



Drighlington Parish Council

Unacceptable Behaviour & Vexatious Policy

1. Purpose of the Policy:

This policy sets out Drighlington Parish Council's approach to identifying, addressing, and managing unacceptable behaviour, vexatious complaints, unreasonable demands, and abusive or aggressive contact from members of the public, contractors, stakeholders, and any other individuals who engage with the Council.

The Council welcomes legitimate enquiries, complaints, requests for information, and criticism. This policy ensures that such contact is managed fairly, consistently, and respectfully, while protecting employees, councillors, and Council resources.

2. Policy Objectives:

This policy enables the Council to:

- Treat everyone fairly, respectfully, and consistently.
- Provide accessible services while managing unreasonable or disruptive contact.
- Support employees and councillors in dealing with unacceptable behaviour.
- Maintain a safe working environment.
- Identify and manage bullying, harassment, vexatious complaints, and unreasonable demands.
- Ensure Council resources are used appropriately and proportionately.

3. Scope:

This policy applies to:

- Members of the public
- Contractors, stakeholders, or any individuals engaging with the Council

All individuals are expected to communicate with the Council in a reasonable, respectful, and appropriate manner.

4. Definitions of Unacceptable Behaviour:

4.1 Bullying:

Bullying is behaviour intended to, or having the effect of, intimidating, humiliating, undermining, or belittling another person.

Examples include:

- Repeated criticism, accusations, or complaints targeting an individual.
- Personal attacks, insults, or derogatory comments.
- False or misleading statements.
- Attempts to isolate, discredit, or undermine an employee or councillor.
- Excessive or repeated contact placing unreasonable pressure on an individual.
- Intimidating or humiliating behaviour.
- Deliberately undermining or belittling an individual.
- Targeting individuals through social media or other communication channels.

A single disagreement or strongly worded complaint does not automatically constitute bullying. The Council will consider the nature, frequency, and impact of behaviour before taking action.

4.2 Aggressive, Intimidating or Abusive Behaviour:

Behaviour or language that causes, or is reasonably likely to cause, a person to feel threatened, harassed, or abused.

Examples include:

- Threatening, abusive, or intimidating language.
- Personal insults or offensive remarks.
- Physical aggression or intimidation.
- Threats of violence or harm.
- Racist, sexist, or discriminatory language.
- Stalking or unwanted contact.
- Malicious or unsubstantiated allegations.
- Repeated personal accusations.
- Repeated personal accusations.
- Contact through inappropriate channels, including personal contact details.

The Council has a zero-tolerance approach to violence, threats, and physical intimidation. Incidents may be reported to the Police.

4.3 Vexatious Requests or Complaints:

A request or complaint that causes unnecessary disruption, annoyance, or disproportionate use of Council resources.

Examples include:

- Repeated complaints about the same matter after due process is complete.
- Excessive or disproportionate demands for information.
- Using complaints to target or seek the removal of an employee or councillor.
- Raising numerous minor or irrelevant points and expecting detailed responses.
- Contacting multiple individuals or organisations about the same matter (“scattergun” approach).
- Complaints made in a tit-for-tat manner.
- Re-raising issues without providing new information.

This list is not exhaustive.

Definition of a Vexatious Requester:

- Repeatedly raise grievances that have already been proven to be without substance or foundation.
- Have threatened or used physical violence towards staff or councillors at any time via any channel of communication.
- Seeking to coerce, intimidate or threaten staff or councillors whether by use of language, tone of voice or behaviour including body language.
- Are known to have recorded meetings or conversations without prior knowledge or consent of other parties involved and/or have impersonated a member of staff or councillor with the objective of soliciting information for whatever purpose.
- Have harassed or been personally abusive or verbally aggressive towards any staff members/councillors whether this has been on a face-to-face contact or at public meetings.
- Have had an excessive number of contacts with the Council - placing unreasonable demands on staff or members. Discretion will be used in determining the precise number of excessive contacts applicable under this section, using judgement based on the specific circumstances of each individual case.
- Persist in pursuing a complaint/request where the Council’s Complaints Procedure or the FOI procedure has been fully implemented and exhausted.
- Persistently change the substance of a complaint/request or continually raise new issues or seek to prolong contact by continually raising further concerns or questions upon receipt of a response.
- Are repeatedly unwilling to accept evidence given as being factual or deny receipt of an adequate response in spite of correspondence specifically answering their questions or do not accept that facts can sometimes be difficult to verify when a long period of time has elapsed.
- Repeatedly do not clearly identify the precise issues which they wish to raise despite reasonable efforts of the Council to address their concerns, and/or where the concerns identified are not within the remit of the Council.
- If the complaint/request is about essentially the same matter that has already been considered, with only very minor differences, and does not contain any new information. The most difficult vexatious complaints to deal with are often complaints that are slightly different from the original complaint, but about the same broad area of activity.
- Regularly focus on a trivial matter to an extent which is out of proportion to its significance. It is recognised that determining what is a trivial matter can be subjective and careful judgement must be used in identifying frivolous complaints.

In relation to Freedom of Information requests, the Council will have regard to Section 14(1) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and ICO guidance.

4.4 Unacceptable Persistence and Unreasonable Demands:

Behaviour may be considered unacceptable where an individual:

- Repeatedly contacts the Council about the same matter without new information.
- Refuses to accept a decision or explanation.
- Makes unreasonable or disproportionate demands on Council staff.
- Uses a level of contact that prevents the Council from dealing with other business.

4.5 Harassment:

Harassment includes unwelcome and unwarranted behaviour that affects the dignity of an individual or group, including offensive, intimidating, malicious, insulting, or humiliating actions.

All instances of harassment or abusive behaviour will be documented.

5. Roles and Responsibilities:

5.1 The Council

The Council is responsible for:

- Approving and implementing this policy.
- Ensuring fair and consistent application.
- Considering cases referred under this policy.
- Determining whether managed contact or restrictions are appropriate.

5.2 Employees and Councillors:

Employees and councillors are responsible for:

- Following this policy.
- Reporting incidents of unacceptable behaviour to the clerk.
- Recording relevant incidents and communications to the clerk.

6. Procedures for Managing Unacceptable Behaviour:

6.1 Initial Response via the clerk:

Where behaviour appears/is unacceptable, the individual will normally be:

1. Informed that their behaviour is considered unacceptable.
2. Asked to modify their behaviour.
3. Given an opportunity to do so.

6.2 Escalation to Council:

If the behaviour continues, the matter will be referred to the Council for consideration. The Council may:

- Take no further action.
- Introduce managed contact.
- Impose time-limited restrictions.
- Suspend contact temporarily.
- Close an investigation.
- Seek legal advice.
- Involve the Police in cases of threats, harassment, or violence.
- Take any other lawful and proportionate action.

Any restrictions will be reviewed after six months.

7. Managed Contact:

Where behaviour continues to be unacceptable, the Council may impose restrictions, including:

- Requiring contact by hard-copy letter only.
- Limiting contact to either the clerk/chairperson
- Restricting communication to specific subjects.
- Limiting the frequency of contact.
- Restricting communication channels.
- Banning a person from Council premises.
- Requiring communication through a nominated advocate.

In serious cases—such as threats, violence, physical intimidation, or harassment—restrictions may be imposed without prior warning.

Blanket bans will not be imposed unless legally required.

8. Recording and Reporting:

- All incidents of unacceptable behaviour will be documented.
- Employees and councillors should report incidents to the Clerk.
- Incidents involving the Clerk will be reported to the Chairperson.
- Records will be kept in accordance with data protection and confidentiality requirements and kept by the Clerk.

9. Consideration of Individual Circumstances:

The Council will consider any relevant circumstances that may affect an individual's behaviour and may make reasonable adjustments where appropriate.

However, the safety and well-being of employees and councillors will remain the priority.

10. Monitoring and Review:

The Clerk will monitor the application of this policy and report significant matters to the Council.

The Council will review the policy annually at the Annual Meeting in May.

Policy Details / Version History

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Version: 01 **Disposal Period:**

Minute Reference: