



DS25/19

Bullying and Harassment Policy

V2.0 – June 2025

Introduction

Within the Church are 'all sorts and conditions' of human beings, diverse in age, gender, ethnicity and with different kinds of ability; there are professionals and volunteers, there are ordained and licensed ministers and faithful members of congregations. The Church is a body whose members acknowledge their individual needs, and which recognizes the human capacity for even the best to go wrong. Indeed, a number of the letters in the New Testament are written to dysfunctional churches struggling with damaged and damaging human relationships.

Sadly, bullying and harassment occur within the Church as in other areas of human society. In a community called to witness to the eternal dignity of every human being, we have a unique responsibility to challenge such behaviour and create communities where each person has the sustaining reassurance that they will be treated with the respect that is due to all human beings made in the image of God and precious to God.

The resources that Christians bring to that task will include, but not be confined to, good professional practice and the expertise of those experienced in the dynamics of working relationships. The commandment to 'love one another as I have loved you' (John 13: 34) is central to our Christian discipleship. We follow the Servant leader who washed the feet of the man about to betray him. St. Paul was not content to leave 'unfinished business' between Philemon and Onesimus but sought reconciliation. A concern is that the call to love and forgive may lead individuals who feel bullied or harassed to hesitate before, or even refrain from, seeking appropriate support and help.

We therefore want to emphasize that it is distinctively Christian to 'go to one who sins against you and show them their faults' (Matthew 18:15), and that bullying and harassment, whether intentional or not, can greatly undermine the effectiveness of individual Christians and the Church to which they belong, as well as being extremely hurtful for those involved. The purpose of this policy is to set out a framework in which, wherever possible, relationships can be rebuilt and trust restored. In this, as in everything, we depend on the grace and power of the Holy Spirit to form each of us more into the likeness of Christ.

(Acknowledgement: material in this Introduction is partly drawn from the Archbishops' introduction to the Safeguarding Adults policy)

Statement of commitment

1. The Church is required by God to foster relationships of the utmost integrity, truthfulness, and trustworthiness. Bullying and harassment will not be tolerated in the Diocese. All complaints of bullying and harassment will be taken seriously and thoroughly investigated.

Standards of behaviour

2. Those with pastoral responsibilities for the clergy in this diocese; Area Deans, Archdeacons, Bishops, and the Archbishop; commit themselves to strive to build a culture of mutual respect where individuals, whether lay or ordained, feel respected and safe, and treat one another with dignity. They recognise the importance of setting a good example in this work and undertake to participate in training in support of this policy.
3. Both the House of Laity and the House of Clergy of the York Diocesan Synod are committed to striving to contribute to a culture of mutual respect where individuals, whether lay or ordained, feel respected and safe, and treat one another with dignity. Its members recognise the importance of setting a good example in this work and undertake to participate in training in support of this policy.

What is bullying and harassment?

4. Any behaviour that could potentially undermine someone's dignity and respect is unacceptable. If it is not challenged, it is likely to escalate and lead to significant difficulties for all concerned.
5. Bullying is unwanted behaviour from a person or a group that is offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting; or an abuse or misuse of power that undermines, humiliates, or causes physical or emotional harm. It can be a regular pattern of behaviour, or a one-off incident. It may happen face-to-face, on social media, in emails or in phone calls. It is not always obvious or noticed by others, and it is possible that the perpetrator might not know that their behaviour is bullying. It can still amount to bullying even if the perpetrator does not realise it or does not intend to bully someone. Bullying can also happen from one or more individuals towards someone in authority, for example from PCC members towards their incumbent. Bullying behaviour can also amount to harassment if it is unwanted behaviour that relates to any of the following "protected characteristics": age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. The legal definition of harassment as set out in discrimination legislation is "unwanted conduct that violates people's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment." A serious one-off incident can amount to harassment, as can repeated behaviour. Additionally, the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 makes it illegal for someone to pursue a course of conduct which amounts to harassment.

How can bullying and harassment be recognised?

6. Bullying may manifest itself in a variety of different ways. It is usually persistent, and often unpredictable, and can amount to severe psychological intimidation. It is insidious and undermines the ability and confidence of the person suffering from it. It can lead to fear, isolation, demotivation and reduced output, poor concentration, symptoms of stress, a noticeable level of sickness absence or stubborn attendance when obviously unwell, psychological, emotional, and physical harm.
7. Harassment, in general terms, is unwanted conduct affecting the dignity of individuals. It may be related to one or more of the Protected Characteristics (including theology or church tradition), or any personal characteristic of the individual, and may be persistent or an isolated incident. Differences of gender or ethnic background, for example, may mean that what is said or done is not understood or heard as it was intended. The important point is that the actions or comments are viewed as demeaning and unacceptable by the recipient.

8. Bullying and harassment may take place in churches, offices, church halls and houses used for church meetings. A list of examples of bullying and harassing behaviour is provided at Appendix 1.
9. It is important to distinguish between bullying and behaviour that is reasonable in a particular context. For example, there may be occasions where shortcomings in performance are being addressed and more incisive behaviour is interpreted as bullying, simply because the recipient is unused to being challenged or asked to account for their actions.
10. **In deciding whether the conduct had the effect of violating the individual's dignity or creating an environment that is intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive to the individual, the following must be taken into account:**
 - the perception of the individual making the allegation
 - the other circumstances of the case
 - whether it is reasonable for the conduct to have that effect.
11. Any person making an allegation of bullying or harassment must describe the behaviour complained of, and the occasion(s) when it occurred in order for it to be considered and investigated. Deliberately malicious complaints will be regarded very seriously.

Harassment Advisers

12. The Diocese of York is committed to the encouragement and training of Harassment Advisers. These are three members of the clergy and laity who have volunteered, and been appointed, to undertake these duties. They are supervised by the Diocesan Adviser in Pastoral Care, from whom they receive regular training for this role and have the full support of the Archbishop and Bishops. They are available to any member of the clergy or laity to offer advice and information as required in the context of a confidential relationship (see paragraph 22). They are also able to channel complaints and, if suitably trained, to negotiate or mediate between the parties concerned. Details of how to contact Harassment Advisers are available on the Diocesan website; they will refer situations to other Harassment Advisers where this is appropriate.

Dealing with allegations of bullying or harassment

13. Every complaint of bullying or harassment will be taken seriously and investigated appropriately. It may be very difficult for someone who is a target to make a complaint.
14. The scope of this policy extends to clergy and lay people including Licensed Lay Ministers (Readers) and Churchwardens, other than those who are employed by the Diocesan Board of Finance, or by a Parochial Church Council, to whom terms and conditions of that employment will apply. The procedure to be followed in the event of allegations should be that applicable to the alleged perpetrator – see Appendix 4. The procedure to be followed is set out in Appendix 4.
15. **This policy does not apply to situations involving children or vulnerable adults; the Diocesan Child Protection Policy and the Safeguarding guidelines for Vulnerable Adults should be used where children or vulnerable adults complain of bullying or harassment.** At any stage, the Diocesan Safeguarding Team must be consulted if there is any uncertainty as to whether the allegation should be raised as a Safeguarding concern within the definitions set out in the House of Bishops practice guidance.
16. Where an allegation of bullying or harassment is made directly to the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer that does not, in their professional opinion, meet the threshold for a safeguarding concern set out in the House of Bishops practice guidance, the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer may refer the complainant for support from one of the Harassment Advisors.

Initial action

17. This policy is intended to deal with current allegations. If the last incident is more than six months old, it should be referred to the relevant Archdeacon, who will consider if there are any safeguarding or CDM issues to be pursued.
18. It may be possible for the complaint to be resolved quickly by the complainant explaining directly to the alleged perpetrator the effect their behaviour is having, and that they want it to stop. By trying this route, the complainant may be able to get the alleged perpetrator to stop their behaviour and so prevent the matter becoming public, or of escalating and making the situation more difficult.
19. It has been shown that it is rarely advisable for an individual to confront a bully alone, without professional support. The complainant should consider consulting a Harassment Adviser or the Diocesan Adviser in Pastoral Care to discuss with them whether to confront the alleged harasser, alone or with their support, or whether the complainant would like them to talk to the alleged harasser on their behalf.
20. Every effort should be made to use informal means, including considering alternative dispute resolution such as mediation or restorative justice, to stop the offensive behaviour before formal procedures are invoked. The complainant should consider whether mediation is an appropriate response in the particular situation before proceeding further. The complainant should also make it clear that if the behaviour continues, they will make a formal complaint. This may be enough to resolve the situation, particularly if the alleged perpetrator(s) was/were unaware that their behaviour was causing offence. The Diocese has two people trained in mediation - see the Diocesan Website for details.
21. In the majority of cases, harassment advisers will attempt to reach resolution or a point of closure within three to six months, followed by ongoing monitoring for another six months.

Informal steps

22. If either a clergy or lay person considers that they are a target of bullying or harassment, they should speak to the Incumbent, the Priest-in-Charge or, during a vacancy, the Area Dean. (If the Incumbent, Priest-in-Charge or Area Dean is the alleged perpetrator or complainant then they should speak directly to the Harassment Adviser.) The Incumbent or Harassment Adviser will ensure that appropriate pastoral care is offered to all parties. It is helpful to aim to speak to the Incumbent as soon as possible after the incident concerned. It is, however, recognised that complaints of this nature may relate to cumulative actions taking place over a period of time. The complainant may also contact one of the Harassment Advisers (see paragraph 13). Further advice is offered in Appendix 2 (for complainants) and Appendix 3 (for those accused of bullying or harassment).
23. i) The Incumbent (this term includes the Priest-in-Charge or Area Dean where appropriate) should investigate the allegations and, if there is sufficient evidence to justify a complaint, to speak to the alleged perpetrator. It is the Incumbent's responsibility wherever possible to take speedy action to stop harassment and it is important that it is made clear to the alleged perpetrator that such behaviour is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Silence or inaction can be seen as collusion and endorsement of such behaviour. If the Incumbent is the complainant or alleged perpetrator then the Harassment Adviser will investigate.
- ii) Those investigating claims of harassment should consider all the circumstances before reaching a conclusion, and particularly the perception of the complainant, as harassment is often felt differently by different people. Having gathered all the evidence those investigating should ask themselves "could what has taken place be reasonably considered to have caused offence?" In some cases, it may be possible to rectify matters informally. Sometimes people are not aware that their behaviour is unwelcome, and an informal discussion can lead to greater understanding and an agreement that the behaviour will cease.
- iii) It is recommended that electronic communication such as email should only be used, if at all, for administrative purposes such as setting up meetings, and not for discussion of any allegations made.
24. Incumbents and Harassment Advisers should balance the importance of a swift response to allegations of bullying and harassment, with the need to spend appropriate time investigating and reflecting on the issues.
25. Incumbents are strongly encouraged to draw upon the advice and support offered by Harassment Advisers who have been trained for this work and appointed to it by the Bishops.

Formal procedures

26. If an informal approach does not achieve satisfactory results, or the nature of the incident(s) prompts the person who feels harassed to take a more formal approach, a complaint should be made to the Archdeacon. Anyone bringing an issue forward may be accompanied by a friend or colleague if they so wish.
27. When the alleged perpetrator is a member of clergy the Archdeacon will consider whether to bring a formal allegation of misconduct under the Clergy Discipline Measure 2003.
28. When the alleged perpetrator is a Licensed Lay Minister, the Archdeacon will consider whether to raise the matter with the Diocesan Bishop, who may decide to take appropriate formal action, including suspension or revocation of the alleged

perpetrator's licence in accordance with Canon E6 or Canon E7 (Licensed Lay Workers).

29. When the alleged perpetrator is a lay person who is not licensed, complaints of bullying or harassment may, with the complainant's consent, be dealt with in one of a number of ways according to the circumstances. This may include a formal, personal letter from the Bishop to the alleged perpetrator, setting out the standards agreed under this policy.
30. After the investigation and action are concluded, the Incumbent or another nominated suitable person should monitor the situation and ensure that appropriate continuing support is offered to the parties involved.

Additional Support

31. The Diocesan Adviser in Pastoral Care is available and contact details are on the Diocesan Website.

Confidentiality

32. These matters are to be treated as confidential unless safeguarding issues arise, in which case appropriate action in line with other diocesan policies and House of Bishops' Guidance must be taken. Persons affected by bullying and harassment should be offered appropriate support.

Review

33. This Policy and a report of activity related to the policy, will be reviewed annually by the York Diocesan Leadership Team in consultation with the Diocesan Safeguarding Panel.

This policy was approved by the Archbishop's Council on 9 June 2025.

Peter Warry

Diocesan Secretary

13/06/2025

Appendix 1:

Examples of bullying and harassing behaviour

This list of behaviours is not exhaustive but gives a clear indication of the sorts of actions that constitute bullying or harassment:

- constantly criticising someone's work
- spreading malicious rumours about someone
- constantly putting someone down in meetings
- deliberately giving someone a heavier workload than everyone else
- excluding someone from social events
- circulating humiliating, offensive, or threatening comments or photos, including via social media
- making aggressive gestures and physically intimidating someone
- making unwanted physical contact
- persistently bombarding someone with emails and other forms of communication

Upward bullying can also happen from individuals, staff, churchwardens, PCC members, members of the congregation or other groups towards someone more senior, for example an incumbent. It can be from one person or a group of people. Examples of upward bullying include:

- showing continued disrespect
- refusing to cooperate or complete tasks
- spreading rumours
- constantly undermining someone's authority
- doing things to make someone seem unskilled or unable to do their job properly

Appendix 2:

I think I have been the target of bullying or harassment, what can I do?

1. If you are experiencing bullying or harassment, you should not suffer in silence or feel that you are to blame in some way for inviting bullying behaviour.

Actions you can take yourself

2. Keep a factual log of all incidents of bullying – dates, times, nature of incident, details of accusations, criticisms, emails, and other correspondence. This may be needed as evidence should harassment, victimisation or bullying continue or subsequently recur. If others have witnessed bullying incidents, ask if they will support you.
3. The Bishops have appointed Harassment Advisers, who have been specially trained to be available to support and accompany you and you are strongly advised to use this support. Harassment Advisers guarantee appropriate confidentiality and will meet with you in private to talk through your complaint. They will advise you on procedures for dealing with claims of bullying and harassment and help you to clarify the impact of the behaviour you are experiencing so that you can decide what you want to do about it.

Further action

4. Please refer to paragraphs 18 – 20 (Initial action), paragraphs 21 – 24 (Informal steps) and paragraphs 25 – 29 (Formal procedures) for the next stages in the procedure.

Appendix 3:

I have been accused of bullying or harassment, what can I do?

1. Bullying and harassment are matters that must be taken seriously. An accusation does not signify a judgement that you are guilty, and there will need to be a discussion with you in order to establish the true nature of the situation. It is possible that there might be a problem that has arisen because you have not realised the effect of your actions and you may not have intended the effects complained of.
2. The perception of the person complaining of bullying or harassment is, however, an important factor in determining whether or not harassment has taken place – simply to deny there is a problem, or that the problem lies with the person complaining won't normally be sufficient.
3. You are encouraged to contact your Incumbent or Area Dean if you are accused of harassment. The aim of the person you contact will be to facilitate discussion with a view to resolving the problem at source if possible. If you feel uncomfortable speaking to your Incumbent or Area Dean about the issue, seek advice from a Harassment Adviser
4. In many cases the problem will be resolved informally through discussion (see paragraphs 18 – 20 above, Initial action). You will be asked to reflect on your behaviour and the possibility that you might be at fault, whether consciously or not.
5. If an informal process (paragraphs 18 – 20, Initial action, and paragraphs 21 – 24, Informal steps) is unsuccessful, consideration will be given to moving to a more formal process involving the Archdeacon (paragraphs 25 – 29, Formal procedures). The Diocese must ensure that any formal procedures are fairly and properly followed. Details relating to the circumstances that gave rise to the complaint, the evidence of witnesses and the nature of the relationship between the person complaining and yourself will all be taken into account.
6. Throughout any informal or formal procedures, the principal objective is that of identifying the underlying issues and eliminating the cause of offence as quickly as possible and with minimal recrimination.
7. As a result of informal or formal action you may be offered help to recognise, understand and modify your behaviour; you are strongly advised to accept this help.

Appendix 4: Summary Flow Chart of Process:

