Part of the Good Neighbours Network	**Alton Community Care** **Registered Charity No. 275617**

Bullying and Harassment Policy

Purpose

Alton Community Care (ACC) is committed to providing a safe, welcoming, inclusive and respectful environment for everyone involved in our work.

Bullying, harassment, intimidation, discrimination, victimisation and other inappropriate behaviour are not acceptable. This policy explains what we mean by bullying and harassment, how concerns can be raised, and how ACC will respond.

We will take concerns seriously and deal with them fairly, sensitively and, wherever possible, confidentially.

Scope

This policy applies to everyone involved with ACC, including but not limited to volunteers, trustees, committee members and clients.

The policy applies to behaviour in person, in phone calls and online, including emails, messaging services, social media, video calls and other digital platforms.

It applies both during ACC activities and where behaviour outside those activities has a direct impact on relationships, safety or ACC's work.

What is bullying?

Bullying is behaviour that is intended to intimidate, undermine, humiliate, threaten or harm another person, or behaviour that has that effect.

Bullying can be repeated or ongoing, although a single serious incident may also be treated as bullying or otherwise unacceptable conduct.

Examples may include:

- Repeatedly putting someone down, humiliating or belittling them
- Shouting at, threatening or intimidating someone
- Deliberately excluding someone from activities or communications
- Spreading malicious rumours or making offensive comments
- Undermining someone's contribution or deliberately setting them up to fail
- Repeatedly making unreasonable demands or imposing unfair treatment
- Sending abusive, threatening or humiliating messages
- Cyberbullying through social media, messaging platforms or other online channels

A person's intention is not the only factor considered. Behaviour may be inappropriate even where the person responsible says that they were joking or did not intend to cause offence.

What is harassment?

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

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Harassment can be related to a person's protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010, such as:

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

Harassment can also involve other unwanted behaviour that is inappropriate or offensive, even where it does not relate to a protected characteristic. Examples include offensive jokes, comments, gestures, unwanted attention, insults, inappropriate messages, sexual comments or unwanted physical contact.

Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment is unwanted conduct of a sexual nature.

Examples can include:

- Sexual comments, jokes or gestures
- Unwanted flirting or sexual advances
- Comments about someone's body or appearance
- Sharing or displaying sexual images or material
- Asking intrusive questions about someone's sex life
- Unwanted touching or other physical contact
- Sending sexually suggestive messages or images
- Making someone feel that they must tolerate sexual behaviour to remain involved in the organisation

Sexual harassment will be treated seriously regardless of the seniority, role or status of the people involved.

What is not bullying or harassment?

Reasonable and respectful management, supervision, feedback or disagreement does not normally constitute bullying or harassment.

For example, it is acceptable for an ACC trustee or Coordinator to:

- Give constructive feedback
- Address poor conduct or performance
- Allocate work fairly
- Set reasonable expectations
- Make legitimate organisational decisions
- Challenge inappropriate behaviour

Such conversations should nevertheless be conducted respectfully and without intimidation, humiliation or discrimination.

Our responsibilities

Everyone involved with ACC is expected to:

- Treat others with dignity and respect

- Avoid behaviour that could reasonably be considered bullying or harassment
- Speak up if they witness inappropriate behaviour where it is safe to do so
- Cooperate with any investigation
- Respect confidentiality
- Avoid victimising anyone who raises a concern or participates in an investigation

Trustees, Committee Members and Coordinators have an additional responsibility to model appropriate behaviour and respond promptly when concerns are brought to their attention.

Raising a concern

Anyone who experiences or witnesses bullying or harassment is encouraged to raise their concern as soon as reasonably possible.

A concern can be raised with:

Designated contact: Andrew Hinde (Chairman)
Email: chairman@altoncare.org.uk
Telephone: 07985 302720

Alternative contact: Pauline Bacon (Chief Coordinator)
Email: chiefcoordinator@altoncare.org.uk
Telephone: 07973 315858

Where possible, people raising concerns should provide information about:

- What happened
- When and where it happened
- Who was involved
- Whether anyone witnessed the behaviour
- Any relevant emails, messages, photographs or other evidence
- The impact the behaviour has had

A person does not need to confront the alleged perpetrator before raising a concern.

Immediate safety concerns

If someone believes they are at immediate risk of harm, they should prioritise their safety and seek appropriate assistance.

The organisation may take immediate steps to protect people while a concern is being considered. This could include changing volunteer arrangements, separating individuals, suspending participation in activities, or putting other temporary measures in place.

How concerns will be handled

ACC will respond to concerns promptly, fairly and proportionately.

Depending on the circumstances, we may:

1. Listen to the person raising the concern and establish the relevant facts.
2. Consider whether any immediate safeguarding or safety measures are required.
3. Speak to the person whose behaviour has been questioned.
4. Speak to witnesses or obtain relevant evidence.
5. Keep appropriate records of the process.
6. Decide what action, if any, is appropriate.
7. Communicate the outcome to the people involved as far as confidentiality and legal obligations allow.

Not every concern will require a formal investigation. Where appropriate and with the agreement of those involved, concerns may be resolved informally through discussion, mediation, clarification of expectations or other appropriate action.

Serious allegations may require a formal investigation.

Confidentiality

Concerns will be handled sensitively, and information will only be shared with people who need it to deal with the matter, wherever reasonably possible.

Complete confidentiality cannot always be guaranteed. For example, information may need to be shared where necessary to investigate an allegation, protect someone from harm, comply with a legal obligation, or meet safeguarding responsibilities.

Everyone involved is expected to respect the confidentiality of the process and not discuss allegations unnecessarily with others.

False or malicious allegations

The organisation recognises that a person may raise a concern honestly even if it cannot ultimately be substantiated.

A concern will not be treated as misconduct simply because it is not upheld.

However, deliberately making a false or malicious allegation, or deliberately providing false information during an investigation, may itself be treated as a serious breach of this policy.

Victimisation and retaliation

ACC will not tolerate retaliation against anyone who:

- Raises a genuine concern
- Supports someone who raises a concern
- Acts as a witness
- Participates in an investigation
- Makes a report in good faith

Any such behaviour will be taken seriously and may result in further action.

Consequences of unacceptable behaviour

Where bullying or harassment is found to have occurred, the organisation will take appropriate action.

Depending on the circumstances and the person's role, this may include:

- A verbal or written warning
- Additional supervision or training
- A requirement to change behaviour or working arrangements
- Removal from a particular activity or role
- Suspension from volunteering
- Ending a person's volunteering arrangement
- Removal from a trustee, committee or leadership role
- Referral to another organisation or relevant authority where appropriate

The organisation will consider the seriousness and circumstances of each case before deciding on appropriate action.

Safeguarding

Where a concern involves a child, vulnerable adult, abuse, exploitation or an immediate risk of harm, the organisation's safeguarding procedures will also apply.

Safeguarding concerns will be dealt with in accordance with ACCS's Safeguarding Policy and any applicable legal or regulatory requirements.

Support

We recognise that experiencing or witnessing bullying or harassment can be distressing.

Where appropriate, ACC will signpost people to suitable sources of support and may make reasonable adjustments to enable someone to continue participating safely in the organisation.

Review of this policy

This policy will be reviewed regularly and whenever there are significant changes to legislation, organisational practice or guidance.

All volunteers, trustees and relevant representatives will be made aware of the policy and their responsibilities under it.