

Anti-harassment, bullying & discrimination policy

We are committed to creating a workplace free from harassment, bullying & and discrimination, to ensure that all employees, & volunteers are treated with dignity & respect, regardless of gender status sexual orientation, marital or family status, colour, race, nationality, ethnic or national origins, creed, culture, religion or belief, age or disability.

This policy & procedure is intended to support this commitment in practice & to provide guidance to staff on how to deal with concerns of bullying, harassment, or discrimination.

Policy

We will not tolerate bullying, harassment, or discrimination in the workplace or at work-related events outside of the workplace, whether the conduct is a one-off act or repeated conduct, & whether done purposefully or not. Neither will we tolerate retaliation against, or victimisation of, any person involved in bringing a complaint of harassment, bullying or discrimination. Retaliation or victimisation will also constitute a disciplinary offence, which may in appropriate circumstances lead to dismissal.

We will take appropriate action if any of our employees or volunteers are bullied, harassed, or discriminated against by others.

Allegations of bullying, harassment or discrimination will be treated seriously. Investigations will be carried out promptly, sensitively &, as far as possible, confidentially. If, after an investigation, we decide that an employee has harassed, bullied, or discriminated against another employee or volunteer, then the employee may be subject to disciplinary action, up to & including dismissal. Employees & others who make allegations of bullying, harassment or discrimination in good faith will not be treated less favourably as a result. False accusations of harassment, bullying or discrimination can have a serious effect on innocent individuals. Staff & others have a responsibility not to make false allegations. False allegations made in bad faith will be dealt with under our disciplinary procedure.

What type of treatment amounts to bullying, harassment or discrimination?

Bullying, harassment or discrimination is something that happens that is unwelcome, unwarranted & causes a detrimental effect. If employees complain they are being bullied, harassed, or discriminated against then they have a grievance which must be dealt with regardless of whether their complaint accords with a standard definition.

It is important to recognise that conduct which one person finds acceptable, another may find totally unacceptable. All employees must therefore treat their colleagues with respect & appropriate sensitivity.

Bullying does not include appropriate criticism of an employee's behaviour or proper performance management.

Reporting concerns

What you should do if you witness an incident you believe to be harassment, bullying or discrimination:

- report the incident in confidence to the CEO. This will be taken seriously & will be treated in strict confidence as far as it is possible to do so.

What you should do if you are being bullied, harassed, or discriminated against by a colleague:

- there are two possible avenues for you, informal resolution or formal complaint.

Informal Resolution

You may be able to resolve the situation yourself by explaining clearly to the perpetrator(s) that their behaviour is unacceptable & must stop. Alternatively, you may wish to ask the CEO or a colleague to put this on your behalf or to be with you when confronting the perpetrator(s).

If the above approach does not work or if you do not want to try to resolve the situation in this way, or if you are being bullied, harassed, or discriminated against by your CEO, you should raise the issue with the Chair of trustees who will discuss the option of trying to resolve the situation informally by:

- telling the alleged perpetrator(s), without prejudging the matter, that there has been a complaint that their behaviour is having an adverse effect on a fellow employee.
- that such behaviour is contrary to Village Water's policy
- that the continuation of such behaviour could amount to a serious disciplinary offence.

It may be possible for the CEO /Chair to have this conversation with the alleged perpetrator without revealing your name, if this is what you want. They will also stress that the conversation is confidential.

In certain circumstances we may be able to involve a neutral third party to facilitate a resolution of the problem.

If your complaint is resolved informally, the alleged perpetrator(s) will not usually be subject to disciplinary sanctions. However, in exceptional circumstances (such as a serious allegation of sexual or racial harassment or discrimination, or in cases where a problem has happened before) further investigation may be needed, & formal action taken, even if you raised the matter informally. We will consult with you before taking this step.

Should your complaint be against the CEO, you should approach the Chair of trustees.

Formal complaint

If informal resolution is unsuccessful or inappropriate, you can make a formal complaint about the harassment, bullying or discrimination to the CEO or the Chair. This may ultimately lead to disciplinary action against the perpetrator(s).

We will first investigate the complaint. You will need to co-operate with the investigation & provide the following details (if not already provided).

- The name of the alleged perpetrator(s)
- The nature of the harassment, bullying or discrimination.
- When the harassment, bullying or discrimination occurred.
- The names of any witnesses.
- Any action taken by you to resolve the matter informally.

The alleged perpetrator(s) would need to be told your name & the details of your complaint in order for the issue to be investigated properly. However, we will carry out the investigation as confidentially & sensitively as possible. Where you & the alleged perpetrator(s) work in proximity to each other, we will consider whether it is appropriate to separate you while the matter is being investigated.

After the investigation, we will meet with you to consider the complaint & the findings of the investigation. At the meeting, you may be accompanied by a fellow worker or an independent person.

After the meeting (& normally within five working days) we will write to you to inform you of our decision & to notify you of your right to appeal to a higher level if you are dissatisfied with the outcome. You should put your appeal in writing explaining the reasons why you are dissatisfied with our decision. You should submit your appeal within five working days of receiving written confirmation of our decision. If you submit an appeal, you will be invited to attend a meeting to consider it. Once again you may be accompanied by a fellow worker or independent person. We will write to you afterwards to confirm our final decision.

Use of the disciplinary procedure

Harassment, bullying and discrimination constitute serious misconduct. If, at any stage from the point at which a complaint is raised, we believe there is a case to answer & a disciplinary offence might have been committed, we will instigate our disciplinary procedure. Any employee found to have harassed, bullied or discriminated against a colleague will be liable to disciplinary action up to & including summary dismissal.

Signed



Andrew Picken

Chair of Board of Trustees

Approved 18 April 2024