

Employment Policy Update

To: Staffing and Appeals Committee

Meeting Date: 16 September 2021

From: Janet Atkin, Assistant Director, HR Services

Purpose: To advise on recent updates and improvements to the Respect at Work Policy and employee guidance on Violence and Aggression at Work.

Recommendation: Members are asked to note the amendments to these key areas of employment policy and guidance.

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1.0 Background

- 1.1 Earlier this year a commitment was given by the Chief Executive to review the Council's Respect at Work Policy and guidance for staff relating to any incidents of violence and aggression experienced at work.
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to provide Staffing and Appeals Committee with an update on the changes and improvements that have been made.

2.0 Respect at Work Policy

- 2.1 Our Respect at Work Policy was first introduced in 2018, and this was a change of approach from the previous Bullying and Harassment procedure, which was taken following a series of staff focus groups, led by the Chief Executive and supported by trade union colleagues.
- 2.2 The driver was to create a procedure which was more easily accessible, and that would encourage people to raise matters early, in the hope that swift resolution could be found.
- 2.3 The Policy clearly sets out that we all have a part to play in establishing and maintaining a culture of respect, and that this culture underpins employee wellbeing, and is crucial to a positive working environment. The Respect@Work Policy defines the behaviour that is expected from everyone.
- 2.4 We recognised the importance of being able to talk to someone directly therefore we put in place a number of Respect@Work Contacts when the policy was first introduced. These are people who are trained to talk with anyone who feels that they are experiencing, or have witnessed, unreasonable behaviour in the workplace.
- 2.5 The most recent update to the policy which can be found at Appendix A made our zero tolerance approach to unacceptable behaviour more explicit. It was also expanded to more explicitly include discrimination and victimisation as we recognised that these weren't sufficiently well addressed previously. The Equality Impact Assessment can be found at Appendix B.
- 2.6 It also became clearer that people may not realise that what they were experiencing or witnessing would fall under the remit of the Respect At Work policy. To try and address this, we have provided a wide range of examples of unacceptable behaviour that employees can refer to, as well as a separate document which highlights examples of case studies.
- 2.7 In most cases raising matters early is more likely to lead to a positive outcome and we therefore encourage employees to speak up and act on concerns as they arise. There is guidance in the policy regarding the steps to take for example speaking to the other party informally in the first instance if they feel able to do so, or utilising the Respect @ Work contacts within the HR team. If it has not been possible to resolve the concerns informally, there are formal steps which can then be taken.
- 2.8 The policy also now includes other sources of support for employees such as the Equality and Diversity Network. For more serious matters, external

sources of support have also been highlighted, for example, when police involvement might be necessary.

- 2.9 Other additions include references to the appropriate route to follow where concerns are raised about the conduct of an Elected Member, partner organisation or customer.
- 2.10 The Council has a protocol on Member/Officer relations which is designed to provide a guide to good working relations between Members and officers, to define their respective roles and provide some principles governing conduct.
- 2.11 The employer also has a responsibility to act where an employee of the council feels that they are being subjected to unacceptable behaviour or conduct from a member of the public, a customer or service user, or an employee of a partner organisation. Routes for responding to these situations are also set out in this version of the policy.
- 2.12 We recognise that the effectiveness of the Respect@Work policy depends on employees being aware of the policy and applying it in practice. We have therefore designed a communication campaign to promote the updated policy. The campaign focuses on our expectations of behaviour towards others. The communication materials feature photographs of officers from all levels of the organisation and a number of elected members. Individuals involved have volunteered to promote the policy and are shown making a commitment to work together to build a culture of respect.
- 2.13 We also highlight the Respect@Work policy in our Equality and Diversity in Employment policy, our induction process, Our Conversations Guidance (this is our performance management system) and our contracts of employment.

3.0 Violence and Aggression Guidance

- 3.1 Prior to this most recent review, a number of tools and guidance documents were in place, but were held in various locations and could not be easily navigated. The recent review has brought this together into one place where the information can be more easily accessed. This document can be seen at Appendix C. The Equality Impact for these procedures can be seen at Appendix D.
- 3.2 As a County Council employee, everyone has the right to be treated with consideration, dignity and respect in the workplace and should not experience violence or aggression at work.
- 3.3 We have a duty of care for our employees and are committed to doing all that we can to keep people safe at work, especially when working in public services brings us into contact with people in difficult and challenging situations. We will not tolerate verbal or physical abuse towards any of our employees.
- 3.4 The HR Team have worked with representatives from across Council services to make sure that the guidance incorporates the various ways in which our employees could be exposed to different forms of violence or aggression at work.

3.5 The guidance details the important preventative measures that must be put in place to minimise the risk of experiencing violence and aggression. It gives information on ways to defuse and de-escalate difficult situations, and provides information on what to do if an incident occurs, what support can be put in place, as well as what action would be taken to prevent something similar happening again.

4.0 Revised Approach

4.1 One thing that became clear during the reviews of these policies and guidance, as well as learning and findings from staff engagement, was that people have not always been clear about which process to follow, and where to find the information.

4.2 To address this, a specific landing page has been created for Camweb titled 'Raising Concerns at Work' and this page can be seen at Appendix E.

4.3 This page sets out the broad areas that people are likely to want to raise concerns about and takes them directly to the relevant procedure to follow, and supporting information.

4.4 This should make accessing the right process quicker and less complicated, as well as easier to communicate out to all staff across the organisation.

5.0 Appendices

Appendix A – Respect at Work Policy

Appendix B – Equality Impact Assessment for Respect at Work Policy

Appendix C – Violence and Aggression Guidance

Appendix D – Equality Impact Assessment for Violence and Aggression Guidance

Appendix E – Raising Concerns at Work Camweb Page

6.0 Source Documents

[Protocol on Member - Officer Relations](#)