

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

Policy Document

(Employment and Service Delivery)

1. LEGAL POSITION

It is unlawful to discriminate against an individual on the following grounds:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

Under the Equality Act 2010 these are known as “protected characteristics”.

This statement sets out Watchet Town Council’s equality of opportunity policy in employment and service delivery. It is based on the policy developed and adopted by our primary district authority, ~~West Somerset Council~~. The policy forms the foundation for operational policies, activities and our code of practice and therefore does not stand-alone. It is an internal policy and will form the foundation for a public equality statement.

This policy supports the Public Sector Equality Duty and the meeting the requirements of the Equalities Act 2010. These duties require public bodies to have **due regard** to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination
- advance equality of opportunity
- foster good relations

It is not the statement, which will ensure or guarantee equality of opportunity, rather the way it is understood, integrated into all the work of the Council and hence interpreted in actions. It is therefore important to measure how the policy is making a difference in practice. In order to make consistent and comprehensive progress in this area, it is important to take a more proactive stance, particularly in relation to service delivery and not just with employment. It should be the basis of the way the Council, Councillors and staff interact with each other, members of the public and all with whom we come into contact.

2. CONTEXT

West Somerset is a predominately rural area with a population of around 35,400. The district has the smallest population but is one of the largest in terms of geographic size. The coastal town of Minehead is the only sizeable settlement with a population of around 10,000. The majority of the population lives along a fairly narrow coastal strip that includes Williton and Watchet with its population of some 3,500.

Poor transport links and the rural nature of the district can lead to particular communities and individuals becoming isolated and disadvantaged as a result of where they live. That isolation can doubly disadvantage groups who already face social and institutional discrimination.

3. POLICY STATEMENT

Watchet Town Council is committed to providing equal opportunities both in its delivery of services and in employment and procedures which means ensuring that no member of the public, employee or councillor receives less favourable treatment on the grounds of the Protected Characteristics detailed in section 1 of this policy or is disadvantaged by conditions or requirements which cannot be shown to be justifiable for health and safety or legal reasons.

This policy sets out our commitment to opposing all forms of discrimination and applies to those who live, work in and visit the district, to those who provide us with goods or services and those with whom we contract.

4. POLICY OBJECTIVES

We will:

- Ensure that all our policies, service plans, practices and procedures are responsive and inclusive
- Ensure we are a fair and equitable employer at all times
- Eliminate any conditions, procedures and individual behaviour that can lead to discrimination even where there was no intent to discriminate
- Foster good relations between different groups and communities
- Promote equal opportunities for all those living, working and visiting the district

5. POLICY ARRANGEMENTS

Service Delivery

We will aim to:

- Provide appropriate, accessible and effective services and facilities to all sections of the community without prejudice or bias.
- Provide accessible information about our services on request.
- Work in partnership with all sections of the community and encourage people to be involved in our decision-making
- Where internal and external stakeholders, community members including where members of Watchet Town Council represent the authority on an outside body, the outside body, partnership or community organisation uphold the same values as expressed in this Policy.
- Where elected members are representing the Council and they believe there is a clear breach of the approved equalities values of the Council by an outside body, partnership or community organisation this should be raised with the organisation by the member at the earliest opportunity. Advice can be taken from the Clerk and Chair of Watchet Town Council. The Monitoring Officer and Scrutiny and Performance Officer of West Somerset Council (responsible for equal opportunities) can also be consulted for advice. Any concerns raised should be notified through the above routes.
- If concerns have not been resolved satisfactorily, they can be referred to our Complaints Committee, who has a responsibility to ensure mechanisms are in place for responding to complaints of discrimination and harassment from employees and the public.
- Review and monitor our services to identify where improvements can be made and to ensure that services do not discriminate.

Employment

Recruitment and Promotion

- We will monitor the recruitment and promotion paths of its employees in a way, which allows equality of opportunity to be monitored.
- All Groups of the Council will comply with this policy, the recruitment and selection guidance and the policy statement on the Recruitment of Ex-Offenders. Employment practices will be regularly reviewed to remove any which are restrictive because they are based on perceived attributes, which are irrelevant, or on assumptions, which are unjustifiable in terms of an individual's ability to do a job.
- Job specifications, interviewing and decision-making criteria will be regularly reviewed to ensure that bias and discrimination are eliminated.
- Staff and Councillors involved in making appointments will be required to undertake specific recruitment and selection training in accordance with the code of practice.

Staff Performance and Development Reviews

- We will review the staff performance and development review scheme as necessary to ensure that all training and development provision is planned, delivered and monitored on the basis of equality of access for all.
- Training and development will be designed to match individual needs of employees to the Council's corporate aims and objectives through Service Standards.
- The Council undertakes to address and provide the training and development needs of its elected members to ensure the highest possible delivery of services to the community.
- The Council will provide equalities awareness training as part of its training and development programme for officers and members.
- Include equality awareness training as part of its induction programme

Code of Behaviour

All staff and elected members are expected to be familiar with the equal opportunities policy and to conduct themselves in accordance with its requirements.

It is acknowledged that discrimination and harassment may occur unintentionally due to a general lack of understanding of 'different' groups in society. However, it is essential that a culture in which positive challenge to inappropriate or discriminatory behaviour is part of normal practice.

We will:

- Treat any deliberate act of discrimination against other employees, volunteers, staff of suppliers, services users or members of the public by employees in the course of their duty as a disciplinary offence.
- Fully investigate acts of deliberate discrimination by volunteers or staff employed by suppliers and ensure appropriate action is taken.

Harassment at work is the subject of a separate policy. All staff must be made aware of that The Discipline and Grievance policy and procedures will be followed for such concerns.

Conditions of Service

The Council will follow flexible employment policies recognising the skills and expertise of its workforce and the need to retain them. When vacancies occur consideration will be given to a range of flexible working arrangements, which could be more attractive and convenient for people with caring responsibilities. These opportunities will also be made available to existing staff.

Working practices will be reviewed to ensure that informal mechanisms do not directly or indirectly disadvantage particular groups of employees.

6. RESPONSIBILITIES

The Council will be compliant with all legal requirements, including the Equality Act 2010 and public sector equality duties (PSED).

The Equal Opportunities Policy is covered by the Clerk together with Chair of Council who has responsibility for promoting and implementing it.

The Clerk also has responsibility for ensuring the service delivery aspects of the policy are met.

The Clerk as line manager has the responsibility for the implementation of the employment aspects of the policy, and for ensuring that their employees understand the equal opportunities policy and are helped to put it into practice.

All employees have a role to play in promoting equality and taking responsibility for their own behaviour and that actions comply with and support the equal opportunities policy. Employees and Members will not be expected to experience discrimination from service users, Members, other staff members, providers or any third party.

All members of Council will need to ensure that their own behaviour and conduct models best practice and that they take steps to correct behaviour or actions which do not comply with the equal opportunities policy.

7. MONITORING

The Council will monitor its progress against a set of local performance indicators in respect of equalities issues. These will be reported and monitored as part of the management framework and reporting of performance indicators and service plan delivery. A report will be provided through the annual report and annual Town meeting.

The Council will monitor workforce profile, recruitment, promotion, pay, grievance, disciplinary, training opportunities and exit from employment.

The Council will monitor service improvements by the implementation of its equality impact assessment programme.

This policy is fully supported by all Members of the council and adopts the model contract as devised by the employee professional body in the local government sector (the Society of Local Council Clerks).

The policy will be monitored and reviewed annually. Other Personnel policies will be reviewed against the values stated in this main Equal Opportunities policy to ensure that the council strives to remain an Equal Opportunities employer.

This policy complies with the requirements set out in the Equality Act 2010 including Section 149 of the Act, Public Sector Equality Duty.

Adopted by Council on

15th April 2013

Reviewed and amended on: 8th December 2022