

# RENFREWSHIRE VALUATION JOINT BOARD



## RESPECT AT WORK for all Renfrewshire Valuation Joint Board Employee HR15

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| <b>Approved By</b>      | Management Team                     |
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| <b>Reviewer</b>         | Assistant Assessor                  |
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### Review History

| <b>Review No.</b> | <b>Details</b>   | <b>Release Date</b> |
|-------------------|--|---------------------|
| 1                 | Addition to paragraph 3.3  | June 2018           |
| 2                 | Update to policy to reflect changes in legislation and recognising intersectionality | April 2026          |

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Renfrewshire Valuation Joint Board (“the Board”) is committed to fostering a safe, respectful and inclusive working environment where all employees are treated with fairness, dignity and respect. We recognise the potential impact of bullying, harassment, discrimination or victimisation including the emotional and psychological harm it can cause, and are committed to preventing all forms of unfair treatment.
- 1.2 Every employee has the right to be treated fairly and respectfully. We understand that experiences of unfair treatment can have serious and lasting effects. Any concerns or complaints will be taken seriously and handled with care, compassion and fairness in line with our Board policies and our trauma-informed values.
- 1.3 This policy has been developed in line with relevant legislation, other existing Board policies and the Board’s Code of Conduct for Employees.
- 1.4 This policy should be read and applied in accordance with other related Board policies and procedures, for example the Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures Policies, and the Violence and Aggression Policy, all of which contribute to a culture of safety and wellbeing.
- 1.5 We will provide guidance and training to managers and employees to support the implementation of this policy.

## 2. Purpose

- 2.1 The purpose of this policy is to clearly outline the Board’s commitment to preventing and addressing all forms of bullying, harassment, discrimination and victimisation. It sets out how we support respectful working relationships and what we’ll do when concerns are raised.
- 2.2 We want a psychologically safe and inclusive workplace which enables all employees to participate fully, contribute meaningfully and feel valued at work. Our aim is to support greater job satisfaction, wellbeing and overall performance.
- 2.3 All concerns about offensive behaviour will be taken seriously. Employees will not face any disadvantage for raising concerns in good faith, even if the issue raised is not upheld. Allegations found to be clearly malicious or knowingly untrue will be addressed in line with the Board’s procedures.
- 2.4 All employees and employee representatives have a shared role in fostering a culture where respect and inclusion are the norm and where harmful behaviour is recognised early and addressed quickly and supportively.
- 2.5 The key aims of the policy are to:
  - **Raise awareness** of behaviours that may cause harm, such as bullying, harassment, discrimination, and victimisation, and promote a culture of respect and shared responsibility across the workforce.;

- **Promote accountability** by helping employees recognise the impact of their behaviour and encouraging constructive responses when concerns are raised.
- **Reinforce a clear commitment to preventing and responding to harmful behaviours**, ensuring employees feel safe to speak up without fear of judgement, blame, or retaliation.
- **Provide clear and supportive procedures** for raising and responding to concerns, with an emphasis on confidentiality, fairness and emotional sensitivity.
- **Ensure prompt and respectful handling** of all complaints, using trauma-informed approaches and aligning with Board policies and procedures.

### 3. Scope

- 3.1 This policy applies to all Local Government Employees' including Chief Officers.
- 3.2 External agencies, partners and contractors who work with or on behalf of the Board are also expected to support the principles of this policy and act in ways that uphold a safe, respectful working environment.

### 4. Legal Framework

- 4.1 The Board is committed to upholding its legal responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 which consolidates and strengthens previous equality legislation. Under this Act, employees are protected from discrimination, harassment and victimisation based on the following protected characteristics:
- Age;
  - Disability;
  - Gender reassignment;
  - Marriage and civil partnership;
  - Pregnancy and maternity;
  - Race (including ethnic or national origins, colour and nationality);
  - Religion and belief;
  - Sex;
  - Sexual orientation.
- 4.2 In line with the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, the Board also has a duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of all employees. This includes taking proactive steps to prevent and address workplace behaviours, such as bullying and harassment, that may cause psychological harm or contribute to a hostile or unsafe working environment.
- 4.3 By aligning our approach with both equality and health and safety legislation, the Board aims to foster a working environment that is inclusive, respectful and safe for everyone.

4.4 The Board further recognises the relevance of additional legislation in supporting a culture of dignity and respect at work:

- The Protection from Harassment Act 1997 offers civil remedies for persistent and distressing behaviour, even where not linked to a protected characteristic.
- The Human Rights Act 1998 underpins key workplace rights, including dignity, privacy and protection from degrading treatment, and informs our commitment to fairness and psychological safety.
- The Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023 introduced a statutory duty for employers to take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment, such as training, awareness and reporting mechanisms.

4.5 To maintain compliance with relevant legislation, the Board will continue to strengthen its policies, practices and training to prevent harm, promote inclusion and ensure that all employees feel safe, respected and supported in the workplace.

## **5. Definitions**

5.1 Unfair treatment and behaviours may be verbal, physical, written or digital. To support understanding and consistency, key definitions of bullying, harassment, discrimination and victimisation are provided in Appendix 1 of this policy. These definitions are intended to help employees identify unacceptable behaviour and understand how it may be addressed under this policy.

## **6. Responsibilities**

6.1 Creating and maintaining a respectful, inclusive and psychologically safe workplace is a shared responsibility across the Board. Every employee, regardless of role or seniority, shares responsibility for promoting a respectful, inclusive and psychologically safe workplace.

6.2 This section outlines the specific responsibilities of key roles in supporting and upholding the principles of this policy:

6.3 **The Board** will:

- Promote and regularly review this policy to ensure its effectiveness.
- Provide training and accessible guidance to support understanding and implementation.
- Foster a culture where employees feel safe to speak up without fear of blame or retaliation.

6.4 **Managers and Supervisors** will:

- Undertake necessary training provided by the Board to engage with and uphold this policy.
- Creating psychologically safe, inclusive team environments.
- Introduce the policy through local induction, supervision and team engagement.
- Role model respectful behaviour and be mindful of personal impact.

- Identify and address any concerns promptly and compassionately, seeking advice from the Board's Personnel Practitioner and/or Renfrewshire Council's People and OD team when necessary.

#### 6.5 **Employees** will:

- Undertake necessary training provided by the Board to engage with and uphold this Policy.
- Treat colleagues with respect, empathy and fairness.
- Value diversity and individual contributions.
- Communicate with others in ways that avoid harm or distress.
- Challenge inappropriate behaviours or raise the matter with your line manager, trade union or the Boards's Personnel Practitioner and/or Renfrewshire Council's People and OD team when necessary to support a culture of accountability.

#### 6.6 **Trade Union Colleagues** and **Employee Representatives** will:

- Support employees who raise or are subject to concerns.
- Work within the principles of this Policy.

### **7 Recognising Bullying, Harassment, Discrimination and Victimisation**

- 7.1 Subjecting someone to bullying, harassment, discrimination or victimisation can have serious and lasting impacts. These behaviours are not always obvious or intentional, but their effects, such as creating an intimidating, unsafe or humiliating environment, can be deeply harmful.
- 7.2 What may seem like a joke or casual remark to one person can be distressing to another. When employees feel excluded, targeted or unsafe at work, it can affect their emotional wellbeing, mental and physical health, self-worth and ability to thrive.
- 7.3 Experiences of harm are shaped by individual identity, lived experience and context. Even unintentional behaviours can cause distress. Recognising this is essential to building a trauma-informed and psychologically safe workplace. The Board will listen without judgement, acknowledge harm, and respond supportively and proportionately. Harmful behaviours must be addressed seriously, even if not formally reported.
- 7.4 We also recognise that some individuals may face increased risk due to overlapping forms of discrimination or marginalisation, known as intersectionality. For example, someone may experience compounded challenges related to their race, sex, disability or sexual orientation. Our approach will ensure support is tailored and sensitive to each employee's circumstances.
- 7.5 Inappropriate behaviours may also pose risks to health and safety at work. Stress, anxiety and other psychological impacts can lead to physical symptoms, reduced concentration and increased risk of accidents or illness. The Board has a duty under the Health and Safety law to protect employees from these risks.

7.6 Examples of inappropriate and harmful behaviour may include, but are not limited to:

- **Verbal or written abuse:** Offensive or insulting language, malicious rumours, derogatory names or jokes and innuendoes that demean or intimidate.
- **Humiliation and exclusion:** Ridiculing or singling someone out, excluding individuals from work opportunities or social interactions or provoking hostility between colleagues.
- **Discrimination and stereotyping:** Making assumptions or derogatory comments based on age, race, gender identity, disability, religion or other protected characteristics.
- **Unwanted conduct:** Inappropriate physical contact, sexualised behaviour or mocking someone's beliefs, culture or personal identity.
- **Misuse of information and communication:** Sharing personal or confidential information without consent, or distributing offensive content via email, messaging platforms or social media.
- **Unfair treatment:** Denying access to training, promotion or development opportunities based on personal characteristics.
- **Health and safety risks:** Creating a hostile environment that contributes to stress, burnout or illness; ignoring signs of distress or failing to act when someone feels unsafe.

## **8 Supporting Employees Who have Experienced Bullying, Harassment, Discrimination or Victimisation**

8.1 Experiencing or witnessing bullying, harassment, discrimination or victimisation at work can be deeply distressing and isolating. If this has happened to you, the Board wants you to know that you will be listened to, supported and treated with respect. Your wellbeing matters, and you do not have to manage the situation alone. Whether the behaviour was recent or ongoing, subtle or overt, support is available and steps can be taken to address it in a way that is fair, compassionate and safe.

8.2 Employees are encouraged to document incidents and, where safe and appropriate, address the behaviour directly. Support is available through line managers, trusted colleagues, trade union representatives, the Board's Personnel Practitioner and Renfrewshire Council People and OD Advisers. Early reporting allows timely and appropriate action. Informal resolution, such as a respectful conversation, may be helpful in some cases. Where informal approaches are unsuitable or unsuccessful, employees may access counselling or mediation or submit a formal complaint through the Board's Grievance Procedure. Formal investigations will be conducted sensitively and fairly in line with Board policy.

8.3 If the behaviour involves a third party, for example, a member of the public, client or contractor, employees should report this to their line manager as soon as possible. The Board will investigate and take appropriate action under relevant policies, including those relating to health and safety.

8.4 Managers play a key role in maintaining a safe and respectful workplace. They must respond to concerns promptly and empathetically, support informal resolution where appropriate, and escalate to formal procedures when necessary. Formal complaints must be investigated in line with grievance and

disciplinary procedure, with appropriate action taken where behaviour is found to be unacceptable.

- 8.5 While the views of the complainant will be respected, serious concerns may require formal action to protect others. In cases of gross misconduct, disciplinary outcomes may include dismissal. Where the individual whose behaviour is in question is not a Board employee, managers must still take appropriate steps to support the employee impacted and respond in line with Board policies.

## **9. Dealing with a Malicious or Vexatious Complaint**

- 9.1 Malicious complaints are rare. This section is intended to protect the integrity of the reporting process without discouraging genuine concerns. Concerns about bullying, harassment, discrimination or victimisation will be handled with respect, fairness and care. Most complaints are raised in good faith and reflect genuine experiences. However, to protect the integrity of the process, it is important that the policy is not misused.
- 9.2 Where an investigation finds that a complaint was made with malicious or vexatious intent, such as knowingly making false allegations, misrepresenting events, seeking to cause distress, or retaliating against a previous complaint, appropriate action may be taken under the Board's Disciplinary Procedures. The complainant's intent and awareness are key in distinguishing such cases from genuine but unsubstantiated concerns.
- 9.3 A malicious or vexatious complaint involves deliberate misuse of the policy. This includes knowingly making a complaint with no factual basis, intentionally distorting events or using the process to cause harm or disruption. It may also include retaliatory complaints made in response to previous allegations, regardless of whether those were upheld.
- 9.4 Some complaints may not be upheld, but they were raised in good faith and reflect genuine concerns. A complaint may not be upheld due to insufficient evidence of differing perspectives, but the employee may still have experienced genuine distress. In such cases, appropriate support will be offered, and restorative or learning-based approaches may be considered to address any underlying issues.
- 9.5 Maintaining a psychologically safe and trusting workplace requires fair and respectful handling of all concerns. Addressing misuse of the policy helps ensure that all employees can engage with the process confidently, knowing it is just, supportive and free from reprisal.

## **10. Mediation**

- 10.1 Workplace conflict, including concerns about bullying, harassment, victimisation and discrimination can be distressing and disruptive to individuals and teams. Where appropriate, and with the voluntary agreement of all parties, mediation may offer a constructive way to address concerns, rebuild relationships and restore a respectful working environment.

- 10.2 Mediation is facilitated by an impartial, trained mediator or independent third party and provides a confidential space for individuals to:
- Share their experiences and perspectives safely and respectfully.
  - Understand the impact of the situation on themselves and others.
  - Collaborate on mutually acceptable situations.
  - Rebuild trust and agree on how to move forward together.
- 10.3 Participation in mediation must be voluntary and it will only proceed when both parties feel safe and willing to engage. It is not suitable in all cases, particularly where there is a significant power imbalance, ongoing risk or trauma-related concerns.

## **11. Counselling**

- 11.1 Experiencing or witnessing bullying, harassment, discrimination or victimisation can have a significant emotional and psychological impact, including stress, anxiety and a reduced confidence. To support employee wellbeing, counselling is available to those impacted.
- 11.2 Counselling provides a confidential, non-judgemental space for individuals to explore their experiences, understand their feelings and consider their options, whether informal or formal, based on their needs and preferences.
- 11.3 Managers must respond to concerns with empathy and respect and ensure employees are supported appropriately. All referrals must be handled confidentially and employees should be given time and flexibility to attend sessions. Creating a culture of openness, trust and care is a shared responsibility across the Board.

## **12. Bullying, Harassment, Discrimination or Victimisation outside the workplace or outwith normal working hours**

- 12.1 Harmful behaviour such as bullying, harassment, discrimination or victimisation may occur outside of traditional work settings or working hours such as at conferences, awards ceremonies or via online platforms and still have a serious impact on an individual's sense of safety and wellbeing at work. When such behaviour is connected to work, it falls within the scope of this policy.
- 12.2 Employees are expected to uphold respectful, inclusive standards of behaviour whenever they are representing the Board, including in virtual environments and on social media.
- 12.3 Any complaints about behaviour occurring outside of the workplace, but linked to work-related contexts, will be taken seriously and may be considered under the Board's disciplinary procedures, where appropriate. This ensures that all employees feel safe, supported and protected, regardless of where or when the incident occurs.

### **13. Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment (EqHRIA)**

- 13.1 This policy has been equality impact assessed in line with the Board's obligations to comply with the Equality Act 2010 and the Worker Protection (amendment to Equality Act 2010) Act 2023.

### **14 Confidentiality**

- 14.1 Information processed may include paper or electronic records and will be done so in line with the General Data Protection Regulation EU 2016/679 ("GDPR"), the Privacy and Electronic Communications (EC Directive) Regulations 2003 (as may be amended by the proposed Regulation on Privacy and Electronic Communications) and any legislation that, in respect of the United Kingdom, replaces or enacts into domestic law, GDPR or any other law relating to data protection, the processing of personal data and privacy as a consequence of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union.

### **15. Monitoring & Review**

- 15.1 The Board will continue to monitor developments in employment law, including proposed reforms to the Human Rights Act and emerging legislation such as the Employment Rights Bill. Any changes with implications for workplace dignity, equality or safety will be reflected in future revisions of this policy. The recognised Trade Unions will be consulted on any future changes to this policy.

## Appendix 1

### Definitions

#### 1.1 Bullying

- 1.1.1 Bullying is targeted, offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, and can include the abuse or misuse of power intended to undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure. It may be a single incident or pattern of behaviour and can significantly impact emotional safety and wellbeing.

#### 1.2 Cyber Bullying

- 1.2.1 Cyber-bullying is a form of bullying using electronic means. It can be an extension of face-to-face bullying, with technology providing the bully with another route to harass their target.

This may take place via mobile phones or online through emails, instant messaging, blogs and social networking websites. Cyber-bullying can include continuing to send e-mails to someone who has said they want no further contact with the sender. It may also include threats, sexual remarks, posting inappropriate pictures, offensive or intimidating language directed at another employee, unauthorised publication of private information or images, impersonation, pressure to join someone's online circle of "friends" or work contacts and "trolling" (abusing the internet to provoke or offend others online).

The nature of this type of bullying means it can occur outside working hours. However, if it is instigated by an employee against another employee, it will still be dealt with under this policy.

The Board can check emails and social networking sites if an employee reports instances of cyber bullying and will seek guidance from the Board's Personnel Practitioner and/or Head of Renfrewshire Council's People & Organisational Development before doing so.

Employees who use social networking sites, emails or other forms of social media for example to air their grievances regarding their employment or other employees, defame or breach the confidentiality of the Board, could be seen as representing the Board and may lead to disciplinary action being considered.

#### 1.3 Harassment

- 1.3.1 Harassment is unwanted conduct related to relevant "protected characteristics", which has the purpose or effect of violating an individual's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that individual.

#### 1.4 Sexual Harassment

- 1.4.1 Sexual Harassment is defined in the Equality Act 2010 as 'unwanted conduct of a sexual nature which has the purpose or effect of violating someone's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them'. Conduct that has any one or more of these effects can be harassment even if the effect was not intended.
- 1.4.2 Sexual harassment can happen to men, women and people of any gender identity or sexual orientation. It can be carried out by anyone of the same

sex, a different sex or anyone of any gender identity. The Equality Act 2010 enables employees to complain of behaviour that they find offensive even if it is not directed at them. The complainant need not possess the protected characteristic themselves.

1.4.3 The Equality Act protects the following people against sexual harassment at work:

- employees and workers
- contractors and self-employed people hired to personally do the work.
- job applicants.

Examples of sexual harassment include, but are not limited to:

- sharing sexually inappropriate images or videos, such as pornography.
- sending suggestive letters, notes, messages or e-mails.
- displaying inappropriate sexual images or posters in the workplace.
- telling lewd jokes or sharing sexual anecdotes.
- making inappropriate sexual gestures.
- abuse of authority or power by those in positions of seniority.

1.4.4 Any sexual action that creates a hostile work environment is considered sexual harassment, and the victim of the harassment may not only be the target of the offence but anyone who is negatively affected by the inappropriate behaviour.

## 1.5 Third Party Harassment

1.5.1 Third-party harassment refers to harassment of an employee by someone who is not a co-worker, such as a customer or contractor. While employers are not currently liable for all forms of third-party harassment, they now have a legal duty to take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment under the Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023.

## 1.6 Discrimination

1.6.1 Discrimination is the singling out of a particular person or group of people for special favour or disfavour, based on stereotypical assumptions about characteristics or interests within certain groups of people. Discrimination may be Direct, Indirect, Associative or Perceptive.

### 1.7 Direct Discrimination

1.7.1 Direct discrimination occurs when someone is treated less favourably than another person because of a “protected characteristic” they have or are thought to have because they associate with someone who has a protected characteristic.

## 1.8 Associative Discrimination

1.8.1 This is direct discrimination against someone because they associate with another person who possesses a “protected characteristic”.

## 1.9 Perceptive Discrimination

1.9.1 This is direct discrimination against an individual because others think they possess a particular “protected characteristic”.

## 1.10 Indirect Discrimination

1.10.1 Indirect Discrimination occurs when you have a condition, rule, policy or practice that applies to everyone, but particularly disadvantages individuals who share a “protected characteristic”.

## 1.11 Victimisation

1.11.1 Victimisation occurs when an employee is treated less favourably because they have made or supported a complaint or raised a grievance, or because they are suspected of doing so.

## 1.12 Favouritism

1.12.1 Favouritism is the giving of preferential treatment to one or more employees without a valid or justifiable business/ organisational reason. Favouritism is considered to be inappropriate behaviour when its practice has a detrimental effect on others and has the potential to lead to bullying, harassment, discrimination and victimisation.

## 1.13 Complainant

1.13.1 The employee or group of employees raising a concern about behaviour they believe is inappropriate.

1.13.2 Can also refer to a third party (including a witness) who reports behaviour that they believe negatively affects them or others. In some cases, the third party may not be treated as a complainant, but concerns may still prompt an investigation.

## 1.14 Respondent

1.14.1 The employee or a group of employees whose behaviour is being reported under this policy.