

UNADOPTED
POLEGATE TOWN COUNCIL



FINANCE & POLICY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Finance and Policy Committee meeting held on Friday 10th March 2023 in the council chambers 49 High Street, Polegate East Sussex BN26 6AL at 10:00am

Present: Cllrs D Murray, D Watts, S Shing, Mrs M Piper, Ms A Snell, D Dunbar, M Cunningham, D Sanders **(8)**

Not Present: Cllrs M Falkner (1)

No members of the public present

Minute Number	Resolution
13223	Opportunity for Public Comment for items on the agenda None
13224	Apologies for absence None
13225	Declarations of interest in any items on the agenda None
13226	Minutes of Finance & Policy committee meeting of 6th January 2023 <u>It was resolved to accept the minutes of Finance & Policy committee meeting of 6th January 2023 as an accurate record of the meeting VOTE all in favour</u>
13227	Payments of accounts as presented <u>It was resolved to authorise the payments as presented £24,236.87 VOTE All in favour</u>
13228	To increase the budget for insurances (increases of 20% due to cost of living increase, rather than claims) <u>It was resolved to authorise and increase the budget for the insurances to cover the increases (£5729.42 pa) above the proposed budget and enter into the 3 year contract. VOTE All in favour</u>
13229	Changing Places Toilet contract – specialist service to meet grant requirements - Financial Regs <u>It was resolved to waive financial regs (and not tender for the service) to allow for the specialist service contract (RISE) from the approved provider for the changing Places Toilet (who met the grant criteria and were on the Government provider list) for the supply and installation of the changing places toilet at Polegate War Memorial recreation ground. VOTE all in favour.</u>
13230	High Street toilet - maintenance contract <u>It was resolved to enter into the maintenance contract again to be paid from general reserves and to be added as an annual budget figure for the 2024/25 budget. VOTE All in favour</u>
13231	Replacement Roundabout quote (Wannock) <u>It was resolved to appoint contractor listed as A in the paperwork for the replacement roundabout at Wannock road, which is within the EMR set aside for the replacement. VOTE All in favour.</u>

The meeting closed at

Signed by _____ Chair of Finance & Policy _____ Dated

Current/Business Premium

Payments made between 15/03/2023 and 31/03/2023

Nominal Ledger Analysis									
Date	Payee Name	Reference	£ Total Amnt	£ Creditors	£ VAT	A/c	Centre	£ Amount	Transaction Details
15/03/2023	FOUR JAYS GROUP	BX359720	540.00	540.00		500			Event Toilets 29/07/2023
15/03/2023	Staff Salaries Cash Book	BX770852	4,532.31			202		4,532.31	March Salaries
15/03/2023	Wealden District Council	DD	1,482.00		247.00	4238	302	585.00	Waste Management
						4241	302	650.00	Waste Management
15/03/2023	EDF Energy	DD	315.00			4131	201	315.00	DD taken
15/03/2023	Staff Salaries Cash Book	march sala	704.00			202		704.00	March Salary
20/03/2023	Streetlights	BX356251	420.00	420.00		500			Column D Wannock Road
20/03/2023	SME IT Solutions Ltd	BX595455	123.55		20.59	4069	102	102.96	IT Support
20/03/2023	SME IT Solutions Ltd	REVERSAL	-123.55		-20.59	4069	102	-102.96	REVERSAL
22/03/2023	IDVerde	BX355818	686.40	686.40		500			Playground Inspections
23/03/2023	Countrymans Contractors Ltd	BX951473	390.00		65.00	8060	302	325.00	Gosford Allot clear
23/03/2023	Countrymans Contractors Ltd	BX951473	390.00	390.00		500			Gosford Allot Clear
23/03/2023	Countrymans Contractors Ltd	BX951473	-390.00	-390.00		500			Lectern Installation
24/03/2023	Pauls Skips	BX361065	264.00	264.00		500			Skip for PJNR
24/03/2023	Pauls Skips	BX361065	264.00	264.00		500			Reversal
24/03/2023	Pauls Skips	BX361065	-528.00	-528.00		500			Double Reversal
27/03/2023	Workshop Aberfeldy (green cano	Barclayc	65.99	65.99		500			Green Canopy Plau
27/03/2023	St Johns Ambulance	Barclayca	18.48	18.48		500			First Aid supplies
27/03/2023	Flags & FlagPoles	Barclaycar	79.80	79.80		500			Coronation Banner
27/03/2023	Hampshire Flag Company Ltd	BARCLAYCA	405.31		67.55	8060	201	337.76	Coronation Flags
28/03/2023	SME IT Solutions Ltd	BX355895	59.94		9.99	4037	102	49.95	UK Domain Renewal/Registratio
28/03/2023	Streetlights	BX356280	420.00		70.00	4282	305	350.00	Column C Roy Martin Way
28/03/2023	Streetlights	BX356419	117.30		19.55	4282	305	97.75	Column K, High Street
28/03/2023	Zurich Municipal	BX357847	5,729.42			4043	102	5,729.42	Inspection Contract
28/03/2023	Eurolants Ltd	BX358312	609.60	609.60		500			Hailsham Road sponsored Beds
28/03/2023	FOUR JAYS GROUP	BX359720	-540.00	-540.00		500			Reversal
28/03/2023	Lewes District Council	BX359733	54.00		9.00	4243	302	45.00	April Play Area Inspections
28/03/2023	Initial UK Ltd	BX361117	30.13		5.02	4154	201	25.11	13 Apr - 12 May Hygiene Bins
28/03/2023	Surrey Hills Solicitors LLP	BX369646	132.00		22.00	4039	102	110.00	Charges for Cophall Allotments
28/03/2023	Surrey Hills Solicitors LLP	REVERSAL	-132.00		-22.00	4039	102	-110.00	REVERSAL
28/03/2023	Initial UK Ltd	REVERSAL	-30.13		-5.02	4154	201	-25.11	REVERSAL
28/03/2023	Lewes District Council	REVERSAL	-54.00		-9.00	4243	302	-45.00	REVERSAL
28/03/2023	Zurich Municipal	REVERSAL	-5,729.42		-954.90	4043	102	-4,774.52	REVERSAL
28/03/2023	SME IT Solutions Ltd	REVERSAL	-59.94		-9.99	4037	102	-49.95	REVERSAL
Subtotal Carried Forward:			10,246.19	1,880.27	-485.80			8,851.72	

Nominal Ledger Analysis									
Date	Payee Name	Reference	£ Total Amnt	£ Creditors	£ VAT	A/c	Centre	£ Amount	Transaction Details
30/03/2023	Europlants Ltd	BX358312	-609.60	-609.60		500			Reversal
30/03/2023	Countrymans Contractors Ltd	BX663860	13,680.00	13,680.00		500			Fencing Brightling Park
30/03/2023	Countrymans Contractors Ltd	BX663860	-13,680.00	-13,680.00		500			Reversal
30/03/2023	Mulberry & Co	BX664050	126.00		21.00	4009	101	105.00	Professional Services
30/03/2023	SME IT Solutions Ltd	BX665411	570.15		95.02	4071	102	180.00	Remote /Telephone Support
						4072	102	108.00	Equipment covered by Support
						4072	102	18.80	MS 365 Business Standard
						4072	102	20.20	MS 365 E3
						4072	102	22.60	Microsoft Proiect Plan 3
						4072	102	11.30	MS Visio Plan 2
						4073	102	9.99	IT Support
						4073	102	2.00	Domain name
						4037	102	9.99	IT Support
						4071	102	62.30	Back up and Recovery
						4071	102	29.95	IT Support
30/03/2023	Fuzion4	BX665464	186.00		31.00	4140	201	155.00	Callout Fee
30/03/2023	SME IT Solutions Ltd	REVERSAL	-570.15		-95.02	4071	102	-180.00	REVERSAL
						4072	102	-108.00	REVERSAL
						4072	102	-18.80	REVERSAL
						4072	102	-20.20	REVERSAL
						4072	102	-22.60	REVERSAL
						4072	102	-11.30	REVERSAL
						4073	102	-9.99	REVERSAL
						4073	102	-2.00	REVERSAL
						4037	102	-9.99	REVERSAL
						4071	102	-62.30	REVERSAL
						4071	102	-29.95	REVERSAL
30/03/2023	Mulberry & Co	REVERSAL	-126.00		-21.00	4009	101	-105.00	REVERSAL
30/03/2023	fuzion4	REVERSAL	-186.00		-31.00	4140	201	-155.00	REVERSAL
31/03/2023	Kingdom Services Group Ltd	BX071475	538.20		89.70	4500	205	448.50	Monthly Cleaning
31/03/2023	SME IT Solutions Ltd	BX830917	124.54		20.76	4069	102	103.78	Telecoms
31/03/2023	Kingdom Services Group Ltd	REVERSAL	-538.20		-89.70	4500	205	-448.50	Reversal wrong year
31/03/2023	SME IT Solutions Ltd	REVERSAL	-124.54		-20.76	4069	102	-103.78	REVERSAL
Total Payments:			9,636.59	1,270.67	-485.80			8,851.72	

NB Reversals are payments that were entered in March but not authorised until April (so needed to be reversed (+ will reenter in April)).

TRAINING POLICY

1. Aims

The organisation recognises that training and development for employees is a major investment in its ability to deliver effective products and services and will seek to create a culture of continuous development. It will seek to:

- a) Provide sufficient funding in the training budget to meet identified training needs and to aim for 3% of salary costs in line with the standard for the industry.
- b) Encourage and support the development of knowledge, skills and abilities and recognise there is shared benefit.
- c) Provide the necessary opportunities, resources and support to enable employees to attain and maintain the required knowledge, skills and abilities.
- d) Include all forms of learning designed to improve the performance, abilities and potential of employees. this includes coaching, on the job training, job shadowing, mentoring, secondments, project work, job swaps, guided reading, e-learning and formal training courses.
- e) Where appropriate, be involved in Government initiatives.
- f) Ensure that the training and development activities will be based on a system of needs assessment, priority will be given to those activities necessary to meet the organisation's objectives.
- g) Ensure that training opportunities and resources will be provided to employees in an equitable and fair way and related to identified needs. Clear reference to training will be included in the equal opportunities policy.

2. Arrangements

To achieve its policy objectives:-

- a) The aim will be to provide each employee with at least 1 days training and development each year, to be by a variety of means.
- b) Each employee will have an individual rolling training plan.
- c) There will be an annual appraisal which will address training, development needs and set annual targets.
- d) A training strategy will be maintained and developed.
- e) All activity will be evaluated to measure its effectiveness and return on investment.

3. Competence Inventories

Standard knowledge/skills will be established for all jobs. These will provide the foundation against which training needs will be measured. Completion/accreditation of the skills/knowledge will be a requirement upon employees and training programmes.

4. Employees

All employees have a responsibility to apply positive attitudes and actions in their development and to assist the organisation in the achievement of its objectives. Undertaking all reasonable training and development activities will be a requirement of the employee's contract of employment.

5. Organisation

- a) The Town Clerk will be responsible for ensuring Implementation of the policy and the provision of training and will secure the integration of training policies and plans within the wider Council business plan.
- b) The Town Clerk will be responsible for appraising, coaching and developing their staff.
- c) The Council will ensure the consideration and inclusion of plans and budgets within the Council's Business plan.

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ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

1 Introduction

Polegate Town Council recognises that the day-to-day operations of the council can impact both directly and indirectly on the environment.

The council aims to protect and improve the environment through good management and by adopting best practice wherever possible.

The council will work to integrate environmental considerations into our business decisions and adopt more environmentally friendly alternatives wherever possible, throughout our operations.

2 Objectives

To discharge its responsibilities, the management will:

- Bring this policy to the attention of all stakeholders.
- Carry out regular audits of the environmental management system.
- Comply fully with all relevant legal requirements, codes of practice and regulations at international, national and local levels.
- Eliminate risks to the environment, where possible, through selection and design of materials, buildings, facilities, equipment and processes.
- Ensure that emergency procedures are in place at all locations for dealing with environmental issues.
- Identify and manage environmental risks and hazards.
- Improve the environmental efficiency of the council's transport and travel.
- Minimise waste and increase recycling within the framework of the council's waste management procedures.
- Only engage contractors who can demonstrate due regard to environmental matters.
- Prevent pollution to land, air and water.
- Promote environmentally responsible purchasing where possible.
- Provide adequate resources to control environmental risks arising from work activities.
- Provide suitable training to enable employees to deal with their specific areas of environmental control as defined within the job description.
- Reduce the use of water, energy and other natural resources.
- Source materials from sustainable supply, whenever practical.
- Consider the impact of noise and light pollution.

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STRESS POLICY

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Council is committed to protecting the health, safety and welfare of its employees and recognises that workplace stress is a health and safety issue and acknowledges the importance of identifying and reducing workplace stressors.
- 1.2 This policy will apply to all staff.
- 1.3 The Town Clerk is responsible for implementation and the Council is responsible for providing the necessary resources.

2. Definition of stress

- 2.1 The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) define stress as *'the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them.'*
- 2.2 This makes an important distinction between pressure, which can be a positive state if managed correctly, and stress which can be detrimental to health.

3. Policy

- 3.1 The Town Clerk will identify all workplace stressors and conduct risk assessments to eliminate stress or control the risks from stress. These risk assessments will be regularly reviewed.
- 3.2 The Council will provide any required training for the Town Clerk in good management practices.
- 3.3 The Council will provide confidential counselling for staff affected by stress caused by either work or external factors.
- 3.4 The Council will provide adequate resources to enable the Town Clerk to implement the stress management strategy.

4. Responsibilities

The responsibilities of the **Council** are as follows:

- Ensure good communication with staff particularly where there are organisational or procedural changes.
- Ensure staff are fully trained to discharge their duties.
- Ensure staff are provided with meaningful development opportunities.
- Ensure that bullying and harassment is not tolerated within the Council environment.
- Offer additional support to a member of staff who is experiencing stress outside work, e.g., bereavement or separation.
- Provide specialist advice and awareness training on stress.
- Provide training and support for implementation of stress risk assessments.
- Support individuals who have been off sick with stress and advise them on a planned return to work.
- Refer individuals to specialist agencies, as required.
- Monitor and review the effectiveness of measure to reduce stress.
- Conduct meaningful consultation with employees on any changes to work practices that could precipitate stress.

The responsibilities of the **Town Clerk** are as follows:

- Conduct and implement recommendations of risk assessments.
- Ensure good communication between both staff and Council members particularly where there are organisational and procedural changes.
- Ensure staff are fully trained to discharge their duties.
- Ensure staff are provided with meaningful development opportunities.
- Monitor workloads to ensure that people are not overloaded.

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- Monitor working hours and overtime to ensure that staff are not overworking. Monitor holidays to ensure that staff are taking their full entitlement.
- Attend training, as appropriate, in good management practice and health and safety.
- Ensure that bullying and harassment is not tolerated within their jurisdiction.
- Offer additional support to a member of staff who is experiencing stress outside work, e.g., bereavement or separation.
- Support individuals who have been off sick with stress and advise them on a planned return to work.
- Monitor and review the effectiveness of measures to reduce stress.
- Inform the Council of any changes and developments in the field of stress at work

The responsibilities of **all staff** are as follows:

- Attend all training courses as required.
- Ensure that all health and safety procedures are complied with.
- Raise any issues of concern with the Town Clerk.
- Accept opportunities for counselling when recommended

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BULLYING & HARRASMENT (EXTERNAL) POLICY

1. Purpose

- 1.1 In support of its value to respect others, Polegate Town Council will not tolerate the bullying or harassment of any member of staff by any member of the public, visitor to the Council, or any other person having contact with the Council's staff. This policy outlines the specific procedures available to all employees to protect them from bullying and harassment.
- 1.2 The Council will issue this policy to all employees as part of their induction and to all members as part of their welcome pack. The Council may also wish to draw the public's attention to this policy via the Data Transparency pages of the Council's website.

2. Definitions

Bullying

Bullying may be characterised as *a pattern of offensive, intimidating, malicious, insulting or humiliating behaviour; an abuse of this use of power or authority which tends to undermine an individual or a group of individuals, gradually eroding their confidence and capability, which may cause them to suffer stress.*

Harassment

Harassment may be characterised as *unwanted conduct that violates a person's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. This usually covers, but is not limited to, harassment on the grounds of sex, marital status, sexual orientation, race, colour, nationality, ethnic origin, religion, belief, disability or age.*

Bullying and harassment are behaviours that are unwanted by the recipient. They are generally evidence by a pattern or course of conduct, rather than being 'one-off' incidents.

3. Legal position

- 3.1 The Council has a duty of care towards its staff under Common Law arising out of the Employment Rights Act 1996 and the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. If an employer fails to act reasonably regarding this duty of care by allowing bullying or harassment to continue unchallenged an employee may decide to resign and claim 'constructive dismissal' at an Employment Tribunal.
- 3.2 In addition, the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 and the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 created a criminal offence of harassment with a fine and/or prison sentence, and a right to damages for the victim. An individual causing harassment may be personally liable to pay damages if a victim complains to an Employment Tribunal on the grounds of discrimination.
- 3.3 The 1997 Act was originally designed to assist in stalking situations but case law has demonstrated that it can be relevant to employment disputes; for instance, employers can be vicariously liable for harassment received in the workplace, that the conduct is viewed as 'serious', or 'oppressive and unacceptable', that a 'course of conduct' needs to be established but that this can link incidents which are separated by long time periods and that the damages for personal injury and distress can be awarded under the Act.

4. Process for dealing with bullying and harassment

- 4.1 You may experience bullying and harassment by members of the public. This behaviour can be either verbal, for example:
 - via the telephone
 - face to face with the member/s of the public
 - written correspondence, letters etc. or
 - email or cyberstalking

or physical, for example:

- assaults or violence towards you, or the threat of assault or violence towards you
- damage to your property (e.g., car)
- inappropriate sexual behaviour

4.2 In the first instance ALL suspected incidents of bullying or harassment must be reported to the Town Clerk and comprehensive notes should be made. These notes should include:

- date,
- time,
- content, and
- if possible, the person's name and the name of any witnesses to the incident.

4.3 If it is possible that the incident was caught on CCTV in or around the Town Hall, ask for the system to be checked and any relevant footage saved. Where the bullying is done by email, do not respond to the emails and keep the emails as evidence.

4.4 The Town Clerk will speak to the complainant and examine any notes made, and from this will determine, in agreement with the complainant, whether the incident is severe enough to report to the police. In cases of doubt the Town Clerk should consult the Police. All incidents involving physical assaults or violence will be reported to the Police.

4.5 All such incidents will be reported to the Council for appropriate action including reporting to the Police if appropriate.

5. Sanctions

5.1 Where it is proven beyond all reasonable doubt to the Council that a member of the public has bullied or harassed a member of staff, the Council reserves the right to impose sanctions against that person or persons, including:

- Blocking their email address and not accepting further emails
- Reporting the incidents to the sender's Internet Provider service
- Banning the person or persons from the Town Hall, or other Council owned buildings or facilities.

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UNREASONABLY PERSISTENT OR VEXATIOUS COMPLAINTS POLICY

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Polegate Town Council is committed to dealing with all complaints equitably, comprehensively, and in a timely manner. Usually, dealing with complaints is a straightforward process, but in a minority of cases complainants pursue their case in a way that can impede the investigation of their complaint or have significant resource issues for the Council. This can happen either while their complaint is being investigated, or once the Council has finished dealing with the complaint.
- 1.2 The aim of this policy is to help the Council deal with unreasonably persistent or vexatious complainants in ways that are consistent and fair. It lets staff and customers know what we consider to be unreasonably persistent or vexatious behaviour. It sets out what is expected of staff when they are confronted with such behaviour, what options are available, and who can authorise the options.
- 1.3 Unreasonably persistent and/or vexatious complainants can be a problem for Council staff and members. The difficulty in handling such complainants can place a strain on time and resources. Whilst the Council endeavours to respond with patience and sympathy to the needs of all complainants there are times when there is nothing further that can be done to assist or to rectify a real or perceived problem.

2. Definitions

- 2.1 In this policy the term 'unreasonably persistent' refers to those complainants who, because of the nature or frequency of their contact with the Council, hinder the Council's consideration of their, or other people's, complaints. The term 'vexatious' is recognised in law and means *denoting an action or the bringer of an action that is brought without sufficient grounds for winning, purely to cause annoyance to the defendant*. These terms are used in this policy to clarify that we are attempting to deal with persons who seek to be disruptive to the Council through pursuing unreasonable complaint behaviour.
- 2.2 The term 'complaint' in this policy includes requests made under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Data Protection Act 1988 and reference to the complaints procedure is, where relevant, to be interpreted as meaning requests under those acts.

3. Scope of Policy

- 3.1 This policy should only be used in exceptional circumstances after all reasonable measures have been taken to try to resolve complaints under the Council's complaints procedures. Judgement, discretion and proportionality must be used in applying the criteria to identify potential unreasonably persistent or vexatious complainants and in deciding on the appropriate action to be taken in specific cases.
- 3.2 The policy should only be invoked following careful consideration of all the issues by the Town Clerk in consultation with the Mayor or other Councillor.
- 3.3 Where the Town Clerk and the Mayor/Councillor are not in agreement over the appropriate course of action, the matter may be referred to the Full Council for a final decision.

4. Definition of an unreasonably persistent or vexatious complainant

- 4.1 Each case will be viewed individually and decided on its merits. However, a complainant (and/or anyone acting on their behalf) may be deemed to be unreasonably persistent or vexatious if previous or current contact with them shows that they meet any of the criteria in Appendix 1, dependent upon degree.

5. Strategy for dealing with unreasonably persistent or vexatious complainants

- 5.1 Where complainants have been identified as unreasonably persistent or vexatious under the scope of this policy, taking account of the criteria in Appendix 1, the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Mayor or other Councillor, will determine what action to take. The Town Clerk will implement such action and will notify complainants, in writing, of the reasons

why they have been classified as unreasonably persistent or vexatious and what action will be taken. They will also be notified of the review procedure below.

5.2 This notification may be copied for the information of others already involved in the complaint or matters closely related to it. A record must be kept for future reference of the reasons why a complainant has been classified as unreasonably persistent or vexatious.

5.3 The Town Clerk may decide to deal with complaints in one or more of the following ways:

- Banning the complainant from making contact by telephone except through a third party (e.g., solicitor/councillor/friend acting on their behalf)
- Banning the complainant from communicating with the Council by email
- Banning the complainant from entering any Council building except by appointment
- Restricting contact with the Council to one named member of staff only
- Placing limits on the number and duration of contacts with staff per week or month
- Restricting telephone calls to specified days/times/duration
- Requiring any personal contacts to take place in the presence of a witness and in a suitable location
- Informing the complainant that further contact on the matter of the complaint will not be acknowledged or replied to. In this case a designated member of staff should be identified who will read future correspondence
- In extreme circumstances, where the complainant's behaviour is such that it threatens the safety and welfare of staff, reporting the matter to the Council's solicitors or to police. In cases of imminent risk, the complainant need not be given prior warning of that course of action

6. Reviewing decisions and withdrawing 'unreasonably persistent or vexatious' status

6.1 Once a complainant has been determined as unreasonably persistent or vexatious, such status needs to be regularly reviewed and, where appropriate, withdrawn at a later date. Such action may be appropriate where a complainant subsequently demonstrates a more reasonable approach or submits a further complaint for which the normal complaints procedures would appear appropriate.

6.2 Complainants also have an opportunity to apply to have their unreasonably persistent or vexatious status withdrawn.

6.3 The Town Clerk, in consultation with the Mayor or other Councillor, will review their decisions to categorise a complainant as unreasonably persistent or vexatious at least every year. In addition, they will review that decision on receipt of a request to do so from the person so categorised, provided that such a request has not been received in the preceding six months.

6.4 If the person categorised as unreasonably persistent or vexatious is not satisfied with the decision reached by the Town Clerk, they may request that the decision is reviewed by the Council. Such a request for a review may only be received once in any six-month period. Upon receipt of such a request, the Council will review the decision, in consultation with the Town Clerk and the Mayor or other Councillor who determined that the complainant was unreasonably persistent or vexatious.

6.5 The Council, on review, may either withdraw the categorisation of a person as unreasonably persistent or vexatious or amend the strategy being applied to that person.

6.6 If the Council considers it appropriate to withdraw the status of unreasonably persistent or vexatious complainant, normal contact with the complainant and application of the Council's complaints procedure will be resumed. Notice of that decision will be supplied to the person(s) as soon as practicably possible.

6.7 The Council's decision will be given to the complainant in writing, as far as is practicable, within two weeks of receipt of the request.

6.8 Copies of all decisions by the Town Clerk or the Council relating to the categorisation of a person as an unreasonably persistent or vexatious complainant will be retained at the Council offices.

7. Timescales for dealing with unreasonably persistent or vexatious complainants

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Stage one	Complaint received that appears to be unreasonably persistent or vexatious.	Day 1
	Complaint is acknowledged within 5 days of receipt	Day 5
	The Clerk and Mayor (or Councillor) will examine the complaint. If the complaint is not judged to be unreasonably persistent or vexatious the Council's normal Complaints Procedure will apply. If the complaint is judged to be unreasonably persistent or vexatious the Town Clerk and Mayor or appointed Councillor will determine what action to take against the complainant. A response will be sent to the complainant no later than 15 days from the date of receipt of complaint.	Day 15
Stage two	If the Town Clerk and the Mayor or other appointed Councillor are unable to agree upon whether the complainant is persistent or vexatious; or what action should be taken against the complainant, a Special meeting of the Council shall be called as soon as practicable and, in any event, at least seven clear working days after the Town Clerk and Mayor/Councillor are unable to agree.	As soon as practicable after the disagreement on action to be taken.
Stage three	Full Council meets to determine matters that could not be agreed upon in Stage 2 above. Once Full Council has determined the course of action a response will be sent to the complainant not more than 14 working days from the date of the meeting.	14 working days from date of Full Council decision

LONE WORKING POLICY

1. Aim and Objectives

This procedure is designed to help and encourage employees to be alert to the risks presented by lone working, to identify the responsibilities each person has in this situation, and to describe procedures which will minimise such risks. It is not intended to raise anxiety unnecessarily but to give staff a framework for managing potentially risky situations.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all employees who may be working alone at any time. This supports the Council's overall policies relating to safer working practices and should be read in conjunction with these. It forms part of the Health and Safety procedure.

3. Definition

Lone working refers to situations where staff in the course of their duties work alone in the community or are the only staff presence in a location. They will be physically isolated from colleagues and without access to immediate assistance.

4. The Procedure

- All duties start and finish at 49 High Street, unless by prior agreement with the Town Clerk.
- At all times, staff should notify a colleague of their whereabouts when they are carrying out Council activities.
- If you are off site attending a meeting, the nature and the location of the meeting should be recorded in the PTC calendar in every instance including the likely time of your return.
- Individuals should carry a mobile phone and it is their responsibility to ensure that it is switched on and charged at all times. If for any reason your mobile phone is not working then an available number should be used and circulated to all staff prior to leaving the building. All individuals should sign in and out of the building on every occasion in accordance with Fire Regulations.
- If the Town Clerk is of the opinion that a job role holds more risk due to the nature of the job role, then a separate risk assessment will be completed to identify measures to reduce the risk.

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ALCOHOL AND DRUGS MISUSE POLICY

1. Purpose

Polegate Town Council has adopted a policy on Alcohol and Drug Misuse in the workplace in order to provide a safe and productive working environment, to promote the health, safety and wellbeing of all its employees and to comply with relevant legislation, for example, the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971.

This policy covers the use and misuse of intoxicating substances, in work or outside of work that could adversely affect work performance and/or health and safety. The definition of intoxicating substances includes:

- alcohol
- solvents
- legal and illegal drugs
- prescription drugs
- over the counter medicines, and,
- other substances.

2. POLICY AIMS

The aims of the policy are:

- To achieve a balance between supporting the employee to come forward with a problem and the need to preserve the health, safety and welfare of employees and others, the organisation's reputation and the delivery of high quality, effective services;
- To create a climate of openness which removes the tendency to conceal or deny alcohol or drug related problems;
- To encourage employees who are experiencing alcohol and drug related problems to seek appropriate assistance voluntarily at the earliest opportunity.
- To promote awareness and provide a procedure on identifying and managing alcohol and drug misuse which includes treatment as well as disciplinary action as required.

3. SCOPE

This policy applies to all employees.

The organisation also expects agency and casual workers, contractors and others working on its behalf to comply with this policy. Failure to do so is likely to result in the working arrangement being terminated.

4. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Employees responsibilities:

- to take reasonable care of themselves and others who may be affected by their action at work;
- ensure that their performance or ability to carry out their activities at work safely and competently is not impaired in any way;
- to adopt a responsible attitude towards drinking and taking prescribed and over the counter drugs and to arrive at work free from the effects of alcohol and drugs and to remain so during the working day;
- when representing Polegate Town Council outside normal working hours, including at staff social events, employees are expected to take a responsible attitude to alcohol and taking prescribed and over the counter drugs as they are representing the Council and must not jeopardise its reputation;
- To inform their line manager of prescribed and over the counter medications that may cause side effects that have potential safety implications for their duties at work;

- When seeking treatment or medicines to be aware of the conditions and side effects notified and where possible seek out alternatives that do not impair performance through drowsiness or other symptoms;
- Not possess, store, trade or sell controlled drugs on organisation premises or bring the organisation into disrepute by engaging in such activities outside of work;
- To seek help if they have concerns regarding their alcohol or drug consumption. It is recommended that the individual approaches their line manager or a member of the Management Team in the first instance to allow the organisation to arrange for the provision of appropriate support, for example, access to the Employee Assistance Programme, referral to the Occupational Health Advisor or other medical professionals;
- To co-operate with any support and assistance provided to address alcohol or drug misuse;
- Encourage colleagues with an alcohol or drug misuse problem to seek help;
- To raise concerns with an individual's line manager if they genuinely suspect that an employee may be misusing drugs or alcohol and that the individual concerned does not wish to come forward to seek help.

Managers responsibilities:

- Provide support and assistance, where appropriate and for a reasonable period, to staff who are dependent on drugs and alcohol to help their recovery. e.g. consider what reasonable adjustments can be made when an employee engaged on safety critical tasks, such as driving a van, is undertaking a period of medical treatment. This may necessitate taking advice from an Occupational Health Adviser;
- assess the risks to the health and safety of their employees under the Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999. Knowingly allowing an employee to continue working if affected by alcohol or drugs, whilst their behaviour places the employee or others at risk could make the employer liable to prosecution. Employees under the influence of alcohol or drugs will be escorted home safely by 2 members of the team (if available) and arrangements made for an initial interview at the earliest opportunity;
- Notify the Town Clerk and police if an employee is found to be in possession of drugs or to be supplying illegal substances under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971;
- To inform the Town Clerk and police of any behaviour or activity which may not be legal e.g. having a drink driving accident in a work vehicle;
- to take an objective and non-judgemental approach when counselling or interviewing employees;
- to refer employees for assistance when appropriate;
- to intervene early when there are changes in performance, behaviour, sickness levels and attendance patterns to establish whether alcohol or drug misuse is an underlying cause;
- to be alert to and to monitor changes in work performance, attendance, sickness and accident patterns;
- to refer to the disciplinary/capability procedures where appropriate; and
- to act promptly on information from staff.

5. THE PROCEDURE

Support for Employees

Polegate Town Council is committed to providing appropriate professional help and support to employees who have an alcohol or drug related problem and who seek help via their GP, or another recognised external agency. Management reserve the right, with the individual's consent, to refer the employee to the company's Occupational Health Adviser.

Help and support will not be provided for any employee who has been involved in an accident or other situation where screening in accordance with this policy has been undertaken, nor where the employee discloses an alcohol or drug dependency problem during disciplinary proceedings. Employees are therefore strongly encouraged to disclose any alcohol or drug dependency voluntarily to their line manager (or another member of the management team if preferred) and at the earliest opportunity.

During a period of treatment consideration will be given to any adjustments to the job role that may be required. This could include time off to attend appointments/treatment.

It is the responsibility of the employee's manager, in conjunction with advice from the Occupational Health Adviser, to determine a time frame for an employee to achieve a sustained improvement – a period of 6 months is often appropriate. Employees will be required to comply with an agreed programme of support during this time.

However, if performance, attendance or behaviour is unacceptable, despite any support and assistance that can be offered, ultimately dismissal may be unavoidable.

Confidentiality will be maintained but may not apply if the employee is deemed, under Health and Safety legislation, to be putting themselves or others at risk.

Performance relating to Alcohol and Drugs

Where an employee's health, attendance or work performance is affected by an alcohol or drug related problem, he or she will be dealt with under the absence or capability procedures at 12 and 13 in the Staff Handbook.

Where the employee's unsatisfactory attendance or work performance is related to an alcohol or drug related problem the Town Council may wish to refer the employee to the Occupational Health Adviser for guidance and a medical report.

Where an employee refuses to attend an Occupational Health appointment, or to give consent for a medical report, management may have to take action based on the information available to them.

After returning to work following a period of absence associated with drugs or alcohol, the employee may be requested to undergo a return to work medical with the Occupational Health Adviser, which may include follow up screening.

Should an employee's health, attendance or work performance continue to be affected and unsatisfactory, further stages of the absence and capability procedures will be followed and could ultimately lead to dismissal.

Misconduct relating to Alcohol and Drugs

Misconduct related to the consumption of alcohol or drugs will be dealt with under the Disciplinary Procedure at 14 in this Handbook as an act of gross misconduct which may result in summary dismissal.

In these circumstances, if the employee is thought to be unfit for work, he or she may be suspended from their duties whilst any investigation takes place, to minimise danger to him or herself, other employees and customers.

Where an employee's alcohol or drug related problem comes to light in the course of disciplinary proceedings, the admission of dependency may be a mitigating factor but will not necessarily result in the suspension of disciplinary action.

Examples of issues that will be subject to disciplinary action, including the possibility of dismissal are:

- deliberate disregard for personal safety and that of others associated with the use of intoxicating substances;
- unacceptable behaviour in the workplace associated with the use of intoxicating substances;
- being found incapable of performing normal duties satisfactorily and safely as a result of consuming alcohol or taking drugs;
- consuming intoxicating substances during the working day;
- possession, consumption, dealing/trafficking, selling, storage of controlled drugs either on work premises or outside of work;
- being disqualified from driving as a result of alcohol or drug related offences (when employees are required to drive a vehicle in their contract of employment);
- making vexatious or malicious allegations that a colleague is misusing intoxicating substances.

This list is not exhaustive.

6. POST INCIDENT TESTING

To assist in the implementation of this Policy an established screening procedure to test for the presence of drugs or alcohol may be used when there is good cause.

Post incident testing may be used when there are reasonable grounds to believe that alcohol or drugs could have, or potentially could have had, an adverse effect on the health and safety of an individual and/or a manager considers there is evidence that alcohol consumption or drug use has occurred.

Possible examples of incidents that may result in post incident testing could include a workplace incident/accident; signs of current intoxication whilst at work; possession of a controlled substance; discovery of an alcoholic container with a broken seal and abnormal behaviour whilst as work. (This list is not exhaustive.)

The Town Clerk is responsible for making the decision to screen an employee and for informing the employee.

The Democratic Services Officer will contact the screening organisation.

Post incident screening leading to a positive result will result in an investigatory interview and the breach of the Alcohol and Drugs Policy may be treated as a disciplinary matter. If following action under the Disciplinary Procedure, no disciplinary action is taken or that action is short of dismissal then the individual (with informed consent) will be referred to Occupational Health. An assessment will be made regarding any degree of dependency and, if necessary, a programme of appropriate support will be outlined which may include counselling. A formal report will be provided by Occupational Health to the Town Clerk and employee will have sight of such reports. Employees will be expected to attend appointments and comply with any programme of support or counselling. Failure to do so may result in the individual being subject to the Disciplinary Procedure.

At the end of a programme of support an employee will be subject to a follow up screening. A positive result at this stage may also lead to action under the Disciplinary Procedure which may result in dismissal.

7. LEVELS

The blood-alcohol level at which staff may be disciplined when being tested for alcohol is in line with the Government's legal drink/drive limit, as amended from time to time.

In the case of drugs, the threshold levels are determined in accordance with established legal and medical practice.

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INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY POLICY

1. General Statement

The Town Council recognises that the spread of electronic communications and access to multiple sources of information and access through the internet is an increasing and necessary part of work for everyone. This accessibility confers many advantages but also brings risks which need to be considered.

Recent events in several employment sectors has shown that it is in both the employer's and the employee's interest to have an appropriate policy in place relating to the use of information technology.

2. Policy

2.1 All members of staff are required to read and to comply with the conditions of the policy in respect of the way in which information technology is used. The policy includes computers and mobile devices.

2.2 The Council recognises that reasonable use of e-mail facilities to communicate brief personal non-offensive messages is acceptable and is a privilege that the Council is prepared to allow, but the amount of time spent must not be abused or it will be stopped

2.3 The Council recognises that access to professional information by e-mail or through web sites is a necessary requirement of the job of the Clerk to the Council and other staff and is permitted.

2.4 Staff are expected to use technology in a courteous, reasonable and responsible manner. The following activities are not acceptable and anyone found to be involved in them may face disciplinary action. In certain instances the matter will be considered to be gross misconduct:

- Receiving, sending or displaying offensive messages or pictures
- Using obscene language
- Improper use of e-mail
- Damaging computers, computer systems or computer networks
- Violating copyright laws
- Using others' passwords and identities (unless authorised)
- Trespassing in others' folders, works, or files
- Intentionally wasting limited resources
- Employing the Council's systems for commercial purposes
- Employing the Council's systems for illegal activities
- Downloading any commercial software

2.5 The Council encourages electronic communications with local, national and international organisations

2.6 The Council cannot control and is not responsible for the accuracy or content of information gathered over the internet. Security is maintained by appropriate software, internal computer security settings and passwords

2.7 It is a requirement of the Council and the duty of all staff to avoid deliberate use of the Council's internet connections and technology for inappropriate personal use. Staff should immediately alert the Town Clerk, or Town Mayor, as appropriate, of any suspect material found stored on a computer or elsewhere on the premises. The Council is prepared to allow staff the use of the Council's internet connections for personal access to the internet if this is carried out in their own time and whilst there is no cost to the Council.

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- 2.8 The computer equipment and software must be used as installed and staff may not install, uninstall, delete or change anything on a Council computer without the express authority of the Town Clerk or the Town Council, as appropriate.
- 2.9 The Council uses a virus checker on its computers and staff are forbidden to load data disks which have not been virus checked by the system. Access to chat rooms, gaming and personal social media is not permitted on Council computers or mobile devices.

Any concerns on the policy must be raised with the Town Clerk or the Town Mayor (as appropriate) in the first instance and will be resolved, if necessary, by the Personnel Committee or the Town Council.

This policy is subject to the normal grievance and disciplinary rules.

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SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

1. General statement

The Town Council recognises that social media – a term encompassing social networking sites, video sharing, blogging, micro-blogging and message boards – can be a useful method for communication between the Council, its customers and other bodies. This Policy instructs Council staff and Councillors in the appropriate use of social media.

2. Policy

- 2.1 All member of staff and Councillors are required to read and to comply with the conditions of the policy in respect of the way in which social media are used.
- 2.2 Except as resolved in Council, no member of staff is to set up a profile that represents or purports to represent the Council on any social networking site (for example, *Facebook*, *Twitter*), nor must any member of staff set up any additional profile(s) on such a site to which the Council already subscribes without the requisite authority.
- 2.3 The Town Clerk will appoint a single, 'Named Person' to be responsible for maintaining the Council's profile on the relevant social media site. The Named Person will be required to ensure that all details relating to the profile are kept up-to-date and that any content on the site is fresh and relevant. Other members of staff may assist the Named Person at the Town Clerk's discretion.
- 2.4 The Named Person is expected to limit the use of social media sites to the provision of information to the Council's customers. Such use would include:
 - Announcing dates of forthcoming meetings
 - Supplying links to the Council's website to enable access to minutes of meetings
 - Providing information on local events, Council initiatives and achievements
 - Advising on maintenance work due to be carried out

There is no objection to the Named Person engaging in everyday pleasantries with other users of the social media site, provided such social intercourse does not involve or lead to any of the activities listed at (6) below.

- 2.5 On sites that allow the user to become a 'friend' or 'follower' of other users of the site, the Named Person shall have the discretion to follow individuals, commercial organisations, public bodies (e.g., police) or other groups (e.g., local societies) that may be of interest to the Council or are relevant to the Council's activities. As far as possible, the Named Person should avoid following or befriending users or organisations that hold, or appear to hold, extreme views or opinions, as this might suggest to third parties that the Council endorses the views held by those other users or organisations.
- 2.6 The Named Person is not to engage in any of the following activities on any social networking or social media site that is representative of the Council:
 - Sending or displaying messages or images that are grossly offensive, racist, sexist or homophobic, or intentionally forwarding such messages or images as have been received from other users of the site.
 - Using obscene language or images
 - Publishing anything that the Council has deemed Confidential
 - Publishing anything that purports to be the Council's opinion upon a particular matter (unless authorised)
 - Violating copyright laws
 - Using others' passwords and identities (unless authorised)
 - Engaging in political debate or exhibiting political partisanship
 - Using the Council's profile to promote commercial activities (unless authorised)
 - Using the Council's profile for illegal activities
 - Any other activity that could be regarded as deliberate misuse of the Council's profile on the site

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Any member of staff found engaging in any of the above activities may face disciplinary action. In certain instances, the matter will be considered gross misconduct. Any Councillor engaging in any of the above activities may be in breach of their Code of Conduct.

- 2.7 If, during the use of a social networking or social media site, the Named Person receives any unsolicited message or image that appears to be grossly offensive, racist, sexist or homophobic, they are responsible for drawing this to the attention of the Town Clerk at the earliest opportunity. The Named Person is not to make any direct reply to the sender of the message or image.
- 2.8 The Council cannot control and is not responsible for the accuracy or content of information on other websites. For this reason, the Named Person must be circumspect when using the Council's profile to supply links to other websites or users. Where appropriate a disclaimer should be used.

Nothing in this policy prevents Councillors from having their own profiles on social media sites, nor from engaging in political debate or exhibiting political partisanship, provided that there is an indication on the Councillor's profile page that all views expressed are his or her own and do not represent the views of the Council.

Any concerns on the policy must be raised with the Town Clerk or the Town Mayor (as appropriate) in the first instance and will be resolved, if necessary, by the Personnel Committee or the Town Council.

It was resolved on 23rd February 2015 to adopt this policy and to presume this is a working document as social media develops amendments may need to be made.

It was also requested that the clerk investigate the County Council social media policies with a view to adopting similar policy statements in the future.

DIGNITY AT WORK POLICY

1.0. PURPOSE

- 1.1. In support of its value to respect others, Polegate Town Council will not tolerate the bullying or harassment of any member of staff by any other member of staff, employee, official or member. This policy outlines the specific procedures available to all employees in order to protect them from bullying and harassment and to maintain their dignity at work.

The Council will issue this policy to all employees as part of their induction and to all members as part of their welcome pack. The Council may also wish to draw the public's attention to this policy via the Data Transparency pages of the Council's website.

1.2 Definitions

Bullying

Bullying may be characterised as *a pattern of offensive, intimidating, malicious, insulting or humiliating behaviour; an abuse of this use of power or authority which tends to undermine an individual or a group of individuals, gradually eroding their confidence and capability, which may cause them to suffer stress.*

Harassment

Harassment may be characterised as *unwanted conduct that violates a person's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. This usually covers, but is not limited to, harassment on the grounds of sex, marital status, sexual orientation, race, colour, nationality, ethnic origin, religion, belief, disability or age.*

Bullying and harassment are behaviours that are unwanted by the recipient. They are generally evidence by a pattern or course of conduct, rather than being 'one off' incidents.

1.3 Examples of unacceptable behaviour

Spreading malicious rumours, insulting, ridiculing or demeaning someone, exclusion or victimisation, unfair treatment, overbearing supervision or other misuse of position or power, unwelcome sexual advances, making threats about job security, making threats of physical violence against a person or their family, deliberately undermining a competent worker by overloading work and/or constant criticism, blaming a person for others' mistakes, preventing an individual's promotion or training opportunities.

Bullying and harassment may occur face-to-face, in meetings, through written communication (including electronic communication such as email or social media), by telephone or through automatic supervision methods. It may occur on or off work premises, during or outside working hours.

1.4 The Legal position

The Council has a duty of care towards its staff under Common Law arising out of the Employment Rights Act 1996 and the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. If an employer fails to act reasonably with regard to this duty of care by allowing bullying or harassment to continue unchallenged an employee may decide to resign and claim 'constructive dismissal' at an Employment Tribunal. From 6th April 2008, changes to the Sex Discrimination Act mean Council has a duty of care towards all staff and liability under common law arising out of the Employment Rights Acts 1996 and the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.

In addition, the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 and the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 created a criminal offence of harassment with a fine and/or prison sentence, and a right to damages for the victim. An individual causing harassment may be personally liable to pay damages if a victim complains to an Employment Tribunal on the grounds of discrimination. The 1997 Act was originally designed to assist in stalking situations but case law has demonstrated that it can be relevant to employment disputes; for instance, employers can be vicariously liable for harassment received in the workplace, that the conduct is viewed as 'serious', or 'oppressive and unacceptable', that a 'course of conduct' needs to be established but that this can link incidents which are separated by long time periods and that the damages for personal injury and distress can be awarded under the Act.

1.5 Penalties

Bullying and harassment by any employee can be considered as serious misconduct, which will be dealt with through the Council's Disciplinary Procedure (Policy no. 2) at Gross Misconduct level and may result in summary dismissal from the Council. If the person bullying or harassing a member of staff is an elected Councillor, then the matter should be referred to Monitoring Officer at Wealden District Council Standards Board as a contravention of the Member's Code of Conduct. In extreme cases, harassment (see Section 1.4 above) may constitute a criminal offence. The Council should take the appropriate legal advice if a criminal offence of harassment is alleged or suspected.

2.0 **PROCESS FOR DEALING WITH BULLYING AND HARASSMENT**

2.1. Informal approach

Any member of staff who feels s/he is being bullied or harassed should try to resolve the problem informally in the first instance. It may be sufficient to explain to the person(s) involved in the unwanted behaviour, or to an intermediary, that their conduct is unacceptable, offensive or causing discomfort. Any member of staff who believes s/he is being bullied or harassed is advised and encouraged to make a record of any incidents, including the date, time, the behaviour complained of and details of witnesses, if any.

2.2. Formal approach

Where the employee feels unable to resolve the matter informally, s/he should report the matter to the Town Clerk. The Town Clerk will investigate and will ask the complainant to put the complaint in writing unless s/he has already done so. Any statement made by the complainant and/or notes made by the Town Clerk will be treated as confidential.

Once all necessary evidence of the complaint has been gathered, the Town Clerk will invoke the Council's Disciplinary Procedure (Policy no. 2).

2.3 Disciplinary action

The Disciplinary hearing will be conducted by the Personnel Committee as per Policy no. 2. At the conclusion of a disciplinary hearing, and if the Committee is satisfied that misconduct has occurred, the Chairman will prepare a report to present to Full Council. The Council will then decide whether the circumstances warrant dismissal or a lesser course of action. The employee complained of will be informed of the Council's decision at the conclusion of the meeting.

2.4. The employee complained of may appeal Council's decision under the provisions of the Disciplinary Policy.

3.0 **Responsibilities**

3.1 All members of staff have a responsibility to ensure that their conduct towards others does not bully, harass or otherwise demean the dignity of others. If unacceptable behaviour is observed it is the duty of the person observing the behaviour to challenge the perpetrator and ask them to stop. If the member of staff witnessing the incident feels unable to confront the perpetrator (for example, where it is likely that the observer will themselves be subjected to harassment or bullying by the perpetrator), then the matter should be reported in confidence to the Town Clerk. The Town Clerk will then be required to speak to the person bullied or harassed and gather the appropriate evidence as per 2.2 above.

3.2 This policy will be reviewed annually and any necessary emendations undertaken by the Town Clerk and reported to Full Council for approval.

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PROTECTING VULNERABLE PERSONS POLICY

1. Introduction

Polegate Town Council is committed to taking all reasonable precautions to safeguard the welfare of children and vulnerable persons that use its services and promotes a safeguarding culture and environment.

2. Safeguarding

The council will endeavour or safeguard children and vulnerable persons, in that:

- The welfare of the child and vulnerable adult is paramount
- All children and vulnerable adults have the right to protection from abuse
- All suspicions and allegations of abuse will be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately
- All employees, volunteers and elected members of the council have a responsibility to report concerns to the appropriate officer
- All employees, volunteers and elected members of the council are not to deal with situations of abuse or to decide if abuse has occurred

3. Duty of care

Polegate Town Council has a duty of care to protect others from harm. This includes a range of processes including risk assessment and health and safety practices.

Allegations or suspicions of inappropriate behaviour by an employee or councillor must be referred immediately to the Town Clerk who will refer the matter to Social Services at East Sussex County Council for investigation.

You must refer – you must not investigate.

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RECRUITMENT POLICY

Introduction

The council will use the employment guidance provided in the National Joint Council for Local Government Services 'Green Book'.

The council has made clear its commitment to equal opportunities for all by the adoption of an Equal Opportunities Statement. All selection processes must take place within the framework laid down by this policy.

Aims

The key aims of the councils recruitment policy are:

- To maximise the effectiveness of the recruitment and selection process
- To ensure the recruitment and selection processes are consistent, fair and transparent, and in accordance with legislation
- To ensure the recruitment and selection processes are in accordance with the councils Equal Opportunities Statement

Applications

- a) The council will provide a job description and person specification for each vacancy, and these documents will form the basis for the selection process. The Town Clerk will be responsible for ensuring these are reviewed and reflect the current responsibilities of the role.
- b) The person specification will include a list of skills, experience and qualifications which are essential and/or desirable for the role. Candidates will be assessed and selected for interview against the person specification criteria.
- c) The job description and person specification will be included in the recruitment pack, which will also provide details of working hours, pay scales and type and length of contract.
- d) Vacancies will be advertised internally and externally, except where the council are amending a temporary or fixed-term contract to a permanent position, where the existing post-holder (assuming their performance is satisfactory) may be offered the position prior to any other advertising.
- e) The council will consider the viability of part-time and/or job share candidates for each role and will make clear in its advertisement if this will be considered.
- f) The council uses application forms for recruitment in respect of all employees and will not accept CVs alone. All potential applicants should be directed to apply formally through the official contact named in the advertisement.

Shortlisting

- a) The council will agree a shortlist panel to assess the applications. The composition of the panel will vary according to the type of post being filled.
- b) Any councillor with a personal connection to any of the candidates will be excluded from the entire selection process.

- c) As soon as possible after the closing date for applications, the shortlisting panel will select candidates for interview by assessing the information in their application form against the job description and person specification.

Interviews

- a) The Town Clerk will agree the composition of the interview panel for all positions except the Clerk when it will be the Council. The interview panel will normally comprise the members of the shortlisting panel.
- b) To ensure a consistent and fair approach, all candidates will be asked similar questions, with supplementary questions structured around each candidate to enable individuals to demonstrate their relevant skills and abilities. The questions will vary depending on the vacancy.
- c) The interview panel must take extreme care to ensure they do not imply discrimination by asking questions about personal circumstances which are unrelated to the job. Such questions are contrary to the councils Equal Opportunities Statement.
- d) Each member of the interview panel will take notes to support their assessment of the candidates' suitability for the role, and the panel may agree a scoring system to help objectively assess the candidates.
- e) Once all the candidates have been interviewed the panel members should compare their notes and agree the most suitable candidate, ensuring their decision is based on the criteria in the job description and person specification. If it has been agreed that none of the candidates are satisfactory, none will be appointed and the position will be re-advertised.

Notification and appointment

- a) Post interview arrangements are the responsibility of the Town Clerk, or where the vacancy is for the Town Clerk role, a locum Clerk and the Chairman of Personnel Committee.
- b) Candidates should be notified as soon as possible of the outcome. A verbal offer of appointment may be made to the successful candidate but must be formally confirmed in writing. The offer is conditional on obtaining satisfactory references and, where applicable, proof of eligibility to work in the UK and any copies of qualification certificates.
- c) If unsatisfactory responses to references are received, the council may reconsider the offer of appointment. If the offer is subsequently withdrawn, the council may make an offer to one of the original unsuccessful candidates or decide to begin the recruitment process again.

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RECRUITMENT OF EX-OFFENDERS POLICY

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This policy is designed to ensure that Polegate Town Council treats applicants who have a criminal record fairly and does not discriminate because of a conviction or other information revealed through the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS).
- 1.2 As an organisation using the DBS service to assess applicants' suitability for positions of trust, Polegate Town Council complies fully with the DBS Code of Practice and undertakes to treat all applications for positions fairly. It undertakes not to discriminate unfairly against any subject of a Disclosure because of a conviction or other information revealed.

2. Key points

- Polegate Town Council complies fully with the DBS Code of Practice
- All applicants for positions are treated fairly
- The Council selects candidates for interview based on their skills, qualifications and experience
- The Council only requests a DBS Disclosure where it is sufficiently relevant to the position concerned
- The Council keeps all information private and confidential, in accordance with the Data Protection Act
- The Council takes into careful consideration the relevance and circumstances of offences.

3. Principles

- 3.1 Polegate Town Council is committed to the fair treatment of its staff, potential staff or users of its services, regardless of race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, responsibilities for dependants, age, physical/mental disability or offending background.
- 3.2 The Council actively promotes equality of opportunity for all with the right mix of talents, skills and potential and welcomes applications from a wide range of candidates. The Council selects all candidates for interview based on their skills, qualifications and experience.

4. Disclosures

- 4.1 A DBS Disclosure is only requested after a thorough risk assessment has indicated that one is both proportionate and relevant to the position concerned. For those positions where a DBS Disclosure is required, all application forms and recruitment briefs will contain a statement that a DBS Disclosure will be requested in the event of the individual being offered the position.
- 4.2 Where a DBS Disclosure is to form part of the recruitment process, the Council encourages all applicants called for interview to provide details of their criminal record at an early stage in the application process. This information can either be stated in the relevant section of the application form or can be sent with the application in a sealed envelope marked 'strictly confidential', where it will be processed with appropriate discretion by the Town Clerk.

5. Previous offences

- 5.1 The Council requires all applicants to disclose criminal convictions. Some posts require information relating to both 'spent' and 'unspent' convictions whereas other posts require 'unspent' information only. The information provided will be treated strictly confidentially. Applicants who have been shortlisted for posts involving regular contact with children or vulnerable adults will be required to apply for either a standard or enhanced Disclosure from the Criminal Records Bureau.
- 5.2 The Council ensures that all those in Polegate Town Council who are involved in the recruitment process are suitably advised to identify and assess the relevance and circumstances of offences.

5.3 At interview or in a separate discussion, the Council ensures that an open and measured discussion takes place about any offences or other matter that might be relevant to the position.

6. Withdrawal of an offer of employment

6.1 Failure to reveal information that is directly relevant to the position sought could lead to withdrawal of an offer of employment.

6.2 Having a criminal record will not necessarily bar you from working with Polegate Town Council. This will depend on the nature of the position and the circumstances and background of your offences.

DRAFT

EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERING POLICY

Policy Aim

The aim of this policy is to enable all employees of Polegate Town Council to undertake volunteer work during working hours as part of the community leadership role of the Town Council and to encourage employees to contribute to their local community.

Policy Scope

This policy applies to all staff once they have successfully completed their probationary period.

Benefits of Volunteering

Volunteering can provide benefits to individuals as well as to the organisation. The benefits of volunteering are that it:

- helps the organisation meet its objective to be a community leader;
- improves the public perception of the organisation;
- develops and strengthens partnerships with other organisations;
- allows employees to develop their skills and abilities;
- improves teamworking and communication across sections;
- supports employees in making the transition from employment to retirement;
- improves employee motivation and morale;
- attracts new recruits and help retain existing employees;
- encourages other organisations to do the same if the Town Council leads by example, thereby building capacity.

Employer Support for Volunteering

- a) Employees are entitled to apply for up to three days volunteering leave per annum (pro-rata for part time staff) provided that they are prepared to match that with their own time. The time off will be paid. The time off does not have to be used all at once, for example, it may be taken as an hour a week to listen to reading in a school. The Town Council will not pay Travel and Subsistence costs. The individual should investigate whether the voluntary organisation chosen is able to pay expenses.
- b) In exceptional circumstances, such as national events, employees may be able to apply for longer periods of volunteering leave with the agreement of the Town Clerk and in consultation with the Chairman of the Personnel Committee as appropriate. The requirement to contribute a maximum of 3 days annual leave, where the activity is not part of the employee's personal development plan, still applies.
- c) If appropriate, volunteering can be considered as one of the methods for meeting development needs and in these circumstances the employee does not have to match the volunteering with their own time (unless they wish to) and travel and subsistence will be paid.
- d) The employee will decide which organisation to volunteer for.

How to apply

- a) Where an employee is volunteering for training and development purposes they must discuss and agree the need with their line manager during their Performance and Development Review and include it in their Personal Development Plan. They must then make arrangements with the voluntary group that they have chosen. The Employee Volunteer Scheme Application Form must be completed by the volunteer and passed to the Town Clerk for approval. Attached to the form must be copies of current insurance certificates for the organisation they will be volunteering for as set out in paragraph 27.7b.
- b) Where an employee is applying for volunteering leave they need to apply to their line manager to have time off and make arrangements with the voluntary group they have chosen. An Employee Volunteer Scheme Form must be completed and passed to the CEO for approval. Attached to the form must be copies of current insurance certificates for the organisation they will be volunteering for as set out in paragraph 27.7b.

How to approve an application (Managers)

- a) When considering sponsoring or promoting an application for volunteering managers need to consider the following factors;
 - the involvement supports the Town Council's Community Leadership role;
 - there is no conflict of interest;
 - the Council can accommodate the time implications of the activity (maximum up to 3 days, pro rata for part time staff);
 - the individual will develop as a result of the activity;
 - the activity will not bring the Council into disrepute;
 - the activity is appropriate for the individual concerned.
- b) The decision of the Town Clerk will be final and will be based on a completed form and the relevant insurance certificates as requested in section 27.5 'How to Apply' para a, b and in section 'Health and Safety para b.

Health and Safety

- a) Whilst the Town Council is not responsible for any volunteering activity that employees undertake, managers and employees should satisfy themselves that risks have been considered and accepted before an activity is undertaken as a risk assessment may be necessary. Guidance can be obtained from the Town Clerk.
- b) The Town Council's Insurance may provide cover if the voluntary work is broadly related to Council activities e.g. litter picking. If the work is outside of Town Council activity e.g. cleaning out at a donkey rescue centre, the Town Council's insurance will not provide cover. Volunteers need to check with the Town Clerk whether their activity is covered by the Town Council's insurers or not. Volunteers also need to prove that the Voluntary Organisation has Employer and Public Liability policies that cover volunteers.

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EMPLOYEE EXPENSES POLICY**Introduction**

This policy applies to all employees of the council and provides a framework to show how an employee can claim and be reimbursed for reasonable and authorised expenses that are incurred during their normal course of work.

Expectations

Employees are expected to:

- Behave honestly, responsibly and within the guidelines of this policy
- Submit expenses claims within reasonable timescales, on approved forms and provide enough information to explain the need for the expense
- Keep all receipts and provide VAT receipts (where appropriate) to allow the council to reclaim the VAT

The council will:

- Check claimed expenses are authorised in line with this policy
- Approve and pay legitimate claims promptly

If an employee fails to comply with this policy, this may delay reimbursement or cause claims to be rejected. Persistent or deliberate non-compliance may result in disciplinary action.

Travel related claims

The council has followed the guidance of HM Revenue and Customs in setting the following travel related expense rates:

- Private car mileage – 45p per mile (up to a maximum of 10,000 miles per annum, thereafter 25p per mile)
- Additional passenger mileage in a private car – 5p per mile per passenger
- Motorcycle mileage – 24p per mile
- Bicycle mileage – 20p per mile
- Rail or bus fare – reimbursement of cost (standard class) as shown on ticket
- Parking – reimbursement of cost as shown on ticket (only where no free parking is available within reasonable walking distance)

The council may amend these rates if guidance from HM Revenue and Customs changes, or alternate legislation recommends changes.

Mileage should only be claimed for distances in excess of normal travel to work. You cannot claim mileage for normal travel between home and work.

The council will not, under any circumstances, reimburse employees for penalty fines incurred due to speeding, unsafe driving or any other motoring offence, parking fines or fines for failing to purchase the correct ticket on public transport.

Other expenses claims

The following expenses are acceptable, and employees will be reimbursed for:

- Overnight accommodation and sustenance where required for attendance at a work-related event (where agreed in advance with the line manager)
- Professional membership fees (where relevant and agreed in advance with the line manager)
- Annual eye-testing (for employees who regularly use Visual Display Units (VDU's))

Claims process

- a) Employees must complete an approved expenses claim form (appendix B) promptly after incurring expenses (and no later than three months after the claim date) and submit to their line manager for approval.
- b) The line manager is responsible for checking the claim complies with this policy and includes receipts (where applicable). Once satisfied, the line manager will sign the form, thereby authorising the payment to be made.
- c) Payment will be made direct to the employee (not through the payroll) either by cheque or direct credit to their nominated bank account.
- d) Any employee unsure whether a claim is likely to be accepted is advised to speak to their line manager prior to incurring the expense

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REDUNDANCY POLICY

Policy Aim

- a) It is the aim of Polegate Town Council to ensure, as far as possible, security of employment and the avoidance of compulsory redundancies for its employees by means of effective forward planning. However, from time to time circumstances may make it necessary to consider reductions in staffing levels. In that event, the provisions of this policy shall be applied.
- b) The purpose of this policy is to ensure that, wherever staffing reductions are considered necessary:
 - all staff who are affected by the anticipation of a redundancy situation and compulsory redundancy will be given fair and equitable treatment;
 - wherever practicable, redundancies will be avoided and alternative measures considered such as flexible working, reduction in overtime, early retirement, seeking voluntary redundancies, retraining or redeployment into existing vacancies; and,
 - so far as possible, changes will be affected with the understanding and agreement of the staff involved.
- c) This policy reflects the size of the Town Council and therefore no reference is made to statutory provision for collective redundancies of 100 staff or more under the Collective Redundancies and Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1995. In addition, the Town Council does not recognise a Trade Union for collective bargaining purposes and no reference is made to consulting Trade Unions (where applicable) as set out in statute. However, where redundancies of 2 or more are proposed, employees will be invited to elect an appropriate number of employee representatives for consultation purposes. These representatives will take part in the consultation on behalf of all affected staff.

Policy Scope

This procedure applies to all staff of the Town Council, including those on Fixed Term Contracts provided that they have at least 2 years continuous local government service at the time of the redundancy.

Redundancy and the Law

- a) Redundancy arises where the Council ceases to operate, relocates, no longer needs as many employees to carry out a specific function or where a specific job is no longer required.
- b) Redundancy is a dismissal in law. The dismissal must result from a diminution or cessation of the employer's need for employees to carry out work of a particular kind or in a particular place. This does not necessarily mean that the workforce as a whole is being reduced in number, or that the overall work has been reduced. A redundancy can occur in an organisation that is growing, if that growth requires a change in the way work is organised, leading to one or more jobs of a particular kind no longer being needed.

Notification

Written notification of pending redundancies has to be given to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) at least 30 days before the first dismissal if between 20 and 99 employees are likely to be made redundant. There is no requirement to notify BIS if less than 20 employees are expected to be made redundant.

Consultation

- a) Consultation with all affected staff must start at least 30 days before the first dismissal takes effect when between 20 and 99 employees are likely to be made redundant. Consultation must happen as soon as there are formulated proposals which imply a reduction in the workforce.
- b) For 19 or less employees there is no statutory minimum period, but employers are required to consult as soon as possible. Where only an individual employee is likely to be selected for redundancy, consultation is also necessary and must begin as soon as possible. As a good practice employer the Town Council will apply the 30 day rule as set out at 31.4.
- c) Consultation must be meaningful taking into account the views of the affected staff. Where redundancies of 2 or more are proposed, employees will be invited to elect an appropriate number of employee representatives for consultation purposes in accordance with 31.1c. In all cases staff will be notified in writing of the following:
 - the reasons for the redundancies;
 - the number of redundancies and in which job categories;
 - the total number of employees of that description employed at the Town Council;
 - the proposed selection criteria;
 - the proposed redundancy procedure and timescale; and,
 - the proposed method of calculating the amount of any redundancy payments.

In addition, consultation will include constructive discussion of ways and means of avoiding redundancy and how the Council can help to limit the effects on those that may be dismissed by reason of redundancy.

- d) Consultation must still be carried out where only one person is proposed for redundancy. The employee will be given the opportunity to comment on their selection and to challenge the results. During consultation individuals will receive an explanation of why and how the individual post has been selected, possible ways of avoiding the redundancy e.g. by offering retraining and possible alternative work.
- e) Consultation should take place whilst the proposals are still at the formative stage and employees given adequate information and time to respond. Any counter proposals offered by either staff or the individual employee involved, should be responded to in writing. All redundancy proposals will be made by the Town Clerk in conjunction with the appropriate member of the Office Team. All redundancy proposals will be approved by the Personnel Committee.
- f) The consultation process must conclude before any redundancy notices are issued.

Selection for Redundancy

- a) The first stage in selection is to identify the pool of job holders who may be affected. A pool could be one employee or the whole workforce depending on the need driving the decision e.g. shutting down a service (so the employee(s) delivering that service would be the pool) or saving x% from the payroll budget (so all employees would be potentially affected).
- b) Once the pool has been identified, the next stage is to identify the selection criteria that will be applied. The Council will seek to agree the selection criteria with the employee representatives. In selecting for redundancy the Council will ensure that the selection criteria are fair, that they are used in an objective way and applied consistently to ensure that no employees are unfairly selected for redundancy. Fair criteria include:
 - skills and qualifications;
 - experience;
 - standard of work performance;
 - conduct/disciplinary record; and,

- attendance record (however, the Council will be mindful of any absence related to disability).
- c) It is automatically unfair to select employees for redundancy because of Trade Union membership, activity, non-membership or acting as an employee representative, gender including transgender, marital or civil partnership status, race, religion, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, disability, pregnancy, maternity, paternity, adoption, parental or dependents leave, age or for seeking to enforce a statutory right. In addition, it may be unfair if they are selected for redundancy because they are employed on a fixed term or part time basis or have caring responsibilities.

Redundancy Compensation

- a) An entitlement to redundancy pay arises when an employee has two years' continuous service with the same employer or one covered by The Redundancy Payments (Continuity of Employment in Local Government, etc) (Modification) Order 1999 (known as the Modification Order).
- b) In calculating entitlement to, and the amount of, a redundancy payment, the Town Council must count **all** continuous local government service and other relevant service up to a maximum of 20 years under the Modification Order.
- c) The statutory calculation for each year of service that counts is as follows:
- d) The Town Council has agreed to calculate the redundancy payment as per the statutory requirement.
- e) The Town Council has the discretion to purchase on behalf of the employee additional annual pension up to the value of £5,000 (this may be purchased in multiples of £250 up to the maximum value of £5,000) in addition to the redundancy compensation at 18.15.7. Polegate Town Council has elected not to apply this discretion.

Notice Period

The amount of notice that an employee is entitled to receive is set out in s.86 of the ERA 1996 as set out below, unless the contract of employment with Polegate Town Council provides for a greater period.

Length of continuous service with the Town Council	Notice required
One month but less than two years	One week
Two years but less than three years	Two weeks
Each additional year	One additional week
Twelve years plus	Twelve weeks

Support

- a) Where practical redundancies will be avoided but where an employee has been issued with a notice of redundancy the following support is available:
 - an entitlement to reasonable time off during working hours, with the prior agreement of the Town Clerk to seek new employment (e.g. to attend an interview or visit a recruitment agency), or make arrangements for training for future employment;
 - a trial period of four weeks when an employee is redeployed into another post to establish whether the new job is suitable without necessarily losing the right to a redundancy payment. Trial periods can be extended to a maximum of 12 weeks to allow for retraining by mutual agreement; and,
 - the employee may ask to be allowed to leave the Council's employment before the expiry of their notice period and

if agreed, this will not invalidate the right to a redundancy payment.

b) Where an employee has been redeployed the following is available:

- salary protection for 3 years where the employee is redeployed into a job at a lower grade than their redundant post. At the expiry of the 3 year period the full terms and conditions of the lower graded post will take effect and the employee's salary will reduce to the maximum scale point of the new grade; and,
- the possibility of protecting pension benefits by the issue of a Certificate of Protection of Pension Benefit and where this is applicable, advice should be sought from the Town Clerk.

c) Further advice and guidance can be sought from the Town Clerk by all staff and at any point in the redundancy process.

Appeals

a) An employee who has had their employment terminated on grounds of redundancy has the right of appeal against their dismissal.

b) The employee should write to the Town Clerk within 5 working days of receiving the notice of redundancy stating one of these specific reasons for appeal:

- the selection criteria used was unfair or unfairly applied; or
- the employer did not seek alternative employment and details as to why this is applicable to their situation.

c) On receipt of the appeal the Town Clerk will inform the Appeal Panel consisting of Members of the Council who will arrange a meeting as soon as possible and normally within 5 working days. The employee will be invited to the meeting and informed of their right to be accompanied by a work colleague or trade union representative at the appeal meeting. At the appeal meeting the employee will have the opportunity to present oral and/or written submissions. The Appeals Panel will carefully consider the matter and provide a written response normally within 5 working days. The employee will be informed that this is the final stage of the procedure and the decision of the Appeals Panel is final.

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SEVERE WEATHER POLICY

Policy Aim

The aim of this policy is to set out the Town Council's approach to dealing with the disruption of severe weather (or other emergency) to travel to and attendance at work.

Policy Scope

This policy applies to all employees of the Town Council.

Policy Principles

In adverse weather conditions the Town Council will have due regard to the health and safety of employees.

In general, employees have an obligation to carry out their normal contractual hours during adverse weather conditions.

The Town Council has a duty to pay a normal day's pay when employees are capable of working and the Town Council prevents them from so doing. For example, the Town Council may close the Office or instruct the employee not to travel to work.

An employee's ability to undertake work will depend on their role and their ability to work from alternative locations in an emergency.

Responses to Absence and Lateness

Managers and staff should discuss as soon as possible how any absence from the workplace or lateness caused by extreme weather conditions should be treated.

When employees have difficulty in carrying out their work as normal the Town Council will consider the following responses.

Working from another location - Home working and home-based working may be a feasible response for a limited number of staff in the circumstances.

Flexible working or leave - Employees who will be absent or delayed or who wish to leave work early because of worsening conditions should agree this with their manager.

In these circumstances where an employee attends work, they will receive a normal day's pay regardless of the hours spent working. Where an employee cannot make it to their normal place of work and are unable to work from home or another local authority workplace they will need to take the time as annual leave, lieu time make up lost hours or take unpaid leave.

Absence due to childcare commitments because of school closures

As a result of school closures some employees may need to take time off to care for their dependent children. Other dependants, older or disabled relatives may also need caring for in a severe weather emergency. Policy 17 "Time off for dependent care" covers circumstances such as these and should be read in conjunction with this policy. Dependency leave is not a right to take extended leave, but only the right to take off what time is reasonable to allow the unforeseen event to be dealt with.

Misuse of these arrangements

If the Council has reason to suspect that an employee is abusing this flexible approach to lateness or absence, a full investigation will be undertaken in line with the disciplinary policy. If such abuse is established it will be treated as any other form of unauthorised absence.

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WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

What is Whistleblowing

Whistleblowing occurs when an employee raises a serious concern about malpractice or wrongdoing or provides information about illegal or dishonest practices within an organisation that has come to their attention through their work.

The concern may be about something that:

- Is unlawful or illegal
- is a failure to comply with a legal duty
- Is a miscarriage of justice
- Is against the Council's Standing Orders or policies
- Amounts to improper conduct
- Endangers the health and safety of any person
- Is unauthorised use of public funds
- Is fraudulent or corrupt
- Might cause damage to the environment.

Policy Aim

Employees may often be the first to realise that there may be something seriously wrong with an aspect of the Council's work. However, they may not express their concerns because they feel that speaking up would be disloyal to their colleagues or the Council.

The aim of this policy is to:

- encourage employees to feel confident about raising concerns about any aspect of the Town Council's work;
- to provide a process for those concerns to be raised in confidence and for the employee to receive feedback on any action taken; and,
- to reassure employees that they will be protected from possible reprisals or bullying if they have a reasonable belief that a disclosure has been made in good faith.

Policy Scope

This policy applies to any person who works for the Town Council including those who are temporary, agency, an apprentice or on work experience and those contractors working for the Council on Council Premises, e.g. Edburtons.

Policy Principles

The Council is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability. In line with that commitment it expects employees, and others that it deals with, who have serious concerns about any aspect of the Council's work to come forward and voice those concerns.

It has been written in accordance with the requirements of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, which protects workers making disclosures about matters of concern where they may have reasonable grounds for believing they are true.

This policy is not intended to address grievances relating to individual employment. A separate Grievance Procedure exists for this purpose at 15 in the Staff Handbook.

Safeguarding and Victimisation

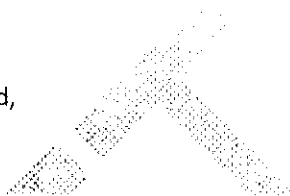
The Council recognises that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make. If what you are saying is true, you should have nothing to fear because you will be doing your duty to your employer and those for whom you provide a service. The Council will not tolerate any harassment or victimisation and will take action to protect you when you raise a concern in good faith.

Confidentiality

All concerns will be treated in confidence and every effort will be made not to reveal your identity if you so wish. At the appropriate time, however, you may need to come forward as a witness.

This policy encourages you however to put your name to your concern whenever possible. Please note that you:

- must disclose the information in good faith;
- must believe it to be substantially true;
- must **not** act maliciously or make false allegations; and,
- must **not** seek any personal gain.



How to raise a concern

You should normally raise concerns with the Town Clerk. If you believe the Town Clerk is involved you should inform the Mayor.

Concerns are best raised in writing but can be raised face to face. The information required to investigate an allegation are details of the background and history of the concern, names, dates and places and the reason for the concern.

If you are a member of a trade union or a professional association you may prefer to invite them to raise the matter on your behalf.

How the council will respond

The action taken by the Council will depend on the nature of the concern. The matters raised may:

- Be investigated internally;
- Be referred to the Police;
- Be referred the external auditor; or,
- Form the subject of an independent inquiry.

In order to protect individuals and the Council, initial enquiries will be made to decide whether an investigation is appropriate and if so what form it should take. Some concerns may be resolved by agreed action without the need for investigation.

Within 10 working days of a concern being received, the appropriate officer will write to you:

- Acknowledging receipt of the concern;
- Indicating how the matter will be dealt with;
- Telling you if any initial enquiries have been made; and,
- Telling you whether further investigation will take place and, if not, why not.

The amount of contact between the people considering the issues and you, will depend on the nature of the matters raised, the potential difficulties involved and the clarity of information provided. If necessary, further information will be sought from you.

POLEGATE TOWN COUNCIL EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK

When any meeting is arranged you have the right, if you so wish, to be accompanied by a union or professional association representative or a friend not involved in the area of work to which the concern relates.

The Council will take steps to minimise any difficulties which you may experience as a result of raising a concern. For instance, if you are required to give evidence in criminal or disciplinary proceedings, the Council will advise you about procedure.

The Council accepts that you need to be assured that the matter has been properly addressed. Thus, subject to legal constraints, you will receive information about the outcomes of any investigations.

How the matter can be taken further

This policy is intended to provide you with an avenue to raise concerns within the Council. If you feel you are not satisfied with the Council response you may feel it is right to take the matter to:

- The Town Council Auditor
- The relevant professional body or regulatory organisation
- Your solicitor
- The police
- Your local Citizens Advice Bureau

You will need to ensure that you do not disclose confidential information or that disclosure would be privileged and you should check this point with your contact.

Independent Advice

Public Concern at Work is an independent charity that provides free confidential advice for employees who are considering expressing concerns covered by this policy. They can be contacted at www.pcaw.org.uk/advice

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