



**Transformation and
Improvement Overview
and Scrutiny Committee**

1st December 2025

Item

Public



Staff Bullying and Harassment Task and Finish Group update

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Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder):	Roger Evans		

1. Synopsis

The following report updates Scrutiny on progress made against previously approved recommendations by Transformation and Improvement Overview and Scrutiny Committee on [19th February, 2024](#) regarding staff bullying and harassment at Shropshire Council

2. Executive Summary

The Task and Finish Group, comprising Members, Officers, and Trade Union representatives, was established following a Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman case in 2023. The group's remit was to review and enhance council policy to ensure robust support for staff experiencing unwanted and persistent behaviour from the public, contractors, or colleagues.

Key actions included:

- Reviewing and amending the Employee Bullying & Harassment policy, now renamed the Bullying Harassment Discrimination and/or Victimisation Policy. The updated policy clarifies unacceptable behaviours, including gaslighting, cyberbullying, and

social media harassment, and aligns with other council policies for dealing with third-party harassment and vexatious behaviour.

- Ensuring that recommendations were evidence-based and presented to the Transformation and Improvement Scrutiny Committee, with final policy sign-off by the Employee Joint Consultative Committee (EJCC).

Significant progress has been made:

- The revised policy was signed off and communicated to staff in April 2024.
- A separate group was established to review support for Members, recognising that existing guidance was insufficient.
- This work of the group also noted the impact of the Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023, which places a new preventative duty on employers to take “all reasonable steps” to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace. Employers are now liable for harassment by third parties and face increased penalties for breaches.

In summary, the Council has made substantial progress in updating policies, procedures, and training to better protect staff from bullying, harassment, discrimination, and victimisation, while responding to new legislative requirements.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1. Members of the Transformation and Improvement Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to note the content of the report and actions against previous recommendations.

Report

4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 4.1. No risks are identified in the updating of recommendations.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1. Shropshire Council continues to manage unprecedented financial demands and a financial emergency was declared by Cabinet on 10 September 2025. The overall financial position of the Council is set out in the monitoring position presented to Cabinet on a monthly basis. Significant management action has been instigated at all levels of the Council reducing spend to ensure the Council's financial survival. While all reports to Members provide the financial implications of decisions being taken, this may change as officers and/or Portfolio Holders review the overall financial situation and make decisions aligned to financial survivability. All non-essential spend will be stopped and all essential spend challenged. These actions may involve (this is not exhaustive):
- scaling down initiatives,
 - changing the scope of activities,

- delaying implementation of agreed plans, or
- extending delivery timescales.

6. Climate Change Appraisal

6.1. No effect.

7. Background

- 7.1. Shropshire Council's aim is to provide a working environment that respects the rights of each individual employee and where colleagues treat each other with the utmost respect. Any behaviour that undermines this aim is totally unacceptable. The organisation deplores all forms of harassment, bullying, victimisation and / or discrimination, racism from staff, members of the community, third-party organisations, members or senior officers. This will not be tolerated under any circumstance and if in the unfortunate event of any unacceptable behaviours then appropriate formal policies and procedures will be invoked which, for members of the community, may see access to services being reduced or removed.
- 7.2. There are several routes' concerns relating to harassment, racism and bullying can be brought to HR, management and/or senior officers' attention:
- a) Formal complaint via the Bullying and Harassment policy;
 - b) Whistleblowing policy – concerns can be raised anonymously;
 - c) Corporate complaints procedure.
- 7.3. The council already had an Unreasonably Persistent and Vexatious Customers policy, Harassment and Bullying and Whistleblowing policy that are aligned to each other to support staff when dealing with such situations/incidents.
- 7.4. The remit of this task and finish group was to review the Bullying and Harassment policy applicable to staff within the council (excluding school-based staff), to ensure any applicable learning from the Ombudsman case was considered as well as emerging trends and initiatives. (NB: School-based staff were excluded due to schools having their own reporting mechanisms and policies).
- 7.5. Task and Finish group members attended a programme of meetings chaired by Councillor Ruth Houghton which focused on:
- a) Reviewing the Employee Bullying & Harassment policy and discuss/propose amendments and enhancements to the policy;
 - b) Understood and considered how the Unreasonably Persistent and Vexatious Customers policy, Harassment and Bullying and Whistleblowing policy were directly aligned and reporting mechanisms followed and reported;
 - c) Reviewed best practice, policy, benchmarking and advice from other Local Authorities, West Midlands Employers and professional bodies i.e. Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development (CIPD) to inform proposals;
 - d) Provided evidence-based recommendations to Transformation and Improvement Scrutiny Committee at the next available meeting.

- 7.6. The recommendations from this work relating to policy were put forward to the Employee Joint Consultative Committee (EJCC) for final sign off (in line with the employee policy sign off arrangements outlined in the constitution).

8. Additional Information

- 8.1. Following the programme of meetings throughout 2023/4 an update on progress along with a number of recommendations were presented and approved in Scrutiny, February 2024:

- a) Bullying and Harassment Policy was to be renamed to Bullying Harassment Discrimination and/or Victimisation Policy. The policy informs staff on the type of behaviour that is unacceptable and provides staff who are the victims of bullying, discrimination, harassment and victimisation a means of redress. The policy was further enhanced in unacceptable behaviours including gas lighting, cyber bullying and social media, dealing with third party harassment and further alignment to other Councils policies including the procedure for dealing with unreasonably persistent and vexatious behaviour;
- b) It became apparent during the initial stages of the task and finish group that there was no such policy for Members. Whilst it was understood that there was guidance from the Local Government Association (LGA) this wasn't deemed sufficient in protecting Members during their duties. A further task and finish group was established to review support in relation to Bullying and Harassment for Members.
- c) Update provided at Cabinet on 13 March 2024 on task and finish group progress and next steps.

- 8.2. The recommendations have been completed with the Bullying and Harassment Policy renamed to Bullying Harassment Discrimination and/or Victimisation Policy and signed off at EJCC in April 2024 and communicated to staff.

- 8.3. A further task and finish group was established to review support in relation to Bullying and Harassment for Members. This resulted in an agreed reporting mechanism, with protocols and flowchart put in place on Member Gateway to ensure all incidents are logged, elected Members are supported, and police are involved. An update was provided to Transformation and Improvement Overview and Scrutiny Committee in [June 2025](#).

9. Conclusions

- 9.1. Shropshire Council has made substantial progress in strengthening its approach to staff bullying, harassment, discrimination, and victimisation. The Task and Finish Group's work has resulted in a comprehensive review and enhancement of key policies, notably the renaming and expansion of the Bullying Harassment Discrimination and/or Victimisation Policy. This updated policy now provides clearer definitions of unacceptable behaviours including gaslighting, cyberbullying, and social media harassment and aligns with procedures for addressing third-party and vexatious behaviour. The Council is now required by law to take "all reasonable steps" to prevent sexual harassment, with increased penalties for breaches. Training and guidance have been improved, and ongoing collaboration between staff, managers, and trade unions will help maintain a respectful and safe workplace for everyone

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

NA

Local Member: *Roger Evans*
Ruth Houghton

Appendices NA