**Question: How should I handle a sexual harassment complaint to prevent the matter escalating?**

Our organisation has become increasingly aware of the risks of sexual harassment, especially following the recent media coverage which is shining the light on this matter. Out of the blue, I have received a complaint which contains an allegation of sexual harassment from one employee against her co-worker in the same department. The complaint reveals that the employee has asked the co-worker to stop the behaviour, but this has not had any effect, and it also names a number of witnesses.

I want to deal with the complaint as fully as possible to ensure the matter doesn’t escalate to a tribunal claim, because the adverse publicity would be significant for our organisation. How should I go about doing this?

**Answer:** First things first, check your anti-harassment and bullying policy. This will usually outline a formal procedure which will be followed once an employee makes a sexual harassment complaint. Key points to take note of are any specific deadlines within the policy, such as you will hold a meeting within three days of receiving the complaint and will send an outcome within five days of the meeting. As a starting point, the procedure within the policy needs to be followed by the manager handling the complaint, or you could be facing a subsequent issue that you failed to follow your own internal procedures. Make sure all relevant witnesses are interviewed as this will allow a balanced determination to be made as to whether harassment took place or not.

If the outcome is that sexual harassment took place, take formal disciplinary action against the perpetrator in line with your organisation’s disciplinary policy. You can also confirm to the victim that you are addressing this formally using disciplinary sanctions, as this reassures the employee that their complaint has been handled properly.

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