



**AXE BRUE, PARRETT &
NORTH SOMERSET LEVELS
INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARDS**

GOVERNANCE

BULLYING & HARASSMENT POLICY

Version 2.0

Approved by the Boards:			
Axe Brue IDB		26/02/2026	Chair
Parrett IDB		26/02/2026	Chair
North Somerset Levels IDB		26/02/2026	Chair

To be reviewed every 36 months

Revisions				
Version	Date	Author	Details	Approved

1.0. Introduction:

1.1. The Axe Brue, Parrett and North Somerset Levels Internal Drainage Boards are the three parties included, by agreement, in the Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium (SDBC). The Consortium provides the administration, management and engineering services on behalf of all three Boards. The Boards are independent statutory bodies, responsible for complying with any duty set out in legislation. The Consortium staff ensure that all three Boards comply with their legal duties. All three Boards aim to adopt similar policies to assist members of the public and to minimise costs.

1.2. The Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium (SDBC) is committed to providing a working environment free from bullying and harassment. The Boards of the Consortium aim to ensure that all staff are treated, and treat others, with dignity and respect.

1.3. This Policy covers bullying or harassment which occurs at work and out of the workplace, including on work trips or at work-related events or social functions.

1.4. This Policy applies to all staff at all levels including Employees, Management, Board Members, Agency and Casual workers, and independent Contractors.

1.5. The policy sits alongside the SDBC Complaints Policy, Grievance Procedure and Disciplinary Procedure and takes precedence for staff conduct where employment law applies.

2.0. What is bullying?

2.1. Bullying is offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, an abuse or misuse of power through means that undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient. Bullying can include the use of personal strength or the power to coerce through fear or intimidation, not necessarily from someone in a position of authority.

2.2. Bullying may be physical, verbal or non-verbal. It can include conduct that is not face-to-face, including via text message, email and social media. Frequency and context are also aspects of bullying that will be taken into account.

2.3. Bullying includes online and indirect behaviours and may occur between peers, upwards (employee to manager) or from third parties.

2.4. Examples of bullying include:

- a. Physical or psychological threats.
- b. Overbearing and intimidating levels of supervision.
- c. Inappropriate derogatory remarks about a person or their performance.
- d. Shouting at staff.
- e. Persistently picking on people in front of others or in private.
- f. Blocking promotion and training opportunities.
- g. Regularly and deliberately ignoring or excluding staff from work activities or work related social events.

- h. Setting a person up to fail by overloading them with work or setting impossible deadlines.
- i. Regularly making the same person the butt of jokes.

Legitimate and reasonable criticism of a staff member's performance or behaviour, or reasonable management instructions, do not amount to bullying. Managers should document performance conversations that are formal or repeated and provide objective evidence when using disciplinary routes

Incidents involving third parties working or contracted to the Boards will also fall within the remit of this policy.

3.0. What is harassment?

3.1. Harassment is any unwanted conduct that has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them.

3.2. A single incident can amount to harassment. A person may be harassed even if they were not the intended 'target'. Harassment also includes treating someone less favourably because they have submitted or refused to submit to such behaviour in the past.

3.3. It is unlawful under the Equality Act 2010 to harass a person because of their age, disability, gender reassignment, marital or civil partner status, pregnancy or maternity, race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. It also includes conduct of a sexual nature (sexual harassment). Harassment is unacceptable even if it does not fall within any of these categories.

3.4. Examples of harassment include, but are not limited to:

- a. Unwanted physical conduct including touching, pinching, pushing and grabbing.
- b. Unwelcome sexual advances or suggestive behaviour.
- c. Offensive e-mails, text messages or social media content or the display of offensive materials as well as threatening emails or messages via social media.
- d. Unwanted jokes, banter, mocking, mimicking or belittling a person.
- e. Sustained derogatory comments by a contractor at a public meeting.
- f. Sharing intimate images without consent.

4.0. Breaches of this Policy:

4.1. Bullying and harassment are not tolerated in our workplace and all Members, Employees and Service Contractors are required to treat each other, along with our customers, suppliers, and visitors, with dignity and respect. The date/time/place of any harassment should always be noted by the recipient.

4.2. Breaches of this Policy will be dealt with in accordance with the SDBC disciplinary procedures. Before any disciplinary procedures are able to be undertaken, interim measures may be implemented by the Chief Executive in the form of a temporary change of duties, supervised contact or suspension. Serious cases of bullying or harassment by Staff may amount to gross

misconduct resulting in dismissal. Harassment that becomes stalking, assault or sexual offences are criminal offences will be reported to the police as appropriate. Victims will be supported by the organisation in deciding to report such offenses.

4.3. Staff who make complaints or who participate in good faith in any investigation must not suffer any form of retaliation or victimisation as a result. However, making a false allegation deliberately and in bad faith will be treated as misconduct and dealt with under our disciplinary procedure. Anyone found to have retaliated against or victimised someone in this way will be subject to disciplinary action under our disciplinary procedure.

5.0. If you believe you are being Harassed or Bullied:

5.1. If you believe you are being harassed or bullied, you may wish to raise the problem informally with the person responsible. Explain the situation and how it has made you feel. It can be helpful to describe the event so the other person is clear about your concerns. Use the opportunity to ask the person to change or stop their behaviour. Alternatively you may speak to your Line Manager who can provide confidential advice and assistance in resolving the issue formally or informally. Reasonable adjustments will be considered for complainants and respondents with disabilities

5.2. If you do not feel that informal steps are appropriate, or they have been unsuccessful, you should raise the matter formally under the Grievance Procedure detailed within the SDBC Staff Handbook. All complaints will be investigated in accordance with the Grievance Procedure.

5.3. If there is sufficient evidence to suggest you have been harassed or bullied, the SDBC will consider the appropriate action to take. If the person accused is an Employee, this may include invoking our disciplinary procedure. Whether or not your complaint is upheld, we will consider how best to manage any ongoing working relationship between you and the person concerned.

5.4. Procedures for dealing with Grievances specifically arising against Board members are documented within the SDBC Complaints Policy.

