

Harassment and Bullying Policy

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Who this document applies to:	All Trustees; All staff; All Volunteers.

1. Purpose and Scope

OPAL Services (Rural West Cheshire) expects its employees, volunteers, trustees, and service users to treat each other, and other people, with respect and dignity. The working environment should always be supportive of the dignity and respect of individuals. Any breach of this principle may constitute harassment or bullying. If a complaint is brought to the attention of OPAL management, it will be investigated promptly, and appropriate action will be taken. Harassment and bullying will not be tolerated in any form, whether face-to-face, online, or via third parties. This policy applies to behaviour by and towards anyone connected with OPAL, including colleagues, trustees, volunteers, service users, and external partners.

This Policy provides guidance to employees, volunteers and trustees in dealing with concerns about harassment and bullying.

2. Definitions

For the purpose of this policy, the terms 'harassment' and 'bullying' are defined as behaviour which is unwanted and makes someone feel intimidated or offended. 'Harassment' also has a specific legal definition because it is unlawful under the Equality Act 2010; therefore, such unwanted behaviour that is based on one of the following 'protected characteristics' is not only a breach of this policy but is also illegal:

- age
- sex
- disability
- gender (including gender reassignment)
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sexual orientation

Harassment includes unwanted behaviour related to a protected characteristic or based on perception or association with someone who has such a characteristic.

Bullying is offensive, intimidating, malicious, or insulting behaviour that may undermine, humiliate, or injure another person. Bullying does not need to be linked to a protected characteristic to be covered by this policy.

Examples of harassing or bullying behaviour could include:

- spreading malicious rumours
- insulting, ridiculing or demeaning someone, either directly or by sharing information about them without a good reason to do so
- isolation, non-cooperation or excluding someone from conversations/events
- threatening someone
- unwelcome sexual advances, such as touching, standing too close to someone
- displaying offensive or sexually explicit materials
- picking on someone
- blocking training or promotion opportunities

Harassment and Bullying can happen:

- face-to-face
- by letter, email, telephone, text or other messaging service
- through social media (e.g. Facebook, twitter, Instagram)

You as an employee, volunteer or trustee may raise concerns either about behaviour you consider to be harassment or bullying against you personally, or behaviour you have witnessed which you believe to be harassment or bullying of another person.

3. How to deal with harassment or bullying at work

(i) Informal Action

If you feel you have been harassed or bullied at work or have witnessed such behaviour, you should try to deal with matters informally first. This means speaking to the person whose behaviour you consider to be harassing or bullying and in breach of this policy. Individuals are encouraged, where appropriate, to raise concerns directly with the person whose behaviour is causing offence. Support and advice can be sought from a Line Manager, HR Committee member, or other trusted person. Mediation or facilitated discussion may also be considered where both parties agree.

The harasser should be informed that their behaviour is unwelcome and asked to stop. It will be helpful to stick to the facts; explain what behaviour they have found to be unacceptable and how it makes them feel. It is sometimes the case that the perpetrator does not intend to have the effect they have - this does not mean their behaviour is acceptable, but they should, if possible, have the opportunity to put things right. If you feel unable to do this face to face, a written request should be considered.

You should keep a written record detailing the incidents of harassment and any requests made to the harasser to stop. You should make this written record as soon as possible after the event(s) giving rise to the concern and should include dates, times, places and circumstances of what happened.

Where an informal approach fails or if the harassment or bullying is more serious, you should raise the matter as a formal complaint to the Chair of Trustees or another Trustee on the HR Committee if the Chair of Trustees is the subject of the complaint.

(ii) Formal Action

OPAL recognises that such complaints are sensitive and will do all that is possible to ensure a formal complaint is dealt with appropriately, properly and as quickly as reasonably possible. A written complaint should be submitted to the Chair of Trustees (or another Trustee if the Chair is involved) who will provide a formal acknowledgement of receipt (see Appendix A). The Chair of Trustees will consider the complaint or if necessary, arrange for it to be fully investigated. Action will be taken to ensure that you are not directly working with the alleged bully/harasser whilst the matter is investigated. All parties to the complaint will be required to act in confidence, and any breach of confidence will be dealt with as a disciplinary matter. You have the right to be accompanied at formal meetings held to consider and resolve the complaint. The Chair of Trustees will determine the outcome having properly considered the facts.

If you as the employee/volunteer making the complaint or the alleged bully/harasser are dissatisfied with the outcome of the considerations, there will be a right of appeal in accordance with the appeal provisions of the Grievance Procedure.

If it is concluded that the complaint is well founded, the bully/harasser may be liable to disciplinary action in accordance with OPAL policy. If you bring a complaint of bullying or harassment, you will not be victimised for having brought it. However, if it is concluded that the complaint is untrue and has been brought with malicious intent, disciplinary action may be taken against you.

Records will be managed in line with GDPR, kept securely, and retained for no longer than 12 months unless needed for ongoing proceedings.

OPAL Services
October 2025

Appendix A

RE: Acknowledgement of your complaint

Dear [Name],

I am writing with regards to the complaint you have raised dated (state date grievance was received).

As per OPAL's Harassment and Bullying Policy I will consider your complaint and will keep you informed as to next steps.

Yours sincerely,

Geoff Hope-Terry

Geoff Hope-Terry
Chair
OPAL Services