

Sexual Harassment Policy

Introduction

Felixstowe Town Council is committed to fostering a safe, respectful, and inclusive working environment. Sexual harassment in the workplace will not be tolerated under any circumstances. This policy sets out the Council's approach to preventing sexual harassment, the support available to affected individuals, and the process for handling complaints.

This policy aligns with the Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023, which came into effect on 26 October 2024, and the guidance provided by the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS).

Scope

This policy applies to all employees, Councillors, contractors, volunteers, and any third parties interacting with the Council, including customers, service users, and members of the public.

Definition of Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is unwanted conduct of a sexual nature that violates a person's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Unwelcome sexual advances or requests for sexual favours
- Inappropriate touching, gestures, or comments
- Sexual jokes or remarks
- Displaying or sharing sexually explicit material
- Online sexual harassment, including social media misuse

Responsibilities

- **The Council:** Responsible for taking reasonable steps to prevent and address sexual harassment.
- **Managers and Supervisors:** Must take proactive steps to ensure a safe working environment and handle complaints appropriately.
- **Employees and Councillors:** Must conduct themselves professionally and report any concerns or incidents.

Reporting and Complaint Handling

Any employee who believes they have experienced or witnessed sexual harassment is encouraged to report it immediately. Reports can be made to the Town Clerk or the Chairman of the Personnel Committee.

Reports can be made verbally or in writing and will be kept confidential to the extent possible. Retaliation against individuals who report sexual harassment is strictly prohibited and will result in disciplinary action

Upon receiving a report of sexual harassment, Felixstowe Town Council will promptly and impartially investigate the allegations. The investigation will be conducted by the Town Clerk, or Deputy Town Clerk, and the Chairman of the Personnel Committee, in accordance with the Council's Disciplinary Procedure. If an investigation confirms that sexual harassment has occurred, appropriate disciplinary action will be taken depending on the severity of the offense and the circumstances involved.

Training and Awareness

All staff and Councillors will receive training on this policy and their rights and responsibilities regarding sexual harassment prevention and reporting. Managers will be trained on their responsibilities and risk assessment procedures.

A risk assessment has been carried out and this will be regularly reviewed to ensure it remains appropriate. The risk assessment is attached as an annex to this policy as below.

Monitoring and Review

This policy will be reviewed periodically and updated as necessary to ensure its effectiveness and compliance with relevant laws and regulations.

Regular staff surveys will be conducted to assess the effectiveness of prevention measures.

Policy Approved: Personnel 2 April 2025 (*pending*)

Review Body: Personnel Committee

Review Period: Annually

Next Review: Personnel (April 2026)

Hazards & Risk	Who is at Risk	Control	Future Control	Likelihood	Impact	By Whom
Inappropriate Comments or Jokes Risk of inappropriate comments or jokes made by elected officials, employees, or public attendees that could be perceived as harassment.	Employees, Councillors, contractors, volunteers, public attendees	Anti-harassment policy applied to all parties. Code of Conduct includes respectful behaviour standards. Complaint and reporting procedure in place.	Appropriate training for all employees and Councillors. Reports can be made verbally and will be kept confidential where possible.	Medium	High	Deputy Town Clerk/ Town Clerk/ Chairman of Personnel Committee
Unwanted Physical Contact Risk of unwanted physical contact by Councillors, employees, or members of the public during meetings or events.	Employees, Councillors, contractors, volunteers, public attendees	Code of Conduct prohibits unwelcome physical contact. Complaint system accessible to all parties.	Monitor and document incidents as reported.	Low	High	Deputy Town Clerk/ Town Clerk/ Chairman of Personnel Committee
Misuse of Power Dynamics Risk of elected officials or employees using positions of authority to exert undue influence or engage in inappropriate behaviour.	Employees, Councillors, contractors, volunteers, public attendees	Clear hierarchy and defined reporting structures. Member/Officer Protocol outlines boundaries. Complaint and reporting procedure in place.	Conduct regular reviews of power dynamics and conduct.	Medium	High	Deputy Town Clerk/ Town Clerk/ Chairman of Personnel Committee

<p>Inappropriate Digital Communication</p> <p>Risk of harassing or inappropriate messages sent via Council-owned email, social media, or digital channels by or to employees, councillors, or members of the public.</p>	<p>Employees, Councillors, contractors, volunteers, public attendees</p>	<p>Staff are given Employee Handbook which includes established guidelines for digital communication.</p> <p>Council's IT policy and Press & Media Policy provide further guidance on digital communication and use of social media. Policies regularly reviewed and published on the website.</p>	<p>Review and update digital conduct policies regularly. Provide appropriate training on the use of social media as appropriate.</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>Deputy Town Clerk/ Town Clerk/ Chairman of Personnel Committee</p>
<p>Retaliation or Intimidation Post-Complaint</p> <p>Risk of retaliation against individuals (employees, Councillors, or public) following a harassment complaint.</p>	<p>Employees, Councillors, contractors, volunteers, public attendees</p>	<p>"No retaliation" clause included in council policy. Retaliation is strictly prohibited and will result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination.</p>	<p>Engage local law enforcement if repeated intimidation occurs.</p>	<p>Low</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>Deputy Town Clerk/ Town Clerk/ Chairman of Personnel Committee</p>
<p>Failure to Address Complaints Properly</p> <p>Risk of mishandling complaints involving Councillors, employees, or the public, potentially leading</p>	<p>Employees, Councillors, contractors, volunteers, public attendees</p>	<p>See Complaints Procedure & Disciplinary Procedure.</p>	<p>Complaint handling processes to be regularly reviewed in line with current legislation and best practice.</p>	<p>Low</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>Deputy Town Clerk/ Town Clerk/ Chairman of Personnel Committee</p>

to legal or reputational consequences.						
Inadequate Knowledge of Sexual Harassment Policies Risk that Councillors, employees, or public attendees do not fully understand what constitutes sexual harassment.	Employees, Councillors, contractors, volunteers, public attendees	Anti-Sexual Harassment, Code of Conduct, Dignity at Work, Whistleblowing, Equality & Diversity policies disseminated to all. All employees and Councillors to positively confirm understanding of the policies, training provided as required.	Regular refresher training for all, including specific guidance on dealing with the public.	Medium	Medium	Deputy Town Clerk/ Town Clerk/ Chairman of Personnel Committee
Public Misconduct Towards Elected Officials and Staff Risk of harassment by members of the public towards Councillors or employees during public events or meetings.	Employees, Councillors, contractors, volunteers, public attendees	Clear behavioural expectations for public attendees. Protocol on Public Participation in meetings published on the website and read out at start of public meetings.	Risk Assessments for individual events to consider risk of misconduct.	Medium	High	Deputy Town Clerk/ Town Clerk/ Chairman of Personnel Committee