

HCC Bullying and Harassment Policy



Policy Statement

1. Huntingdonshire Community Church (HCC) is committed to providing a safe, respectful, and inclusive environment for all individuals associated with our organisation, including employees, volunteers, members and visitors. We do not tolerate bullying, harassment, or any form of discriminatory behaviour, and we are committed to preventing and addressing such issues promptly and effectively.

Scope

2. This policy applies to all individuals involved with HCC, including but not limited to employees, volunteers, members, beneficiaries, donors, partners, and anyone representing the organisation in any capacity.

Definitions

3. **Bullying:** Bullying refers to any aggressive, intimidating, or harmful behaviour, whether verbal, physical, or psychological, which creates a hostile, offensive, or threatening environment. It may involve an abuse of power or authority.

4. **Harassment:** Harassment includes any unwelcome conduct or communication, often based on an individual's protected characteristics, for example race, colour, religion, or any other characteristics that may be protected by applicable law. Harassment can be verbal, non-verbal, or physical.

Procedures

5. Prevention

a. HCC will provide training and education on bullying and harassment to all employees, volunteers, and anyone associated with the organisation.

b. We will establish and communicate clear standards of behaviour and ethical guidelines to promote a respectful environment.

c. The organisation will foster a culture of open communication, where individuals are encouraged to report any concerns related to bullying or harassment.

6. **Reporting** If you experience or witness bullying or harassment within HCC, please follow these steps:

a. Report the incident as soon as possible to your immediate supervisor or line manager.

b. If you are uncomfortable reporting to your immediate supervisor, you may contact an elder, the Senior Leader or a member of the Board of Trustees.

7. **Investigation** Upon receiving a complaint, HCC will promptly investigate the matter. The investigation will be carried out impartially and confidentially. It may include interviews with all parties involved and any witnesses. The investigation process is described in Appendix 1.
8. **Remedial Action** If it is determined that bullying or harassment has occurred, appropriate corrective actions will be taken. These actions may include, but are not limited to:
- Support for the victim
 - Counselling and training for the offender
 - Disciplinary measures, up to and including termination for employees or volunteers who engage in bullying or harassment
9. **Retaliation** HCC strictly prohibits retaliation against anyone who makes a good-faith report of bullying or harassment. Anyone found engaging in retaliatory actions will be subject to disciplinary measures.
10. **Monitoring and Review** This policy will be periodically reviewed and updated to ensure its effectiveness. It is essential that all employees, volunteers, and stakeholders are aware of the policy and receive training on it.

Compliance

11. Failure to comply with this policy may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination or the termination of volunteer services. Legal actions may also be pursued when appropriate
12. This Bullying and Harassment Policy is in place to ensure the safety, well-being, and dignity of all individuals associated with HCC.

BULLYING AND HARASSMENT INVESTIGATION PROCESS

1. A bullying and harassment investigation is a sensitive and thorough process designed to address allegations of inappropriate behaviour, ensure fairness, and resolve the issue in line with church policies and legal obligations. Below are the key steps to conducting such an investigation.

2. Initial Complaint or Report

- **Receipt of Allegation:** The process starts when an employee or volunteer formally or informally raises a complaint of bullying or harassment. This could be reported to the elders, a trustee or via the grievance system.
- **Acknowledge the Complaint:** The church should acknowledge the complaint promptly, ensuring the complainant that it will be handled confidentially and seriously.

3. Preliminary Assessment

- **Initial Review:** the Senior Leader (or Chair of Trustees if the Senior Leader is involved in the complaint) conducts a preliminary assessment to determine if the complaint warrants a formal investigation. This might involve a quick review of any available evidence or an informal chat with the complainant.
- **Decide on Formal Investigation:** if the issue is serious (eg repeated bullying, discriminatory harassment), the Church will proceed with a formal investigation. Less serious complaints may be addressed informally through mediation or discussion.

4. Appoint an Investigator

- **Neutral Investigator:** appoint an impartial investigator (usually a line manager within HCC, but sometimes an external investigator) to handle the case. The investigator should not have any prior involvement with the individuals involved to avoid bias.
- **Explain the Process:** both the complainant and the accused should be informed about the investigation process and what to expect, including timeframes and confidentiality.

5. Define the Scope of the Investigation

- **Clarify the Allegations:** clearly define the nature of the bullying or harassment allegations. What specific behaviours are being alleged? Are they in violation of HCC policies or of legal standards?
- **Investigation Plan:** develop an investigation plan, which includes the issues to be investigated, the witnesses to be interviewed, the documents to be collected, and the expected timeline.

6. Gather Evidence

- **Document Collection:** collect any relevant documentation that supports or refutes the allegations. This could include:
 - Emails, messages, or social media communications.
 - Relevant policies or handbooks (eg codes of conduct, anti-bullying policies).
 - Performance reviews or prior complaints involving the parties.
 - Any written complaints or reports by the complainant.
- **Witness List:** identify individuals who may have witnessed the bullying or harassment or who can provide relevant information. These may include coworkers, managers, or external parties.

7. Conduct Interviews

- **Complainant Interview:** the complainant is interviewed first to gather detailed information about the allegations. Key points to cover include:
 - Specific instances of bullying or harassment
 - The impact of the behaviour on the complainant
 - Any witnesses or evidence that supports the claim
- **Accused Interview:** the person accused of bullying or harassment should also be interviewed, allowing them to provide their side of the story and respond to the allegations. Emphasise fairness and give the accused a full opportunity to explain their behaviour and present evidence.
- **Witness Interviews:** interview witnesses to verify facts, gather corroborating evidence, and understand the broader context of the alleged incidents.
- **Recording Statements:** document interviews accurately, either through detailed notes or audio recording (with consent), ensuring that key points are captured without leading or influencing the responses.

8. Analyse the Evidence

- **Review Consistency:** compare witness statements and evidence for consistency. Are the allegations supported by facts? Are there patterns of behaviour that suggest bullying or harassment, or are the claims unsubstantiated?
- **Assess Credibility:** consider the credibility of the witnesses and parties involved. Evaluate whether there are biases, motives, or personal conflicts that may impact the evidence.
- **Identify Policy Violations:** determine whether the behaviour described violates company policies (eg anti-harassment policy, bullying guidelines) or breaches legal standards.

9. Reach a Conclusion

- **Fact-Based Decision:** based on the evidence, the investigator reaches a conclusion. The key question to answer is whether, on the balance of probabilities, bullying or harassment occurred.
 - If the evidence supports the claim, the complaint is upheld.
 - If the evidence is inconclusive or contradicts the allegations, the complaint may be dismissed or considered unsubstantiated.
- **Consultation:** The investigator may consult with external HR specialists, or trustees, to ensure that the conclusion aligns with legal requirements and HCC policies.

10. Prepare the Investigation Report

- **Detailed Report:** a written investigation report is prepared, outlining:
 - The background of the complaint.
 - Evidence gathered (including witness statements and documentary evidence).
 - Key findings and analysis.
 - The conclusion (whether bullying or harassment occurred).
 - Recommended actions (disciplinary actions, mediation, training, policy review).
- **Confidentiality:** the report should be shared only with relevant parties and handled confidentially to protect all individuals involved.

11. Decide on Appropriate Action

- **Management Decision:** the Senior Leader reviews the report and decides what actions to take based on the findings. Possible outcomes include:
 - **Disciplinary Action:** if bullying or harassment is confirmed, HCC may issue a formal warning, suspension, demotion, or even termination, depending on the severity of the behaviour.

- Remediation: if no formal action is taken, informal measures like counselling, mediation, or training may be recommended to prevent future issues.
- Corrective Measures: the church may also recommend policy changes, improved communication, or team-building efforts to improve the workplace culture.

12. Communicate the Outcome

- **Inform the Complainant:** the complainant should be informed about the outcome of the investigation, including whether their complaint was upheld and what steps will be taken. Specific details (eg exact disciplinary measures) may be kept confidential.
- **Inform the Accused:** the accused should also be informed of the outcome and any actions being taken, whether disciplinary or otherwise.
- **Confidentiality:** ensure that only essential parties are made aware of the investigation findings, maintaining the privacy of all involved.

13. Right of Appeal

- **Appeal Process:** both the complainant and the accused should be informed of their right to appeal the investigation's findings or any disciplinary actions if they believe the process was flawed or the outcome unfair.
- **Review Appeal:** if an appeal is lodged, the company should conduct a fresh review, possibly appointing a different investigator to re-examine the case.

14. Post-Investigation Support

- **Ongoing Monitoring:** monitor the workplace environment to ensure that the behaviour does not continue or escalate. This may include follow-up meetings with the complainant and accused.
- **Support Services:** offer support to all parties, such as counselling services, mediation, or conflict resolution training to help repair workplace relationships and reduce stress.
- **Policy and Training Review:** consider updating policies or providing additional training to prevent future occurrences of bullying and harassment.

15. By following these steps, the church ensures that a bullying and harassment investigation is fair, thorough, and compliant with legal and policy requirements. This process also supports a respectful workplace environment and ensures that complaints are handled appropriately.