

Bullying and Harassment Policy August 2021

Everyone will be treated with dignity and respect at North Midlands OLGBT Group. Bullying and harassment of any kind are in no-one's interest and will not be tolerated; this includes bullying or harassment of members by visitors to North Midlands OLGBT Group.

This policy applies to all Trustees, members and volunteers at our usual meeting place or online, including those working away from our main meeting place.

Allegations of bullying and harassment will be treated seriously and following investigation may result in termination of membership.

What are Bullying and Harassment?

Harassment, in general terms is unwanted conduct affecting the dignity of men and women, where actions or comments are viewed as demeaning and unacceptable to the recipient.

It may be related to age, gender, race, disability, religion, belief, sexuality, nationality or any personal characteristic of the individual, and may be persistent or an isolated incident.

Bullying is offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, an abuse or misuse of power through means intended to undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient.

Bullying or harassment may be by an individual against an individual or involve groups of people. It may be obvious or it may be insidious. It may be face to face or in written communications, electronic (e)mail, phone. Whatever form it takes, it is unwarranted and unwelcome to the individual. It may take place in private or in public.

Examples of bullying/harassing behaviour include:

- spreading malicious rumours, or insulting someone by word or behaviour (particularly on the grounds of race, sex, age, disability, sexual orientation and religion or belief);
- copying memos that are critical about someone to others who do not need to know;
- ridiculing or demeaning someone – picking on them or setting them up to fail;
- exclusion or victimisation;
- unfair treatment;
- overbearing supervision or other misuse of power or position;
- unwelcome sexual advances – touching, standing too close, the display of offensive materials;
- making threats or comments about job security without foundation;
- deliberately undermining a competent worker's efforts by overloading and constant criticism;
- preventing individuals progressing by intentionally blocking training opportunities.

Legitimate, constructive and fair criticism of a member's performance or behaviour is not bullying. An occasional raised voice or argument is not bullying.

Procedures

Complaints of bullying and/or harassment, or information from members relating to such complaints, will be dealt with fairly and confidentially and sensitively using the general format set out in North Midlands OLGBT Group's complaint procedures. However bullying or harassment will not be treated as a standard complaint; it is a serious issue and will be treated as such.

Investigation

Complaints will be taken seriously and investigated promptly, objectively and independently. Decisions can then be made as to what action needs to be taken.

Informal action

If appropriate, the matter will be dealt with 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.

Formal action

More serious cases of bullying or harassment will be dealt with under the NORTH MIDLANDS LGBT OLDER PEOPLES GROUP's complaints procedures.

Where bullying or harassment amounts to gross misconduct, dismissal from the group without notice may be appropriate.

Counselling and Mediation

Outside Counselling or mediation may be considered, particularly where investigation shows no cause for action, or where it may be useful to help resolve the issue or help support the person accused as well as the complainant. Both parties need to agree to this and find appropriate arrangements themselves.

Unfounded allegations

Members lodging a complaint will not be challenged for doing so unless somebody makes an unfounded allegation of bullying and/or harassment **for malicious reasons**. The case will then be investigated and dealt with fairly and objectively under the complaints procedure

Procedures

The aim of these procedures is to ensure incidents of bullying and harassment can be recognised and dealt with.

How can bullying and harassment be recognised?

Behaviour that is considered bullying by one person may be considered firm management by another. Most people will agree on extreme cases of bullying and harassment but it is sometimes the "grey" areas that cause most problems.

Bullying and harassment can often be hard to recognize – they may not be obvious to others, and may be insidious. The recipient may think “perhaps this is normal behaviour for North Midlands OLGBT Group”. They may be anxious that others will consider them weak, or not up to the job, if they find the actions of others intimidating. They may be accused of “overreacting” and worry that they won’t be believed if they do report incidents.

People being bullied or harassed may sometimes appear to overreact to something that seems relatively trivial but which may be the “last straw” following a series of incidents. There is often fear of retribution if they make a complaint. Colleagues may be reluctant to come forward as witnesses, as they too may fear the consequences to themselves. They may be so relieved not to be the target of the bully that they collude with the bully as a way of avoiding attention.

Bullying and harassment makes someone feel anxious and humiliated. Feelings of anger and frustration at being unable to cope may be triggered. Some people may try to retaliate in some way. Others may become frightened and demotivated. Stress, loss of self confidence and self-esteem caused by harassment or bullying can lead to insecurity, illness, absence from meetings, and even resignation. Almost always enjoyment of membership is affected and relations in the group suffer.

Why do we need to take action?

Bullying and harassment are not only unacceptable on moral grounds but may, if unchecked or badly handled, create serious problems:

- Poor morale and poor membership relations;
- Loss of respect for others in the group;
- Poor activities;
- Lost enjoyment of being a member;
- Absence;
- Resignations;
- Damage to group’s reputation;

The legal position

Discrimination and harassment

It is not possible to make a direct complaint to a tribunal about bullying. However, members might be able to bring complaints under laws covering **discrimination and harassment**.

Action by Board of Trustees

Management should be clear about the standards of behaviour expected, set a good example in their own behaviour and ensure that individuals are fully aware of their responsibilities to others.

Procedures

Bullying is a serious issue and must be treated as such. Complaints of bullying and / or harassment, or information from members relating to such complaints, must be dealt with fairly and confidentially and sensitively using the general format set out in our complaints procedures

Investigation

Complaints must be taken seriously and investigated promptly and objectively. Members do not normally make serious accusations unless they feel seriously aggrieved. The investigation must be seen to be objective and independent. Decisions can then be made as to what action needs to be taken.

Informal approaches

In some cases it may be possible to rectify matters informally. Sometimes people are unaware that their behaviour is not welcome and an informal discussion can lead to greater understanding and an agreement that the behaviour will cease. It may be that the individual will choose to do this themselves, or they may need support from a Board member or other member.

Counselling

Counselling or mediation may be used where appropriate, particularly where investigation shows no cause for action, or where doubt is cast on the validity of the complaint. Counselling may be used to resolve the issue or help support the person accused as well as the complainant.

Serious misconduct

When somebody makes an unfounded allegation of bullying and/or harassment for malicious reasons the case should be investigated and dealt with fairly and objectively under the complaints procedure.

----- End of policy -----

For further guidance see:

www.gov.uk/workplace-bullying-and-harassment

www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/l/r/Bullying_and_harassment_employer_2010-accessible-version-July-2011.pdf

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Small Charities & Voluntary Groups.

www.smallcharitysupport.uk

Version History

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17/08/2021	Reviewed and readopted without amendment by OLGBT Board