UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOUR POLICY

YEOVIL TOWN COUNCIL

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1. Introduction

1.1. Yeovil Town Council is committed to treating everyone it interacts with, with dignity, respect, and courtesy.

1.2. The Council also has a duty to protect its Members, officers, contractors, volunteers, and others from abusive, threatening, or unreasonable behaviour.

1.3. This policy sets out the standards of behaviour expected when interacting with the Council and explains what constitutes unacceptable behaviour.

1.4. The policy also describes the actions the Council may take where behaviour falls below acceptable standards.

1.5. While disagreement and challenge are legitimate, the manner in which they are expressed must remain respectful and appropriate. The Council expects the same standards of behaviour from others as it provides in return.

2. Scope of Policy

2.1. This policy applies to:

- Councillors, when dealing with officers, other Members, or the public;
- Members of the public;
- Contractors, consultants, and volunteers; and
- Any person communicating with or attending meetings of the Council

2.2. The policy applies to behaviour that occurs:

- in person;
- by telephone;
- in writing, including emails and letters;
- via social media or online platforms; and
- at Council meetings, events, or on Council premises.

2.3. This policy operates alongside, and does not replace:

- the Councillors' Code of Conduct;
- Standing Orders;
- staff disciplinary procedures; and
- the Council's statutory and legal duties.

3. Expected Standards of Behaviour

3.1. All individuals interacting with the Council are expected to:

- be polite, respectful, and professional;
- communicate clearly and constructively;
- listen to differing views;
- avoid personal attacks; and
- respect the respective roles and responsibilities of Members and officers.

3.2. The Council recognises that people may strongly disagree with decisions or actions. Disagreement itself is not unacceptable; however, the way in which it is expressed is key.

4. Unacceptable Behaviour

4.1. Definitions

For the purposes of this policy:

- Vexatious behaviour

  Vexatious behaviour refers to actions or communications that are repeated, unreasonable, or disproportionate, and which have the effect of harassing the Council, causing distress, or placing an unjustifiable burden on time or resources, rather than pursuing a legitimate issue.

- Persistent contact

  Persistent contact refers to repeated communication that continues after an issue has been fully addressed or where reasonable requests for appropriate conduct or limits on contact have not been respected.

4.2. Unacceptable behaviour is behaviour that hinders the Council's work, causes distress, or places unreasonable demands on individuals or resources. The examples below are not exhaustive.

4.3. Abusive or Aggressive Behaviour

This includes, but is not limited to:

- shouting, swearing, or using insulting language;

- personal attacks or derogatory remarks;
- offensive, discriminatory, or prejudicial comments; and
- threats of harm, whether explicit or implied.

4.4. Harassment or Bullying

This includes:

- repeated or persistent contact that is unreasonable, intimidating, or oppressive;
- personal, sexual, or discriminatory harassment; and
- targeting individuals rather than addressing Council matters.

4.5. Unreasonable Behaviour

This includes:

- excessive, repetitive, or vexatious correspondence;
- refusing to accept a decision once it has been properly made and explained;
- making unreasonable demands on officers' or Members' time;
- attempting to involve multiple officers or Members simultaneously to secure a different response.

4.6. Undermining Governance

This includes:

- challenging or disregarding lawful decisions, Standing Orders, or professional officer advice in an abusive or disruptive manner;
- attempting to improperly pressure officers or Members; and
- persistently questioning officers' integrity or professionalism without supporting evidence.

4.7. Disruptive Conduct at Meetings

This includes:

- interrupting proceedings;
- refusing to comply with the rulings of the Chair; and
- preventing the orderly conduct of Council business.

4.8. Social Media Misuse

This includes:

- posting abusive, intimidating, or defamatory content about the Council, its Members, or officers;
- using online platforms to harass or target individuals associated with the Council.

5. What Is Not Unacceptable Behaviour

The following, in themselves, do not constitute unacceptable behaviour:

- making a complaint;
- expressing dissatisfaction with a decision;
- robust but respectful challenge; and
- raising concerns about Council services or conduct through appropriate channels.

6. Consideration of Vulnerability

6.1. The Council recognises that an individual's behaviour may, in some circumstances, be influenced by factors relating to vulnerability. This may include, but is not limited to:

- physical or mental health conditions;
- learning disabilities or neurodivergence;
- age-related conditions or frailty;
- communication difficulties, including language barriers;
- temporary distress arising from personal circumstances; and
- any protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

6.2. Where the Council is aware, or reasonably believes, that an individual may be vulnerable, this will be taken into account when assessing whether behaviour is unacceptable and in determining any appropriate response.

6.3. In such cases, the Council will take reasonable and proportionate steps to support effective communication and engagement. This may include making reasonable adjustments, adapting communication methods or providing additional time or support where appropriate.

6.4. However, the Council's duty of care to protect its Members, officers and others from abusive, threatening, or unreasonable behaviour remains paramount. The existence of vulnerability does not prevent the Council from taking action under this policy where it is necessary and proportionate to do so.

7. Managing Unacceptable Behaviour

7.1. Where unacceptable behaviour occurs, the Council will take action that is proportionate to the seriousness and persistence of the behaviour.

7.2. Informal Action

This may include:

- reminding the individual of expected standards of behaviour;
- requesting that behaviour changes; and
- setting clear boundaries for future contact.

7.3. Formal Action

Where behaviour continues or is more serious, the Council may:

- restrict methods of contact, for example to written communication only;
- limit the frequency of contact;
- require communication to take place through a single nominated officer;
- exclude an individual from Council premises or meetings, where lawful and appropriate; and
- cease correspondence where all issues have been fully exhausted.

7.4. Serious or Persistent Behaviour

In cases involving threats, harassment, or serious disruption, the Council may:

- involve the Police;
- seek legal remedies; and
- take action under employment, conduct, or constitutional procedures.

7.5. Authority to implement actions under this section may be delegated to the Chief Executive / Town Clerk, who may determine an appropriate and proportionate response in accordance with this policy.

7.6. Right of Appeal

7.6.1. Any individual subject to action under this policy has the right to appeal the decision.

7.6.2. An appeal must be made in writing within 10 working days of notification of the action, setting out the grounds for the appeal.

7.6.3. Appeals will be considered by the Staffing Committee, which will review the decision to ensure that it was reasonable, proportionate, and applied in accordance with this policy.

7.6.4. Where it is not appropriate or practicable for the Staffing Committee to consider the appeal internally, the Council will make arrangements for the appeal to be considered by an independent external party.

7.6.5. The outcome of the appeal will be communicated in writing and will be final.

8. Councillors and Unacceptable Behaviour

8.1. Where a Councillor's behaviour may breach the Councillors' Code of Conduct, the matter may be:

- referred for investigation in accordance with the Code; and/or
- addressed under Standing Orders, including withdrawal from meetings.

8.2. The Chief Executive / Town Clerk retains responsibility for protecting officers from unacceptable behaviour.

9. Recording and Review

9.1. Incidents of unacceptable behaviour will be recorded in order to:

- ensure consistency;
- identify patterns of behaviour; and
- support fair and proportionate decision making.

9.2. This policy will be reviewed periodically to ensure it remains effective and appropriate.

10. Equality and Proportionality

All actions taken under this policy will be:

- proportionate;
- fair, consistent, and transparent; and
- compliant with equality and human rights legislation.

11. Policy Ownership

This policy is owned by the Chief Executive / Town Clerk and may be implemented where necessary to protect the wellbeing of the Council, its Members, officers and the public.

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To be reviewed: June 2030