



BULLYING AND HARASSMENT POLICY

1. Purpose

As an equal opportunities employer, Merseyside Waste Disposal Authority supports a working environment for individuals in which dignity at work is paramount. The purpose of this policy is to support a working environment and culture in which bullying and harassment is unacceptable.

2. Applicability

For the purposes of this policy, 'members of staff' refers to all staff working within the Authority, employees, visitors, service users, contractors and staff from other organisations working on the Authority premises.

3. Area

This policy will apply to all Authority premises and all Authority personnel working in other premises.

4. Actions

4.1. Principles

The Authority recognises that all employees have the right to be treated with consideration, dignity and respect. The Authority seeks to support all staff in their professional development and aims to provide a happy and fulfilling environment in which to work. This policy promotes the respectful treatment of staff within the Authority and the protection of our employees from bullying and harassment at work. Bullying and harassment will not be tolerated by the Authority in any form.

Each member of staff carries personal responsibility for their own behaviour in relation to this policy and is responsible for ensuring that their conduct is in line with the standards set out in this policy. Staff should report to the appropriate line

manager, or trade union representative, or Assistant Corporate Services Manager, any incidents of bullying and harassment which come to their attention.

Allegations raised regarding bullying and harassment will be taken seriously and treated confidentially. The Authority gives an assurance that there will be no victimisation against an employee making a complaint under this policy or against employees who assist or support a colleague in making a complaint.

Bullying and harassment may be treated as a disciplinary offence and, where allegations are founded, may lead to summary dismissal. Disciplinary action may also be taken if a complaint is found to have been submitted maliciously or in bad faith.

4.2. What is bullying and harassment?

Harassment, in general terms is unwanted conduct affecting the dignity of men and women in the workplace. It may be related to age, sex, race, disability, religion, sexual orientation, nationality or any personal characteristic of the individual, and may be persistent or an isolated incident. The key is that the actions or comments are viewed as demeaning and unacceptable to the recipient.

Bullying may be characterised as offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, an abuse or misuse of power through means intended to undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient.

Bullying or harassment may be by an individual against an individual (perhaps by someone in a position of authority such as a manager) or involve groups of people. It may be obvious or it may be insidious. Whatever form it takes, it is unwarranted and unwelcome to the individual.

4.3. Responsibilities of staff and managers

All staff have personal responsibility for their own behaviour and for ensuring that they comply with the policy. There are a number of things that staff can do to help prevent harassment, such as:

- Set a positive example by treating others with respect.
- Be aware of the Authority's policy and comply with it.
- Do not make personal comments.
- Do not accept behaviour that may be offensive when directed against you or others, and take positive action to ensure that it is challenged and/or reported.
- Be supportive of colleagues who may be subject to bullying and/or harassment.

If you are subject to bullying and/or harassment but do not feel able to talk about it yet, make notes including dates and details which will help you recall events clearly at a later date. Your first point of call should be your direct line manager is possible however, staff can also contact the Assistant Corporate Services Manager or union representative for advice and support. All managers have a responsibility to implement this policy and to bring it to the attention of staff in their section, in order to establish and maintain a work environment free of harassment. They must:

- treat a complaint seriously and deal with it promptly and confidentially, giving the employee and the alleged perpetrator full support during the whole process
- set a positive example by treating others with respect and setting standards of acceptable behaviour; also, promote a working environment where harassment is unacceptable and not tolerated
- tackle, and where possible, resolve incidents of harassment
- liaise with the Assistant Corporate Services Manager when dealing with a complaint.

4.4 Role of Assistant Corporate Services Manager

The Assistant Corporate Services Manager has a responsibility to ensure that the policy is followed, fairly and consistently and has the role of:

- advising managers on the application of the policy
- advising managers and staff where individuals feel that they are being harassed or bullied in the course of their employment
- ensuring the effective implementation of the policy
- monitoring incidence of bullying and harassment and initiating appropriate action
- reviewing and amending the policy as necessary.

4.5 Support and advice

The Authority is committed to achieving informal resolution of complaints relating to harassment wherever possible.

In line with this approach, a series of options have been put into place to enable staff to be supported. This support will be provided to complainants, alleged perpetrators and any witnesses.

Counselling

The Authority can provide a confidential external service for its staff. This service offers telephone support with confidential face to face counselling sessions.

Occupational health service

Any member of staff who is involved in a claim of bullying and harassment may find it helpful to talk to the occupational health service. All employees have a right to self refer into occupational health.

Trade unions

The Authority recognises the important role trade unions play in addressing harassment and members are encouraged to approach their representative regarding their concerns. The Authority will work in conjunction with the trade unions in addressing unacceptable and inappropriate behaviours.

4.6 Informal procedure

Employees are encouraged to discuss any concerns about harassment with the Assistant Corporate Services Manager, a trade union representative or through occupational health services in the first instance.

Actions you can take yourself:

- Keep a diary of all incidents - records of dates, times, any witnesses, your feelings etc. Keep copies of any correspondence that may be relevant, for example reports, letters, memos, notes of any meetings that relate to you.
- In many instances it is possible for the complaint to be resolved quickly by explaining directly to the harasser the effect their behaviour is having and that you want it to stop.
- You should always make it clear that if it continues you will make a formal complaint.
- If the behaviour of a person is aggressive it may be necessary to walk away making it clear you do not wish to be spoken to in that way.

If you do not feel able to raise your concerns with the person directly, you could write to them stating that you feel harassed, state where and when this occurred and how you wish to be treated. Always keep a copy. Alternatively, you could speak to the Assistant Corporate Services Manager, a trade union representative or occupational health.

Mediation

If you feel unable to deal directly with the alleged harasser, then as part of the informal procedure you may approach any manager. The manager will discuss and agree with you the steps to be taken to assist in resolving the difficulties.

The manager will normally meet with both parties individually before advising on next steps of the mediation process. Possible options would include a further meeting between both parties, facilitated by the manager. At this meeting the complainant will be given the opportunity to explain to the individual the reasons why they consider their behaviour to constitute harassment. Where possible the matter will be resolved through informal discussion and agreement about future behaviour.

4.7 Formal procedure

If informal attempts to resolve the situation have not been successful, or if you feel that the acts complained may not be resolved informally, this may be raised with your direct line manager, your trade union representative, or the Assistant Corporate Services Manager, who will advise on the next steps, for example, formal investigation.

A decision to conduct a formal investigation should be made by a senior manager jointly with the Assistant Corporate Services Manager.

Where an investigation is deemed appropriate, it should be conducted independently by a line manager and the Assistant Corporate Services Manager and allow the appropriate involvement of trade union representation of the individuals involved. This investigation and any action arising from it will be carried out in line with the Authority's disciplinary procedure.

If, following investigations, it appears that harassment/misconduct has occurred, the investigating line manager and Assistant Corporate Services Manager will recommend the appropriate course of action in line with the Authority's disciplinary procedure. A detailed response will be given to both parties outlining the results of the investigation and what action, if any, is being taken in respect of the complaint. This may result in a meeting under the Authority's disciplinary policy being convened and the behaviour being viewed as serious misconduct. This may also apply in cases where the complainant's behaviour is deemed to be malicious.

The Authority has set a target of two months for completing formal investigations. However, given the complexities of some issues, this may not always be achievable. Timescales will be discussed in more detail with the individual concerned.

4.8 Follow up

Following resolution of both formal and informal harassment complaints, a record should be kept of the incident. Where harassment did occur, it is important to check that the harassment has stopped and that there has been no subsequent victimisation. Monitoring will be carried out on a regular basis.

4.9 Confidentiality

All employees involved with the investigation and any subsequent process are required to respect the need for confidentiality.

All complaints, associated correspondence and interviews will be treated in strict confidence. Breaches in confidentiality will be subject to disciplinary action.

5. Training and Awareness Raising

The Authority will make the following training provisions:

- New staff will be made aware of the policy during induction programmes.
- Existing staff will receive bullying and harassment awareness training.
- Management will be trained to handle complaints effectively.
- A copy of this procedure will be included in the Employee Handbook and published on the Authority's website.

6. Monitoring

The Bullying and Harassment Policy will be monitored on a regular basis by the Assistant Corporate Services Manager.