

Kennet District Council

Harassment Policy Statement

This policy statement forms part of the Council's Equality and Diversity Policy. The Council has adopted the Equality Standard for Local Government, which has five levels. Kennet is currently at level 2 and is working towards achieving the level 3 standard.

In 2003 the Discrimination law had amendments made to include harassment, on the basis of disability, colour, ethnic or natural origin, race, religious belief or philosophical belief and sexuality. The Sex Discrimination Act was extended in 2005 following the introduction of the Equal Treatment Amendment Directive to include a specific prohibition against harassment and sexual harassment. In 2006 the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations have made it illegal to harass individuals on the basis of age.

Harassment can constitute unlawful discrimination and can be a criminal offence. It is defined as unwanted conduct affecting the dignity of individuals and is most commonly related to race, religion, sex, age or disability. It can be in many forms and can appear as a one off incident or may occur over a period of time. Kennet District Council considers any form of harassment to be totally unacceptable both within the local community and within the Council as a place of work. This policy sets out the positive approaches being put in place to challenge such behaviours and support those affected.

1. What constitutes harassment?

Any form of harassment robs an individual of their respect and dignity. Harassment can take many forms, below are some examples;

- Unpleasant remarks to another individual, perhaps about race, religion/ belief, or their appearance.
- The use of rude or inappropriate language, ageist jokes, offensive posters.
- Constant criticism, shouting at an individual.
- Sending rude or unprofessional letters, texts, use of cyber bullying.
- Isolating, excluding and ignoring an individual.
- Failing to keep an individual's transsexual status confidential.
- Spreading personal gossip, or unpleasant rumours.
- Unwanted and inappropriate physical contact.

2. Support within the Community

The Council is constantly reviewing services through the Equalities and Social Inclusion Steering Group to constantly develop future improvements and prevent inequality.

The Council has a “Complaints Procedure” that enables members of the public to raise any concerns or complaints they have about the services that we provide. Individuals are encouraged to use the complaints procedure if they feel they have been subject to harassment by anyone employed at the Council, or feel they have been treated unequally through our service provision. We aim to provide a range of services that treat our whole community equally and we take all complaints seriously to try and improve the services that we deliver.

The complaints procedure is available on the Council website and through the Customer Services team.

3. Support for Council Employees

The Council promotes equality based approaches that treat all employees and potential employees equally regardless of age, disability, gender, race religion/belief and sexual orientation. Action will be taken against any form of harassment.

There are a variety of Acts in place providing legislation to protect employees against harassment. These are relevant both when applying for a job and also whilst working for the Council.

In April 2007 legislation called the Gender Equality Duty came into force and the Council fully embraces these new statutory responsibilities. The duty includes requirements to protect transsexual and transgender employees from harassment and discrimination.

Harassment on the grounds of gender reassignment is prohibited in employment and in vocational training. Transsexual and transgender people make up a small percentage of the population and a lack of understanding can lead to harassment and discriminatory treatment by others. The Council will use equality and diversity training to actively promote awareness and understanding. Advice and support will be provided when appropriate.

The Council seeks to promote a workplace that respects the dignity of both its employees and all potential candidates. Equality is a core value at the Council and this policy is shared during induction training with all employees. It is also communicated in our Employee Code of Conduct and on the Council website and is highlighted during the annual appraisal process.

4. How to report incidences of Harassment

- a) All employees are encouraged to raise any incidences of harassment by using the grievance procedure. Any incidences will be dealt with swiftly and in strict confidence.
- b) The Council also has a formal “Disciplinary Procedure” that is shared with all employees. This identifies all forms of harassment as a disciplinary issue. If an incidence of harassment is reported a full disciplinary investigation will take place.

- c) The Council operates a Code of Conduct. This is well publicised and offers the opportunity of “whistle blowing” by employees and also by members of the public. This provides an additional means of highlighting any issues of harassment.
- d) Members of the public can make a complaint about harassment by using the Council’s formal Complaints Procedure.

5. Monitoring

The Council records and monitors all complaints made on the basis of inequality or harassment. Statistical information is used to monitor any issues and develop potential improvements to the services that are provided. This Harassment Policy fits within the Corporate Equality and Diversity Policy. It is reviewed regularly through use of equality impact assessments to ensure it remains effective and reflects the latest legislation.