

Preventing bullying and harassment

STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT

“The Church is required by God to foster relationships of the utmost integrity, truthfulness and trustworthiness. Abuse, harassment and bullying – however rare - will not be tolerated in the Diocese. All allegations of abuse, harassment and bullying will be taken seriously and thoroughly investigated.” The Bishop of Worcester

Context

A survey undertaken among all clergy in 2010 by a working group convened by the Chair of the House of Clergy of the Diocesan Synod concluded that the clear finding of the questionnaire was that, far from feeling bullied or neglected, the vast majority of clergy in the Diocese of Worcester feel supported and affirmed by the lay people to whom they minister, as well as the bishops, archdeacons and fellow clergy.

Nevertheless, it is important to have procedures in place to address any occasions, however rare, in which things do go wrong.

As well as having wider application, this page constitutes the diocesan anti-bullying and harassment policy referred to in the Code of Practice for the “Grievance Procedure” issued by the Archbishops’ Council under the Ecclesiastical Offices (Terms of Service) Regulations 2009.

It is policy that these matters are to be treated with confidentiality and that no action would normally be taken without the willing consent of the person who feels he or she has been a target.

Standards of behaviour

Those who are ordained in the diocese, (clergy, area deans, archdeacons, and the bishops) recognise the importance of setting a good example. Whilst acknowledging that ministry has a leadership role their primary function is to teach, admonish (reprove gently but earnestly) and build the people up in faith. Overall they should seek to develop a culture that is consultative in style where all are consulted and problems discussed.

It is possible too for laity to be perceived as harassing and bullying both each other and clergy. Lay members of the Church should recognise the importance of setting a good example, measuring behaviour against Christian values, beliefs and standards in the simple question ‘how Christ like are we?’

Harassment can be defined as “conduct which has the effect of violating an individual’s dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment”. Further explanation is provided in the Annex below.

The Director of Ministry & Discipleship will source and facilitate suitable

training for clergy and laity, those with pastoral responsibility for the clergy and the Harassment Advisers in order to help lay people and clergy to engage with what are reasonable expectations. This will be integrated into ongoing ministerial development and offered through deanery synods. Harassment Advisers, with appropriate training, will be available where there is a perception that these reasonable expectations of behaviour are not being met.

WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

Harassment Advisers

We are committed to the encouragement and training of Harassment Advisers. Harassment Advisers are concerned members of the clergy and laity who have volunteered, and been accepted, to undertake these duties outlined in a specific job description. Appointed by the Bishop they will receive special training for this role. They are available to any member of the clergy or laity to offer, in confidence, advice and information.

Advisers will not make judgements, and only very rarely will they make recommendations or reports; they will listen in an informal atmosphere and help with the discernment of the necessary action and support needed.

To request being put in touch with a Diocesan Harassment Adviser please contact the HR Administrator at the Diocesan Office who will simply take contact details to pass them on to a Diocesan Harassment Adviser.

The Diocesan Harassment Advisers are appointed and act on behalf of the Bishop of Worcester. Information they hold is within the context of the Bishop's registration as a data controller.

Counselling and dispute resolution

The Bishop's Advisor for Pastoral Care & Counselling can be contacted directly (for contact details see the Diocesan Directory or ask the Diocesan Office). Professional counsellors, trades unions, and professional associations are other useful sources of support for individuals.

If I think I have been the target of bullying or harassment, what can I do?

If you are experiencing bullying or harassment you should not suffer in silence or feel that you are to blame in some way for inviting bullying behaviour.

Actions you can take yourself

- Keep a factual log of all incidents of bullying – dates, times, nature of incident, details of accusations, criticisms, emails and other correspondence. This may be needed as evidence should harassment, victimisation or bullying continue or subsequently recur.

- Try to get witnesses to bullying incidents and avoid situations where you are alone with the bully. Find out if you are the only person being bullied or whether other people are also affected now, or have been in the past. Talk to colleagues and see if they will support you.
- If possible, clarify your role description so that you can check whether the responsibilities you are given match it. It is important, for example, to ensure that any duties or tasks you have been given are not unreasonable.
- Research all the available informal and formal options open to you and what support and advice is available including from qualified counsellors, professional associations, trades unions and the police. Harassment Advisers have been appointed in the diocese to be available as a point of contact; you are strongly advised to use this support. Harassment Advisers are volunteers who guarantee appropriate confidentiality and will meet or phone you in private to talk through your complaint. They will advise you on procedures for dealing with claims of bullying and harassment, and help you to clarify the impact of the behaviour you are experiencing so that you can decide what you want to do about it.

Informal action

The Diocesan Harassment Advisers role is limited to the informal stage of addressing a concern about harassment. They are not able to take on an advocacy role.

It may be possible for the complaint to be resolved quickly by explaining directly to the harasser or bully the effect their behaviour is having, and that you want it to stop. By trying the informal route you may be able to get the harasser or bully to stop their behaviour and so prevent the matter becoming public, or of escalating and making your situation more difficult.

But it has been shown that it is rarely advisable for a target to confront a bully alone, without support. Consult a Harassment Adviser and discuss with them whether to confront the alleged harasser, alone or with someone, for instance a colleague or friend, in support.

Every effort should be made to use informal means to stop the offensive behaviour before formal procedures are invoked. But it should also be made clear that if the behaviour continues you will make a formal complaint. This may be enough to sort things out, particularly if the person(s) involved was/were unaware that their behaviour was causing offence.

Further Steps

Formal procedures are not dependent on you having to take personal action to ask the bully to stop their behaviour. It is recognised that by its very nature bullying is often something that happens over a prolonged period of time and the longer it goes on the more difficult it is to take personal action to confront the behaviour.

If an informal approach has not resolved the matter, then:

If the perpetrator is a clergy person, it may be appropriate to use the Clergy Discipline Measure .

If the perpetrator is a lay person:

- namely a Reader or lay worker holding the Bishop's licence, it may be appropriate to use the processes in Canons E6 and E8 .
- namely someone volunteering or employed by e.g. a Parochial Church Council, the Diocesan Board of Finance, or a Health Authority and the harassment is arising in the context of that role, it may be appropriate to use the relevant body's complaints procedure.

However, if the perpetrator is some other lay person then there are no formal diocesan processes but the following informal procedures may help with dealing with such complaints.

- Make it clear to the person harassing you that their behaviour is inappropriate and explain the impact of their actions on you.
- Invite a colleague or a friend to intervene/support you. For lay people this could be your incumbent.
- Seek the help of a Diocesan Harassment Advisor.

False accusation

False accusations are a serious matter. The behaviour of anyone who is found to have made an unfounded, deliberately malicious complaint or allegation will be regarded with the utmost seriousness and, where possible, formal action taken. In the case of a clergy person this may be a complaint under the Clergy Discipline Measure 2003. A member of either the clergy or laity could be subject to an action for defamation if they have made false accusations against someone else.

Annex I

WHAT IS BULLYING AND HARASSMENT?

'Harassment, in general terms, is unwanted conduct affecting the dignity of men and women. It may be related to age, sex, race, disability, religion, sexual orientation, nationality or any personal characteristic of the individual, and may be persistent or an isolated incident. The key is that the actions or comments are viewed as demeaning and unacceptable to the recipient.'

'Bullying may be characterised as offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour; an abuse or misuse of power through means intended to undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient.'

The legal definition of harassment also requires the behaviour to have 'the purpose or effect of violating people's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.'

'Unacceptable behaviour' changes its label to 'bullying' or 'harassing behaviour' when it causes actual harm or distress to the target(s), normally but not exclusively, after a series of incidents over a prolonged period of time.

How can bullying and harassment be recognised?

Bullying may manifest itself in a variety of different ways. It is usually persistent, and often unpredictable, and can amount to severe psychological intimidation. It is insidious, and undermines the ability and confidence of the person suffering from it. It can lead to fear, isolation, demotivation and reduced output, poor concentration, symptoms of stress, a noticeable level of sickness absence or stubborn attendance when obviously unwell, psychological, emotional and physical harm.

On the other hand it is important to distinguish between bullying, and behaviour that is reasonable in a particular context. For example there may be occasions where shortcomings in performance are being addressed and more incisive behaviour is interpreted as bullying simply because the recipient is unused to being challenged or asked to account for their actions.

Also it can be the case that when clergy or lay leaders are seeking to bring about change it may not always be welcomed by everyone. This may trigger difficult behaviour amongst some of the congregation etc and clergy or lay leaders have to recognise that some of that (although only within reason) is a part of managing change and is not automatically bullying or harassment but about managing people in difficult situations

Harassment, in general terms, is unwanted conduct affecting the dignity of men and women in the workplace. It may be related to age, sex, race, disability,

religious belief (including theology or churchmanship), nationality or any personal characteristic of the individual, and may be persistent or an isolated incident. The important point is that the actions or comments are viewed as demeaning and unacceptable to the recipient.

On the whole it is safest to take the view that if a person complains that they are being bullied or harassed, then they have a grievance, which should be dealt with regardless of whether or not their complaint accords with a standard definition.

Examples of bullying behaviour

The following list of behaviours is not exhaustive but gives a clear indication of the sorts of actions that constitute bullying or harassment

- removing areas of responsibility without discussion or notice
- isolating someone or deliberately ignoring or excluding them from activities
- consistently attacking someone's professional or personal standing
- setting out to make someone appear incompetent
- persistently picking on someone in front of others
- deliberate sabotage of work or actions
- deliberately withholding information or providing incorrect information.
- overloading with work/reducing deadlines without paying attention to any protest
- displays of offensive material
- use of e-mails to reprimand, insult or otherwise inform someone of their apparent failing, either to the individual or to third parties
- repeatedly shouting or swearing at someone or about them in their presence in public or in private
- spreading malicious rumours to third parties
- public humiliation by constant innuendo, belittling and 'putting down'
- personal insults and name-calling
- aggressive gestures, verbal threats and intimidation
- persistent threats about security
- making false accusations
- aggressive bodily posture or physical contact
- talking/shouting directly into someone's face
- direct physical intimidation, violence or assault

The most serious incidents might result in:

- creating an unsafe working environment
- ignoring signs of overwork and extreme stress
- putting someone's health physically, emotionally or psychologically at risk by making them upset, frightened and/or ridiculed

The Earlier Action is Taken the Better

Annex 2

THE HARASSMENT ADVISERS' ROLE

Purpose of Role

The Harassment Advisers are appointed by the Bishop of Worcester to be available to any member of the clergy or laity to offer support, advice and or information to those who consider they may be a victim of harassment or bullying or who have had a complaint of harassment or bullying made against them in the context of the Church of England in this diocese.

Duties and Responsibilities

The Harassment Adviser will not, as a general rule, make recommendations or reports (although there may be rare occasions when they do) but instead will listen in an informal atmosphere and help with the discernment of the necessary action and support needed. They are not able to take on an advocacy role but will:

- be a point of contact and support for any lay or clergy (church officer/ member of congregation/employee)
- consider whether the matter is appropriate to be dealt with in an informal way. Cases involving formal action will lie outside the remit of the Harassment Adviser. For instance, the threshold for invoking the Clergy Discipline Measure is if a complaint of serious misconduct has been made against members of the clergy
- refer to the DSA (Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser) when appropriate. NB: Any pastoral support for a complainant will be dealt with separately
- not normally need to be available outside normal working hours
- arrange an appropriate time for each discussion/meeting

- actively listen in a non-judgmental manner
- help identify the problems faced, and explore and discuss options in order to determine whether and how matters should be progressed
- help to obtain information on diocesan policies and procedures
- signpost other services or agencies as appropriate
- maintain appropriate confidentiality
- make and store securely appropriate summary records of action taken for each case, taking into account any safeguarding and GDPR requirements for record keeping, which remain the property of the Bishop of Worcester's office
- notify the HR Administrator(s) when the informal action has run its course
- receive initial training/orientation, with refresher training as appropriate

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