

Audit and Governance Committee

15 April 2024

Sexual Harassment Policy

For Decision

Portfolio Holder: Cllr S Flower, Leader of the Council

Local Councillor(s): All Councillors

Executive Director: J Mair, Director of Legal & Democratic

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Report Status: Public Choose an item.

Brief Summary:

This report seeks endorsement from the Committee for the publication of Guidance to Councillors about the Council's Sexual Harassment Policy.

If supported by the Committee the Guidance to Councillors will sit alongside the Councillor Code of Conduct and the Staff Sexual Harassment Policy, providing a further demonstration of the Council's zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment and the Council's commitment to providing a supportive working environment for all.

Recommendation:

That the Audit and Governance Committee endorse the publication of Guidance to Councillors about the Council's Sexual Harassment Policy

Reason for Recommendation:

The Equality Act 2010 provides legal protections for workers from sexual harassment at work. The staff policy explains how the Council fulfils its legal obligations but does more than that and aims to enable a safe culture at work, free from sexual harassment.

Endorsement by the Audit and Governance Committee of guidance to councillors further strengthens this commitment and will enable the guidance to form part of the induction of councillors after elections in May 2024.

1. **Financial Implications**

None.

2. **Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Implications**

None.

3. **Well-being and Health Implications**

Any form of harassment is unacceptable with the potential for significant impacts on a person's well-being and their health. The staff policy recognises the importance of:

- prompt and appropriate action in response to any allegation of sexual harassment
- ensuring that everyone understands what sexual harassment is, that we can openly and confidently discuss concerns about inappropriate behaviour in the workplace, and are clear on Dorset Council's policy and practices.
- educating and informing managers about the potential signs of and impact of sexual harassment in the workplace, and how they can support individuals at work.
- reinforcing the council's role in setting a wider example to our communities, aiming to set an example as part of wider change in the community regarding sexual harassment and assault.

Publication of the councillor guidance will widen understanding and demonstrates the Council's commitment at the highest level to preventing and, where it occurs, addressing and challenging sexual harassment.

4. **Risk Assessment**

4.1 **HAVING CONSIDERED:** the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Medium

Residual Risk: Medium

Expectations of high standards of ethical conduct have been at the forefront of how we work ever since the formation of Dorset Council. The recent experience of other public sector bodies has though demonstrated how the behaviour of a minority can taint the reputation an entire organisation.

An independent review of workplace culture in the Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service concluded that:

“DWFRS has a minority of people who are damaging the reputation of the hardworking decent people who want to create an inclusive workplace and make a positive difference to their communities. It also has some people who stand by, knowing and observing poor behaviour, yet not protecting those who are the victims of such behaviour. It is vital that everyone in the organisation understands their personal responsibility for standing up and challenging poor and inappropriate behaviour. The adage what you permit you promote should be understood by all.”

Applying that conclusion to our own organisation guidance to councillors, as well as guidance to staff, is part of ensuring that we all understand our responsibility for standing up to and challenging poor and inappropriate behaviour

5. **Equalities Impact Assessment**

No additional impact assessment has been undertaken for the extension of the officer policy as guidance to councillors.

6. **Appendices**

- (1) Sexual Harassment Policy (January 2023)
- (2) Draft Guidance to Councillors about the Council’s Sexual Harassment Policy

7. **Background Papers**

None.

8. **Report Sign Off**

- 8.1 This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer), the Executive Director for Corporate Development (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s)