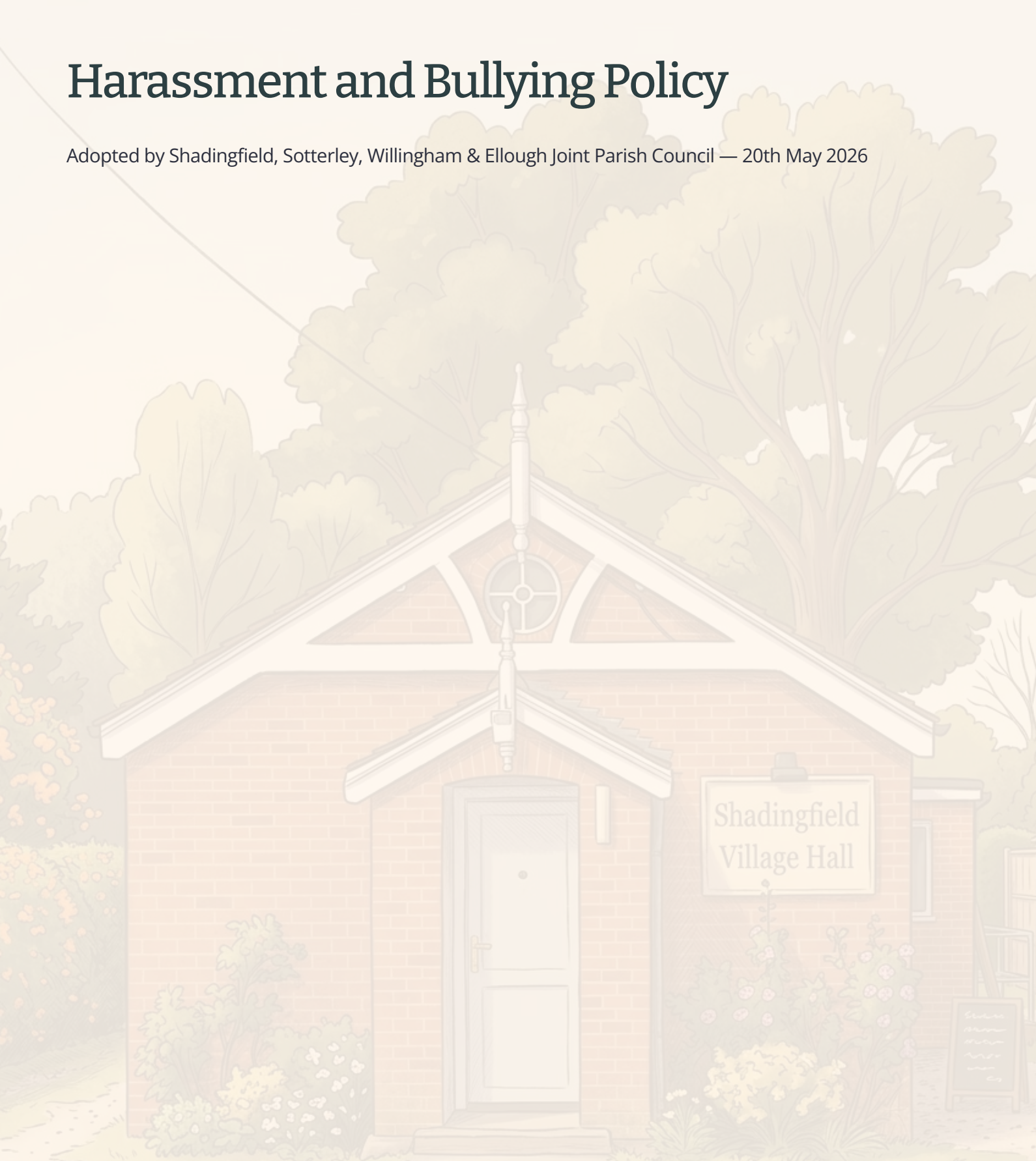
Harassment and Bullying Policy

Adopted by Shadingfield, Sotterley, Willingham & Ellough Joint Parish Council — 20th May 2026



This policy will be reviewed by April 2028, or sooner if best practice guidance changes.

1. Purpose

The Parish Council is committed to providing a working environment where employees, councillors, volunteers and contractors are treated with dignity and respect. Harassment and bullying are unacceptable and will not be tolerated under any circumstances.

This policy aims to:

- Define harassment and bullying.
- Promote a safe, respectful and inclusive working environment.
- Provide clear procedures for raising and resolving concerns.

Everyone has a responsibility to uphold this policy and to treat others with courtesy and professionalism.

2. Policy Statement

The Council is committed to ensuring that all individuals can contribute effectively in a non-threatening environment. Intimidating, hostile or offensive behaviour damages wellbeing, morale and the Council's effectiveness.

Employees and councillors are encouraged to challenge inappropriate behaviour without fear of victimisation. The Council will take all complaints seriously and act promptly.

3. What Is Harassment?

Harassment is unwanted behaviour that violates a person's dignity, or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

Harassment may be a single incident or repeated behaviour. It is judged by the **impact on the recipient**, not the intention of the perpetrator.

Examples include:

- Physical contact.
- Offensive jokes, language or gestures.
- Slander, gossip or malicious rumours.
- Displaying offensive images, posters or online content.
- Deliberate exclusion.
- Coercion for sexual favours.
- Persistent unwanted contact, pestering or stalking.

4. Grounds of Harassment

Harassment may relate to, but is not limited to:

- Sex or gender
- Race, nationality or ethnic origin
- Disability or health
- Age
- Religion or belief
- Sexual orientation
- Social background
- Physical characteristics
- HIV/AIDS status
- Personal beliefs

This list is not exhaustive — harassment on any other ground is equally unacceptable.

5. Bullying

Bullying is offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour that undermines, humiliates or injures the recipient. It may include:

- Persistent criticism.
- Abuse of power.
- Ridiculing or demeaning behaviour.
- Overbearing supervision.
- Setting someone up to fail.

Bullying does not need to relate to a protected characteristic to be unacceptable.

> Legitimate and constructive feedback about performance or behaviour, and reasonable instructions given in the course of employment, do **not** constitute bullying.

Harassment and bullying can occur face to face, in writing, by telephone, by email, and through social media or other electronic communications.

6. Sanctions

Harassment or bullying will be treated as a disciplinary offence.

- **Employees** may face disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.
- **Councillors** may face referral to the Monitoring Officer under the Code of Conduct, which may result in sanctions including suspension or disqualification.
- Some forms of harassment (for example, sexual or racial harassment) may constitute **criminal offences**.

7. Raising Concerns

7.1 Informal Resolution

Where appropriate, individuals are encouraged to make it clear to the person that their behaviour is unacceptable, and to seek support from the Clerk, Chair, Vice-Chair or a councillor. This gives the person an opportunity to change their behaviour.

7.2 Formal Procedure

If the issue is serious or unresolved:

- Employees should raise a formal grievance under the Council's Grievance Policy.
- Councillors may raise concerns through the Monitoring Officer or Standards Committee.
- If the Chair is involved, concerns should be raised with the Vice-Chair.

All complaints will be treated confidentially and sensitively.

7.3 Witnesses

Anyone who witnesses behaviour they believe may constitute harassment or bullying should report it in confidence to the Clerk or a councillor. Such reports will be taken seriously and treated as confidentially as possible.

8. Investigation

The Council will:

- Conduct a prompt, thorough and impartial investigation.
- Allow both parties to present their case.
- Permit representation by a colleague or trade union representative.
- Consider reasonable protective measures, such as temporary changes to duties or working arrangements.

No decision will be made until the investigation is complete.

9. Outcomes

Where a complaint is upheld:

- Appropriate disciplinary action will be taken in line with the Disciplinary Policy.
- For employees, this may include summary dismissal for gross misconduct.
- For councillors, sanctions may include referral to the Monitoring Officer under the Code of Conduct, which may result in suspension or disqualification.

Where a complaint is not upheld:

- No action will be taken against the alleged harasser.
- If the complainant disagrees, they may appeal under the Grievance Procedure.

⊗ Malicious or knowingly false complaints may result in disciplinary action.

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10. Support

The Council will ensure that:

- Complainants are protected from victimisation.
- Support is available throughout the process.
- Confidentiality is maintained wherever possible.

ⓘ **Victimisation** means treating someone less favourably because they have made a complaint of harassment or bullying, or because they have supported or given evidence in connection with such a complaint. Victimisation will be treated as a disciplinary matter.