

POLICY TITLE:	Respectful Interactions with Employees and Council
POLICY NUMBER:	C-13
POLICY OWNER:	Council
EFFECTIVE DATE:	July 22, 2025

1. Purpose

- a. To establish standards of conduct that the public are expected to adhere to when interacting with Town employees and Council members; and
- b. To establish the consequences and processes for handling interactions of a frivolous, vexatious, harassing, and/or violent nature.

2. Scope

The Town of Coalhurst is committed to serving the community and recognizes the importance of public input and welcomes inquiries, comments, requests, and complaints as valuable forms of feedback. While most members of the public interact with Town employees and Council members in a respectful, polite, and reasonable manner, the Town also recognizes that some inquiries, comments, requests, and complaints may be frivolous, vexatious, harassing, and/or violent. These can consume a disproportionate amount of time and resources, can impede employees from attending to other members of the public or providing essential services, and can create an unsafe working environment.

It is the policy of the Town to deal with public inquiries, comments, requests, and complaints in ways that are consistent, fair, and reasonable while acknowledging that there is a need to set expectations regarding appropriate conduct when the public is interacting with Town employees and Council members.

3. Definitions

“Town” means the municipal corporation of the Town of Coalhurst in the Province of Alberta.

“Cyberbullying” means the use of electronic technologies to engage in deliberate, repeated, or hostile behaviour intended to harm, embarrass, harass, or slander another person. Electronic

technologies include, but are not limited to, Town-sanctioned social media platforms, blogs, webpages, online discussion groups, or online media articles.

“Employee” means persons who are compensated for services performed and whose duties are under the control of the Town and includes all employees regardless of whether they are temporary, permanent, part-time, casual, and/or seasonal.

“Frivolous” means an inquiry, comment, request, or complaint that has no serious purpose or value or may have little merit and be trivial and is part of a pattern of conduct that amounts to an abuse of the right of access, interferes with the operations of the Town, or is made in bad faith or for a purpose other than to obtain access.

“Harass” means any single Incident or repeated Incidents including conduct, behaviour, or communication that a reasonable person knows or ought to have known would be objectionable, unwelcomed, threatening, insulting, stalking, bullying, or harassing behavior in person or through other means and includes:

- (a) action that causes offence or humiliation to an employee’s or Council member’s dignity, or adversely affects the Employee’s or Council member’s health and safety or would cause a reasonable person to fear for one’s safety or the safety of loved ones, or could foreseeably cause emotional distress and cause harm;
- (b) conduct, comment, bullying, or action because of race, religious beliefs, colour, physical disability, mental disability, age, ancestry, place of origin, marital status, source of income, family status, gender, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation; and
- (c) sexual solicitations or advances or stalking.

“Interaction” means any contact with an Employee or Council member including but not limited to in-person contact, or contact via email, phone, hard copy documentation, or social media.

“Peace Officer” means a member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police or a Peace Officer appointed under the *Peace Officer Act*, S.A. 2006 c P-3.5, as amended.

“Unreasonable” means given the nature and frequency of an inquiry, comment, request, or complaint, it is likely to cause distress or disruption to the Town, employees, Council members, or other members of the public.

“Veiled Threat” means a threat that is non-specific and subjective in nature (e.g., “you better watch your back”) and includes a statement and/or body language, psychological injury, or behaviour which shows an intent to harm (e.g., “I know where you live”, “how are you going to make me?”, shaking fist motion, hand signal like a gun).

“Vexatious” means an inquiry, comment, request, or complaint without merit, that is pursued in a manner that is malicious, intended to inconvenience, embarrass, or harass the recipient or is a pattern of conduct that amounts to the misuse of processes and procedures.

“Violence” or **“Violent”** means a veiled threat, attempted or actual conduct of person that causes or is likely to cause physical or psychological injury or harm.

4. Policy

4.1 An inquiry, comment, request, or complaint may become frivolous, vexatious, harassing, and/or violent based on the nature and frequency of the inquiry, comment, request, or complaint. A pattern of conduct occurs when, on one or more occasions, a member of the public engages in conduct that includes, but is not limited to:

- a. Bringing an inquiry, comment, request, or complaint on an issue that an employee or Council member has already investigated or provided a response to and determined to be groundless or bringing an inquiry, comment, request, or complaint similar to an issue that an employee or Council member has already investigated and determined to be groundless;
- b. Engaging in unreasonable conduct, including harassing, verbally abusing, or otherwise seeking to intimidate an employee or Council member or to secure preferential treatment;
- c. Making multiple lines of inquiry regarding the same issue. For example, pursuing an inquiry, comment, request, or complaint with staff in multiple departments, with employees and/or Council members simultaneously or via multiple methods such as phone, email, etc., even after being advised that the inquiry, comment, request, or complaint is being investigated or a response is being formulated;
- d. Repeatedly challenging the findings or response provided by an employee or Council member;
- e. Refusing to accept that an issue falls outside the scope of the Town’s jurisdiction;
- f. Making unreasonable demands on employees or Council members such as demanding a response within an unreasonable timeframe;

- g. Making statements or providing representations that the member of the public knows or ought to know are incorrect or persuading others to do so;
- h. Changing the basis of the inquiry, comment, request, or complaint and/or denying statements or information provided at an earlier point in time;
- i. Failing to clearly identify the precise issues of the inquiry, comment, request, or complaint while still wanting a response;
- j. Making malicious and unsubstantiated allegations about an employee or Council member;
- k. Using crude, vulgar, obscene, or offensive language or gestures;
- l. Submitting falsified information about themselves, others, or the issue; and
- m. Engaging in cyberbullying.

4.2 The Chief Administrative Officer may establish standards for employees and Council members to follow, to document, and manage frivolous, vexatious, harassing, and/or violent conduct from members of the public.

5. Procedure

5.1 Expected Standards of Conduct of the Public

When interacting with employees and Council members, members of the public are expected to adhere to following standards of conduct:

- a. Respectfulness at all times, even if providing criticism;
- b. No crude, vulgar, obscene, or offensive language or gestures;
- c. No defamatory and libelous remarks or unsubstantiated allegations;
- d. No remarks of a racial, sexist, or any other type of discriminatory nature;
- e. No physical confrontations, including those that are intended to intimidate;
- f. No psychological or physical threats; and
- g. No engaging in any other conduct of a frivolous, vexatious, harassing, and/or violent nature.

5.2 Consequences of Frivolous, Vexatious, Harassing and/or Violent Interactions

The following consequences may occur if a member of the public engages in frivolous, vexatious, harassing, and/or violent interactions:

- a. A warning that their conduct contravenes this policy and that if the conduct does not stop, further actions may be taken;
- b. Limiting communication with employees and Council members to a particular format (e.g., written correspondence only);
- c. Limiting communication to an established point of contact at the Town;
- d. Limiting face-to-face contact to the presence of a Town-sanctioned third party;
- e. Employees and/or Council members ceasing to communicate with the member of the public on the specific issue or in extreme cases of frivolous, vexatious, and/or harassing interactions, ceasing to communicate with the member of the public entirely;
- f. Blocking emails or social media profiles or deleting or hiding comments on Town social media platforms;
- g. Promptly ending phone calls if conduct does not improve.

5.3 Criminal Offences

If there is a specific, general, or implied threat of stalking, violence or potential of violence threatening the safety, personal privacy, or security of an employee or Council member, a Peace Officer and/or the RCMP will be contacted immediately.

5.4 Employee Procedures

In the event an employee is subject to frivolous, vexatious, harassing, and/or violent interactions with a member of the public, the employee shall:

- a. adhere to any relevant procedures and expectations outlined in the Town's Employee Guidebook; and,
- b. report the incident to their direct report or to the Chief Administrative Officer.

5.5 Authority of the Chief Administrative Officer

In the case of a member of the public engaging in frivolous, vexatious, harassing, and/or violent interactions with an employee, the Chief Administrative Officer or designate will determine what consequences will be implemented. Consequences for such interactions levied against a Council member may be determined by the Council member in consultation with the Chief Administrative Officer.

6. Appendices / Forms


There are no appendices or forms associated with this policy.

7. Supporting Information

The Alberta Occupational Health and Safety Code, Part 27, Section 389 to Section 392 and all Subsections within, pertain to Violence and Harassment in the workplace and the Employer's Obligations to mitigate the hazards relating to Violence and Harassment.

The Town of Coalhurst Employee Policy and Guidelines Handbook provides additional details and processes regarding bullying, providing a psychologically healthy and safe workplace, free from workplace harassment and violence.

8. Revision History / Amendments

Review Date	Description	Approved By:
25-Jul-22	On April 15, 2025 Council directed Administration to prepare a policy regarding respectful interaction between members of the public, Town Council and Town of Coalhurst staff.	 Mayor