

## Bullying and the Code of Conduct

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Paragraph 3(2)(b) of the Code of Conduct says 'you must not bully any person'. This includes other members, officers and members of the public.

### What is 'bullying'?

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We characterise bullying as offensive, intimidating, malicious, insulting or humiliating behaviour which attempts to undermine, hurt or humiliate an individual or group. It can have a damaging effect on a victim's confidence, capability and health.

Bullying conduct can involve behaving in an abusive or threatening way, or making allegations about people in public, in the company of their colleagues, through the press or in blogs, (but within the scope of the Code of Conduct).

It may happen once or be part of a pattern of behaviour, although minor isolated incidents are unlikely to be considered bullying. It is also unlikely that a member will be found guilty of bullying when both parties have contributed to a breakdown in relations.

### What are the consequences of bullying?

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When officers are bullied, it can affect the authority's ability to provide services. This is because bullying can create a working environment with an atmosphere of mistrust, insecurity and fear.

In some cases, bullied officers require long periods of leave because of ill-health or stress which can damage the running of an authority. This can particularly be the case in parish and town councils, where there may only be a small team of employees. Quite often, officers feel unable to return to their role.

### What about criticism of officers?

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Criticism of officers will not in itself constitute bullying. Members are allowed to express disagreement with officers, and question officer performance, so long as it is done in an appropriate and private way. A personal attack, or criticism that is offensive, is likely to cross the line of what is acceptable behaviour.

### Complaining about bullying

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If you believe you have been the victim of bullying by a member you can complain to the local standards committee. Information about making a complaint to a local standards committee can be found [here](#).

### Anyone alleging bullying should:

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provide examples of the words or actions used provide clear, objective evidence of bullying try to describe the specific behaviour they are concerned about, providing dates, times and locations. This is because it is more

difficult to judge bullying from general remarks.

## Find out more

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Please read our Code of Conduct: Guidance for members 2007

Call our enquiries line on 0845 078 8181

Email us at [enquiries@standardsforengland.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@standardsforengland.gov.uk)



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