



RBFRS Policy Document

Policy Information	Details
Policy Name	Bullying and Harassment Policy
Author	Senior HR Adviser
Owner	Head of HR and L&D
Protective Marking	Official
Version	
Status	Contractual Minor change only – no formal consultation required
Issue Date	
Review Date	2 Years from issue date

Policy Statement	Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) values and celebrates diversity and believes that everybody should be treated with dignity and respect without the fear of discrimination, harassment or bullying. Employees are expected to model positive behaviours inside and outside the workplace by treating everyone with dignity and respect and recognising and challenging inappropriate behaviours. RBFRS has a zero tolerance approach to all forms of bullying, harassment, discrimination and victimisation and expects that everybody will report any such incidents either towards themselves or others immediately. All incidents of any inappropriate or unacceptable behaviour will be challenged, investigated and suitable action will be taken. The confidentiality of all those involved will be maintained wherever possible. All individuals can trust that their concerns, problems or complaints will be dealt with sensitively and fairly and be resolved as soon as possible. If you have concerns you feel cannot be raised through the Employee Complaints Policy and Procedure, these can be raised through RBFRS' external 'Say So' reporting site or if it is more appropriate to do so, via the Whistleblowing Policy.
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Purpose	The policy sets out the definitions of bullying, harassment, discrimination and victimisation and provides examples of inappropriate behaviour.
Scope	This policy applies to all employees of RBFRS, and voluntary representatives of RBFRS.
Supporting Information	Employee Complaints Policy and Procedure Management Tools - Mediation Process - Managers Guide to Investigating Complaints Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy Whistleblowing Policy Trans Equality Policy Staff Safety Risk Assessment Employee Code of Conduct Behavioural Competency Framework Equality Act 2010 The Worker Protection (Amendment of the Equality Act 2021) Act 2023 Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Guidance Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Procedure Recruitment and Induction Policy NFCC Positive Disclosure Risk Assessment Guidance NFCC Managing Allegations Guidance

Revision History			
Revision	Description	Author	Date
8	Added to new policy template, general review and removal of repetition	HR Adviser	09/04/2021
9	Inclusion of information on dual discrimination and expansion of specific examples of inappropriate behaviour.	Senior HR Adviser	17/08/2022
10	Expansion of definitions of bullying and harassment. Inclusion of information on the protected characteristics as defined in the Equality Act 2010. Inclusion on paragraph regarding representation.	Senior HR Adviser	24/03/2023

Revision History			
Revision	Description	Author	Date
11	Inclusion of information on Welfare Officers for those making or the subject of a complaint	Senior HR Adviser	29/08/2023
12	Addition of statement that individuals are responsible for their behaviour in and outside the workplace. Inclusion of information relating to individual liability for acts of victimisation. Inclusion of information on Third Party harassment and types of harassment in line with requirements of the Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2012) Act 2023). Revision of time limits of raising a complaint in line with the ACAS code of practice and good practice from other Fire and Rescue Services. Addition of link to Staff Safety Risk Assessment. Inclusion of an additional appendix detail the complaint reporting process.	Senior HR Adviser	23/07/2024
13	Update to policy to include a statement that complaints dealt with wherever possible before an employee leaves employment and inclusion of specific references to online bullying and harassment.	Senior HR Adviser	11/08/2025
14	Removal of reference to the grievance process (which is now a separate policy). Inclusion of a section relating to sexual harassment and cyberbullying.	Senior HR Adviser	04/02/2026

Authorisation	
Approving SLT Member	Becci Jefferies (HHRLD)
Approving Director (If Required)	Nikki Richards (DCE/DCS)

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Policy Detail

Responsibilities

All Staff

We all have a part to play in ensuring a safe, supportive and inclusive workplace, free from bullying and harassment. To maintain a safe working environment, all employees should:

- Behave in accordance with the Behavioural Competency Framework (BCF) and the Employee Code of Conduct.
- Consider how behaviour and communication may affect others.
- Discourage bullying and harassment by making it clear that any such behaviour is unacceptable and support any colleagues that are experiencing it
- Challenge and/or report any inappropriate behaviour either experienced or witnessed at the earliest opportunity
- Act as a positive role model and display the safe, supportive, inclusive behaviours.

Managers

In addition to the above, managers should;

- Address issues early and appropriately.
- Take concerns seriously and act promptly.

Definitions

Any grievances or complaints should ideally be dealt with informally in the first instance and you are encouraged to raise any complaints with your line manager (or other appropriate manager) in order that it can be dealt with. This is to ensure that, wherever possible and as appropriate, issues are addressed at source. However, if the complaint is of a serious nature or cannot be resolved informally a formal complaint may be immediately made through the Employee Complaints Policy.

Protected Characteristics

Under the Equality Act 2010, all employers are under a statutory duty not to directly or indirectly discriminate against anyone who possesses a protected characteristic. The protected characteristics as defined in the Equality Act 2010 are:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

Bullying

Workplace bullying is when someone persistently mistreats you in a way that causes you either physical or emotional harm. It can include verbal, non-verbal, psychological, physical abuse and humiliation.

Although there is no legal definition for bullying, it can be described as unwanted behaviour from a person or group that is either:

- Offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting
- An abuse or misuse of power that undermines, humiliates, denigrates or causes physical or emotional harm to someone

Bullying can be:

- A regular pattern of behaviour or a one off incident
- Happen face-to-face, online (including through) social media, in emails or calls
- Happen in work or in other work related situations
- Not always be obvious or noticed by others

Examples of bullying could include:

- Spreading malicious rumours about someone
- Consistently putting someone down in meetings
- Deliberately giving someone a heavier workload than everyone else
- Excluding someone from team social events
- Someone consistently undermining their manager's authority
- Putting humiliating, offensive or threatening comments on social media

Sometimes bullying can be classed as harassment, if it is related to certain protected characteristics.

Cyber Bullying/Online Harassment

This can be defined as the use of information and communication technologies to support deliberate, repeated and hostile behaviour by an individual or group that is intended to harm others.

This typically involves using the internet, email, mobile phones to send or post text or images intended to hurt or embarrass another person, including offensive jokes or sexual material. This can take place on work devices or personal devices.

Harassment

Harassment is when someone behaves in a way which creates an intimidating, degrading, hostile, humiliating, or offensive environment or violates an individual's dignity. This could be abusive comments or jokes, graffiti or insulting gestures. Harassment can happen face to face, online (including through social media) or in emails or calls.

Under the Equality Act 2010, there are three types of harassment:

- Sexual harassment
- Harassment related to certain protected characteristics
- Less favourable treatment as a result of harassment related to sex, sexual harassment or gender re-assignment

Unwanted behaviour can include:

- A serious or one-off incident
- repeated behaviour
- spoken or written words, imagery, graffiti, gestures, mimicry, jokes, pranks, physical behaviour that affects the person

To be harassment the unwanted behaviour must have:

- violated the person's dignity
- Created an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for the person

Harassment can result from a power imbalance between the parties (for example where one party is in a more senior role than another). This power imbalance can impact the ability of an individual being harassed to challenge or expressly indicate that the inappropriate conduct is unwelcome. This could perpetuate the harassment and/or exacerbate its impact on the individual being harassed.

Sexual Harassment

The Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023 includes a legal duty for employers to take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment of its workers and employees, including harassment by third parties. From October 2026, this duty will change to taking all reasonable steps.

Sexual harassment is unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature that has the purpose or effect of violating an individual's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment for that individual. Behaviour does not need to be intentional to be considered harassment.

Sexual harassment may include, but is not limited to making sexual remarks, suggestive looks, sexual gestures, asking about someone's sex life, telling sexually offensive jokes (including about someone's sexual orientation or gender), displaying or sharing pornographic images, unwanted physical contact, sexual assault or rape

Sexual harassment may occur as a single incident or be a series of multiple incidents taking place either in person, face to face, virtually such as via email, message tools or social media. It is usually directed at an individual although this is not always the case. It does not have to be directed at one person for someone to make a complaint of sexual harassment (for example sharing explicit images).

Third Party Sexual Harassment

Third party harassment occurs where an individual or group of people are sexually harassed by someone who does not work for the Service, but with whom the individual or group of people have come into contact with during the course of their employment in connection with their role and work. Examples can include unwanted behaviour from members of the community, a contractor or supplier visiting the site.

RBFRS will provide support to the individual and will take all reasonable steps to prevent it from happening again, which could include (but is not limited to) excluding the harasser from RBFRS sites, warning the harasser about their behaviour and reporting any criminal activity to the Police.

Discrimination

Discrimination is when you are treated unfairly because of who you are, because you possess certain characteristics, because you are perceived as holding a certain characteristic or if you are a friend or family member who holds a certain characteristic. By law, discrimination is when you are treated unfairly because of any of the protected characteristics.

Dual Discrimination

Dual discrimination is when you are treated less favourably because of a combination of two protected characteristics (for example a homosexual woman).

Victimisation

Victimisation refers to unfair treatment directed towards you, if you have made or if people think you have made or supported a complaint under discrimination law. It includes situations where a complaint hasn't yet been made but you are being badly treated because it is suspected that you might make one. Individuals can be held personally liable under the Equality Act 2012 for acts of victimisation.

Harassment, discrimination or victimisation may lead to disciplinary action if it committed:

- In a work situation
- During any situation related to work such as a social event with colleagues
- Against a colleague or other person connected to RBFRS outside of a work situation, including on social media
- Against anyone outside of a work situation where the incident is relevant to their suitability to carry out their role

Specific Examples of Inappropriate Behaviour

The following are examples of inappropriate behaviour (note, this list is not exhaustive and can include behaviour that is face to face, online (including through social media) or in emails or calls:

- Bullying and/or harassment based on a particular characteristic or protected characteristic
- Using stigmatising language or behaviours
- Verbal or physical assault offensive language or comments toward you or others
- Offensive or insulting jokes, banter, gibes, insinuations and graffiti
- Displaying offensive materials including the contents of internet sites
- 'Virtual' harassment remotely over remote video meetings/workplace chat forums
- Inappropriate comments, pictures or videos on public internet 'chat site' or social networking sites
- Persistent intrusive questions about your private life or marital status, sexual interests or orientation, ethnic origin, culture or religion
- Unnecessary references to sexual orientation or gender identity
- Attempts to impose religious or political beliefs on you or other people
- Encouraging others to behave in a way which is discriminatory

- Ridicule or behaviour which demeans you or others
- Someone mimics you or others or mimics a stereotypical view of a particular group of people
- Unwelcome sexual advances
- Unwelcome physical contact
- Someone spreading rumours or insults, including by communications such as email or copying communications that are critical about someone to others who do not need to know and 'outing' someone without their permission
- Aggression, including swearing, shouting and verbal abuse
- Exclusion of individuals from discussions or decision making (including deliberately undermining an individual or group of individuals)
- Not providing individuals the training or information you need to do your job
- Refusing employees time off for religious purposes despite them giving sufficient notice of their requirements
- Isolating individuals from other members of the team
- Microaggressions – everyday actions or comments which can be subtle, indirect, intentional, unintentional types of discrimination against marginalised groups. They may demean a person's race, sex, sexual orientation or other protected characteristic and leave people feeling unwelcome, belittled, hurt or excluded.

Raising Concerns

Anyone who experiences or witnesses bullying or harassment is encouraged to raise the matter as soon as possible. Grievances or complaints should be dealt with informally where appropriate and you are encouraged to raise any complaints with your line manager (or other appropriate manager) in order that it can be dealt with. This ensures that, wherever possible and as appropriate, issues are addressed at source. However, if the complaint is of a serious nature or cannot be resolved informally a formal complaint may be immediately made. Please refer to the Employee Complaints Policy and Procedure. Note that in some circumstances due to the seriousness of a complaint it may have to be dealt with formally.

Staff Safety Risk Assessment

A staff safety risk assessment meeting should be considered when an employee has raised concerns that they do not feel safe in the workplace. It is recommended that the meeting is arranged as soon as reasonably practicable after concerns have been raised. Undertaking this risk assessment can ensure that the potential risk to the employee, other employees or the organisation as a whole is lessened. If an employee discloses that they are suffering symptoms of stress due to concerns raised, a referral should be made to Occupational Health

Support Available

Anyone affected by bullying or harassment whether they have experienced it, witnessed it or accused of it can access support. In complex or sensitive cases, a Welfare Officer may be assigned to those making a complaint, as well as those that are the subject of the complaint.

Additional sources of support available through the **Employee Assistance Programme, Trade Unions and the Blue Light Champions**.

Employee Assistance Programme – Add relevant detail.

[National Bullying Helpline](#) offers a free, confidential service for anyone experiencing bullying at work, online or in the community. They are open from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday.

Freephone: 0300 323 0169 / Telephone: 0845 225 5787.

[Cyber Helpline](#) provides advice for any cyber security scenario including cyber stalking, online bullying and harassment, revenge porn and inappropriate content. You can contact the Cyber helpline via their website.

[Rights of Women](#) provides free employment legal advice to women in England and Wales experiencing sexual harassment at work. You can contact their advice line on **020 7490 0152**

[Survivors UK](#) Confidential online chat and text for men and non-binary adults: available daily, 12–8 pm.

Review

This policy will be reviewed within 2 years of its publication date or when required by a change in circumstances.

Initial Equality Impact Assessment

Please complete the below if making significant revisions or this is a new policy.

Name and Role of Person Completing Assessment: Lucy Greenway Senior HR Adviser		Date of Assessment: 04/02/2026
1. Who is intended to benefit from this policy/service, and in what way?	This policy outlines the behaviours expected from employees and provides examples of unacceptable behaviour and ensures all individuals understand the expected levels of conduct and behaviour. It also ensures that RBFRS are meeting their legislative obligations in terms of worker protection.	
2. Who are the main stakeholders in relation to the policy/service? (e.g. applicants, service users, member of the public, RBFRS employees, partner organisations)	RBFRS employees and voluntary representatives	
Please briefly describe any potential impacts (neutral, positive, negative) of the policy / revisions of the policy on the groups below:		
Sex (Men and Women)	Positive – this policy is designed to offer equality protection for all groups, and provides a process for any concerns or issues relating to discriminatory behaviour can be addressed effectively.	
Race (All Racial Groups)	Positive – this policy is designed to offer equality protection for all groups, and provides a process for any concerns or issues relating to discriminatory behaviour can be addressed effectively.	
Disability (Mental, Physical, and Carers of Disabled people)	Positive – this policy is designed to offer equality protection for all groups, and provides a process for any concerns or issues relating to discriminatory behaviour can be addressed effectively.	
Religion or Belief	Positive – this policy is designed to offer equality protection for all groups, and provides a process for any concerns or issues relating to discriminatory behaviour can be addressed effectively.	
Sexual Orientation (All diverse sexual orientations)	Positive – this policy is designed to offer equality protection for all groups, and provides a process for any concerns or issues relating to discriminatory behaviour can be addressed effectively.	

Pregnancy and Maternity (Includes new mothers and those returning to the workplace)	Positive – this policy is designed to offer equality protection for all groups, and provides a process for any concerns or issues relating to discriminatory behaviour can be addressed effectively.
Marital Status (Married and Civil Partnerships)	Positive – this policy is designed to offer equality protection for all groups, and provides a process for any concerns or issues relating to discriminatory behaviour can be addressed effectively.
Trans People (Includes non-binary identities and all other diverse gender identities/expressions)	Positive – this policy is designed to offer equality protection for all groups, and provides a process for any concerns or issues relating to discriminatory behaviour can be addressed effectively.
Age (People of all ages)	Positive – this policy is designed to offer equality protection for all groups, and provides a process for any concerns or issues relating to discriminatory behaviour can be addressed effectively.
People in different family circumstances (including those with caring responsibilities)	Positive – this policy is designed to offer equality protection for all groups, and provides a process for any concerns or issues relating to discriminatory behaviour can be addressed effectively.
People in different social circumstances (including socio-economic factors i.e. poverty and isolation)	Positive – this policy is designed to offer equality protection for all groups, and provides a process for any concerns or issues relating to discriminatory behaviour can be addressed effectively.
Different employee groups (including consideration of on-call staff, grades, contract status. Also consider non-employee groups i.e. casual workers, volunteers)	Positive
Other – this may include consideration of other factors as relevant to the activity such as unemployment, homelessness, urbanisation, rurality, health inequalities	Positive
If any potential negative impacts have been identified you must complete a full Equality Impact Assessment (Form 280) before publication.	