DIGNITY AT WORK POLICY

1) Introduction

1.1 Howden Town Council believed that civility and respect are important in the working environment, and expects all members, staff and the public to be polite and courteous when working for and with the Council.

1.2 The Council is committed to creating a working environment where all Council employees, members and contractors and others who come into contact with us in the course of our work, are treated with dignity, respect and courtesy. We aim to create a workplace where there is zero tolerance for harassment and bullying.

1.3 The Council recognises that unaddressed issues have the potential to escalate to become larger and more complex issues and this policy sets out how concerns will be managed with an emphasis on resolution and mediation (where appropriate) rather than an adversarial process.

2) Principles

2.1 The Town Council will not tolerate bullying or harassment at the workplace or at work-related events outside the workplace, whether such conduct is a one-off act or repeated, and whether harm is intended or not.

2.2 Neither will the Council tolerate retaliation against, or victimisation of, any person involved in bringing a complaint of harassment or bullying.

2.3 Allegations of bullying and harassment will be treated seriously, and investigations will be carried out promptly, sensitively and, as far as possible, confidentially in line with the Council's grievance procedures.

2.4 False accusations of harassment or bullying can have a serious effect on innocent individuals. Staff and others have a responsibility not to make false allegations. The Council will assume that all complaints of bullying and harassment are made in good faith, in the event that allegations are found to be malicious or vexatious the person raising the complaint may be subject to action under the Council's disciplinary procedures.

3) Definitions

3.1 Harassment is where a person is subject to uninvited conduct that violates their dignity, in connection with a protected characteristic and behaviour which creates a hostile, humiliating, degrading or similarly offensive environment in relation to a protected characteristic.

3.2 Bullying is behaviour that leaves the victim feeling threatened, intimidated, humiliated, vulnerable or otherwise upset. It does not need to be connected to a protected characteristic.

4) **Examples of bullying and harassment include:**

- Physical conduct ranging from unwelcome touching to serious assault
- Unwelcome sexual advances
- The offer of rewards for going along with sexual advances eg promotion, access to training
- Threats for rejecting sexual advances
- Demeaning comments about a person's appearance
- Verbal abuse of offensive comments, including jokes or pranks related to protected characteristics
- Unwanted nicknames, especially related to protected characteristics
- Threats in relation to taking it not taking part in a particular course of action
- Spreading malicious rumours or insulting someone
- Lewd or suggestive comments or gestures
- Deliberate exclusion from conversations, work activities or social activities
- Withholding information a person needs in order to do their job
- Practical jokes, initiation ceremonies or inappropriate birthday rituals
- Physical abuse such as hitting, pushing or jostling
- Rifling through, hiding or damaging personal property
- Display of pictures or objects with sexual or racial overtones, even if not directed at any particular person
- Isolation or non-cooperation at work
- Subjecting a person to humiliation or ridicule, belittling their efforts, whether directly and/or in front of others
- The use of obscene gestures
- Abusing a position of power

4.1 Behaviour that one person may find acceptable, another may find unacceptable and such behaviour could constitute bullying/harassment when the person had no intention to offend. People have the right to determine what offends them and harassment will occur if behaviour continues after a recipient has advised you that their behaviour is unacceptable.

4.2 Harassment can also occur where the unwanted behaviour relates to a perceived characteristic or due to their association with someone else. All employees must, therefore, treat their colleagues with respect and appropriate

sensitively and should feel able to challenge behaviour that they find offensive even if it is not directed at them

4.3 Bullying does not include appropriate criticism of an employee's behaviour or effective, robust performance management. Constructive and fair feedback about behaviour or performance from a manager, colleagues or members is not bullying. It is part of normal employment and management routines, and should not be interpreted as anything different.

4.4 Victimisation is subjecting a person to detriment because they have, in good faith, complained (whether formally or otherwise) that some one has been bullying or harassing them or someone else, or supported someone to make a complaint or given evidence in relation to a complaint. This would include isolating someone because they have made a complaint or giving them a heavier or more difficult workload.

4.5 Provided that one acts in good faith ie genuinely believes what they are saying is true, they have a right to not be victimised for making a complaint or doing anything in relation to a complaint of bullying or harassment and the Council will take appropriate action to deal with any alleged victimisation, which may include disciplinary action against the complainant.

5) **Raising Concern**

5.1 If you feel you are being bullied or harassed by a member of the public or a supplier, this should be raised with the Proper Officer.

5.2 A decision on how to deal with the situation will be made in consultation with you

5.3 If you feel you are being bullied or harassed by a Councillor, this should be raised with the Proper Officer. The Proper Officer will inform the Chair of Council and a decision on how to deal with the situation will be made in consultation with you. The situation will either be dealt with through informal resolution (detailed below) or through the submission of a formal complaint to the Monitoring Officer under the Councillor Code of Conduct.

5.4 The Council will consider reasonable measures to protect your health and safety. Such measures may include a temporary change in duties or change of work location, not attending meeting with the person about whom the complaint has been made etc

5.5 If you feel you are being bullied or harassed by a colleague or contractor, this should be raised with the Proper Officer. A decision on how to deal with the situation will be made in consultation with you. The situation will either be dealt with through informal resolution (see detailed below), or as a formal grievance under the Council's grievance procedures.

5) Witnessing Bullying or Harassment

5.1 If you witness an incident you believe is bullying or harassment you should report such behaviour to the Proper Officer.

5.2 As far as is practicable, such reports should be treated in confidence. The Proper Officer shall ensure a suitable investigation is undertaken into the report.

6) Informal Resolution

6.1 It may be possible to resolve a situation by explaining clearly to the perpetrator (s) that their behaviour is unacceptable, is contrary to policy and must stop. This could be done by you directly, or on your behalf by the Proper Officer or a Councillor.

6.2 If this approach does not work, if you do not wish to try to resolve a situation this way, or if the issue relates to the Proper Officer an informal resolution may be attempted.

6.3 Under informal resolution, the issue will be discussed with a view to resolving the situation informally by telling the alleged perpetrator, without prejudicing the matter, that:
a) there has been a complaint that their behaviour is having an adverse effect on a member of the council staff
b) such behaviour is contrary to our policy
c) for employees, the continuation of such behaviour could amount to a serious disciplinary offence

6.4 It may be possible for this conversation to take place with the alleged perpetrator without revealing your name, if this is what you want. The person dealing with it will also stress that the conversation is confidential.

6.5 In certain circumstances the Council may be able to involve a neutral third party (a mediator) to facilitate a resolution of the problem. This will be discussed with you if this is appropriate.

6.6 If your complaint is resolved informally, the alleged perpetrator (s) will not usually be subject to disciplinary sanctions. However, in exceptional circumstances (such as extremely serious allegation or in cases where a problem has happened before) the Council may decide to investigate further and take more formal action notwithstanding that

you raised the matter informally. We will consult with you before taking this step.

7) Formal Complaints

If informal resolution is unsuccessful or inappropriate, a formal process (ie grievance or code of conduct) will be available

Policy to be reviewed every two years.