK ASSESSMENT

Risk area	Description of risk	Who may be affected	Likelihood	Impact	Existing controls	Further action	Residual risk
Councillor behaviour & governance limitations	Councillors are not employees & cannot be managed through internal disciplinary procedures. The Code of Conduct & Monitoring Officer have limited sanctions & cannot remove a councillor from office.	Clerk, staff, councillors, contractors	Medium	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sexual & General Harassment Policy and procedure applies to Councillors Member Code of Conduct & Cllrs annually sign Statement of Assurance Multiple reporting routes Written records maintained 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include expectations in Councillor induction Provide periodic information for all staff and Councillors on recognising and preventing harassment 	Medium
Lone working & meetings	Staff regularly work alone or meet contractors, councillors, or members of the public on a 1:1 basis, increasing vulnerability to inappropriate behaviour.	Clerk and all staff	Medium / High	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use visible/public locations where possible & if in Council office a second person should be present Remote meetings encouraged Staff permitted to end meetings if uncomfortable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement lone working policy & introduce ways for staff to get help quickly in high-risk situations Staff to be supported in declining unsafe meetings 	Medium

Power imbalance	Close working or personal relationships between Councillors may create a perceived barrier to reporting concerns.	Staff	Medium	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variety of reporting routes available • Conduct expectations clearly communicated to Councillors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clerk to identify external HR support for sensitive matters on a case-by-case basis • Remind staff of whistleblowing protections 	Medium
Third-party interactions	Employees and councillors interact with members of the public, suppliers, and contractors who may behave inappropriately.	All council representatives	Medium	Medium / High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid isolated locations • Meetings ended if behaviour becomes inappropriate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add behavioural expectations to contractor agreements 	Low / Medium

Overall Risk Level: Medium

Priority Actions:

- Implement Lone Working Policy and procedures
- Add zero-tolerance statement of expectations into Councillor and employee induction packs

Risk assessment carried out by Kate Goodare (Clerk – Swillington Village Council), 12/02/2026

Review: April 2027
