



DIGNITY AT WORK POLICY

Document history

| Notes of changes | Version No. | Date of approval and adoption |
|---|-------------|-------------------------------|
| Dignity at Work Policy | 1.0 | April 2024 |
| Revised – changes made to reference new Sexual Harassment Policy. | 2.0 | April 2025 |
| Revised no changes | | April 2026 |

**THIS DIGNITY AT WORK POLICY IS PUBLISHED AS APPROVED BY CUMBRIA ASSOCIATION
OF LOCAL COUNCILS IN APRIL 2026**

1. Scope

This policy applies to everyone working/ volunteering on behalf of CALC, including the board of directors, paid staff, contracted staff and facilitators.

2. Introduction

CALC values all of its employees and directors and is committed to providing a safe, healthy and productive work environment, free from harassment, bullying, intimidation and victimisation. CALC has zero tolerance towards harassment and any allegations will be taken seriously and handled confidentially and sympathetically.

Behaviours which could be interpreted as harassment or bullying will not be tolerated and will be investigated using the CALC Grievance Procedure and, where appropriate, may lead to action being taken in accordance with the Disciplinary Procedure (see list of related policies at the end of this document).

All complaints of harassment and bullying will be taken seriously and handled sensitively and discreetly.

3. Eligibility

All people who work for CALC, including contractors, volunteers, as well as job applicants and ex- employees are to be protected from harassment. This is both at work and outside of work, for example at a work-related function. The harassment can be from a work colleague but also from councillors, clerks, members of the public and stakeholders.

Because of the nature of harassment and bullying, staff will not always talk to their line manager the Chief Officer. A member of staff being bullied may confide in a colleague or simply resign. Indicators such as uncharacteristic behaviour or poor performance should be looked out for and questioned early on. It is incumbent on CALC to be proactive in tackling harassment or bullying behaviours to avoid all of the negative consequences and possible claims of unfair dismissal or discrimination.

4. Entitlement

CALC has a duty in law to ensure that the workplace is free from discrimination and harassment. It is liable for the discriminatory acts of its employees in the course of their employment, whether or not they are carried out with the knowledge or approval of CALC, unless it can be shown that all reasonable steps were taken to prevent employees carrying out unlawful discrimination.

Harassment of a member of staff or volunteer may be carried out by a third party. CALC must take reasonably practicable steps to prevent the third party from harassing the victim where they know or ought to know that harassment is occurring.

All staff and volunteers are duty bound to comply with this policy and help CALC comply with its legal duties. They must co-operate to keep the workplace free of attitudes or behaviours which may cause offence to others, to assist CALC in dealing with cases of harassment or bullying by giving evidence in investigations or hearings and generally to take reasonable care of their own health and safety and

that of their colleagues.

Staff should be made aware that if they are accused of harassment then this will be investigated under Disciplinary Policy and that the allegations, if upheld, may result in a formal disciplinary sanction including dismissal without notice for gross misconduct.

Harassment on the grounds of 'protected characteristics' of individuals (**age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation**) is prohibited in equality law. Pregnancy and maternity are different from other protected characteristics in how the law on harassment treats them. Sexual harassment and disability harassment are extended to cover harassment of someone associated with the claimant or harassment witness by the claimant, or harassment because of the claimant's association with a person who has one of the protected characteristics. See CALC's Sexual Harassment Policy.

Protection from harassment is legislated for under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997⁶, the Equality Act 2010 and several other acts including the Public Order Act 1986 (as amended)⁷ which makes international harassment a criminal act. An employee may be able to pursue criminal charges against an alleged harasser through a court of law in these circumstances.

There is also legal protection against victimisation on the basis of an individual's membership or non-membership of a trade union.

5. Definitions

Harassment has a legal definition in the Equality Act 2010⁸ and is summarised as unwanted conduct related to any of the protected characteristics which has the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of an individual, or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that individual.

Bullying is defined by ACAS as offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour; an abuse or misuse of power through means intended to undermine, humiliate, denigrate, or injure the recipient.

ACAS sets out the following examples of such behaviours:

- Spreading malicious rumors or insulting someone (particularly on the grounds of race, sex, disability, sexual orientation and religion or belief).
- Copying correspondence that is critical about someone to others who do not need to know.
- Ridiculing or demeaning someone – picking on them or setting them up to fail.
- Exclusion or victimisation.
- Unfair treatment.
- Overbearing supervision or other misuse of power or position.
- Unwelcome sexual advances – touching, standing too close, display of offensive materials.
- Making threats or comments about job security without foundation.
- Deliberately undermining a competent worker by overloading and constant criticism.
- Preventing individuals progressing by intentionally blocking promotion or training opportunities.

Bullying and harassment is not always verbal or face to face but can involve written communications or visual images, such as pictures of a sexual nature or embarrassing photographs sent by text, instant messaging, email or social media.

Bullying and harassment may involve single or repeated incidents, ranging from extreme forms of intimidating behaviour, such as physical violence, to more subtle forms such as ignoring someone. It can often occur without witnesses.

There may be a series of trivial acts, but another bullying action may be the 'final straw.' ACAS stresses that behaviour that is considered bullying by one person may merely be considered firm management by another.

It must be recognised that it is how the recipient perceives such behaviour, not the intent of the person accused of the harassment that is important in determining whether harassment has occurred. The examples should be used in communications with employees to help increase the understanding of the nature, effect and causes of harassment.

Other forms of harassment or bullying may include:

- Practical jokes which embarrass or humiliate.
- Deliberate exclusion or isolation of others, whether professionally or socially; and
- Physical aggression or intimidation.

The ACAS guide on bullying and harassment is a good reference point and a link to the leaflet can be found on the CALC website.

If an employee experiences offensive or unwelcome behaviour from a member of the public in relation to work, they should speak to the Chief Officer. See CALC's Grievance Policy for further details.

6. Accountability

All staff and volunteers are responsible for treating stakeholders in line with this policy and should be aware of their duties when conducting themselves professionally.

7. Procedures

Allegations of harassment will be dealt with using CALC's Grievance Procedure. Initially, claims of harassment should, when possible, be resolved using an informal approach (see below). This is not only a quicker approach but can avoid adversarial relationships building and remaining. If the informal approach does not work, or the person raising the grievance does not want to use this route, then the formal approach will be the next step.

The procedure should remain confidential and all people involved or interviewed should be asked to respect the confidential nature of a complaint of harassment or bullying.

8. Informal Procedure

The Grievance Procedure explains the process of raising an informal concern in more detail. The recipient should, as a first step, tell the person who is causing

the problem that the behaviour in question is unwanted and/or offensive to them and ask for it to stop. This could be done verbally or in writing. This will hopefully achieve the result that the victim wants and the person who is accused of the harassment may not have realised that their actions were causing an issue/offence and may stop immediately.

If the employee /volunteer finds it difficult or embarrassing to raise the issue directly with the person creating the problem, they should, whenever possible, ask the Chief Officer or another colleague for help. Alternatively, they could ask the Chair of the CALC Board to support them at this stage, particularly if the complaint is about the alleged behaviour of the Chief Officer. A board director could approach the Chief Officer, the chair or another board director.

The employee / volunteer should keep a record of incidents, noting the date, time, nature of the incident, the names of those involved and any witnesses. Such information will be vital if there is recourse to the formal procedure.

9. Training, Communication and Awareness

All staff and directors should receive training in recognising and tackling harassment and bullying behaviours. This should start at induction, be reinforced through briefings on the employment policies and procedures and re-trained if a case of bullying or harassment arises. Accurate records should be kept of all training / development undertaken in relation to the operation of this policy.

10. Record Keeping and Review

Accurate records should be kept of all aspects of the operation of this policy and regular policy reviews carried out on an annual basis. This will ensure that relevant legal obligations are fulfilled and that a pro-active and consistent approach to tackling harassment or bullying can be demonstrated in the event of a complaint to a tribunal or court of law of harassment.

Related Policies

Grievance

Disciplinary

Sexual Harassment