



STOWMARKET TOWN COUNCIL

Equality & Diversity Policy

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Related policies/procedures:	All Town Council Policies & Procedures

At Stowmarket Town Council we are committed to eliminating discrimination and encouraging diversity.

This Equality and Diversity Policy Statement has been adopted by Stowmarket Town Council and aims to maintain and demonstrate equal opportunities and promote inclusion throughout its entire remit. It covers all Town Council departments and services, and all employees (whether part-time, full-time or temporary), Councillors, contractors and service users.

Our aim is that the Town Council will be truly representative of all sections of society and everyone feels respected and able to give their best. We value all people, recognise their different needs, situations and goals, and aspire to remove the barriers that limit what people can do and be.

We will not use any of the following **protected characteristics** as a reason to treat people unfairly:

- gender
- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sexual orientation

The purpose of this policy is to provide equality and fairness for all in our employment, demonstrate equal opportunity throughout the Council, encourage and manage diversity within the organisation and ensure nobody is discriminated against on grounds of any of the protected characteristics.

Stowmarket Town Council has a commitment to:

- providing equality for all;
- treating every person fairly, ensuring equal access to services and opportunities;
- making our services accessible for all those who live, work and visit the town;
- seeking to ensure the workforce represents the community fairly and is representative of the population, to secure the widest pool of talent possible;
- ensuring every person be paid equally where they are carrying out the same job or work of equal value;
- offering access to training for employees or non-employees to help fit them to particular work in the organisation;
- ensuring our employment practices and service provision takes full account of individual differences and needs;
- providing a working environment that promotes dignity, fairness, respect and tolerance to all for every employee irrespective of their personal circumstances, background or lifestyle; no form of intimidation, bullying or harassment will be tolerated;
- creating an environment in which individual differences and the contributions of all our staff are recognised and valued;
- reviewing all our employment practices and procedures to ensure fairness;
- upholding this policy;
- monitoring and reviewing this policy annually; and
- ensuring that any complaints of harassment or victimisation and breaches of this policy are regarded as misconduct and dealt with seriously, promptly and confidentially; such acts could lead to disciplinary proceedings and may lead to dismissal.

Stowmarket Town Council believes that ensuring equality in the workplace is good management practice and makes sound business sense. We aim to be an equal opportunity employer.

We oppose all forms of unlawful and unfair discrimination. All people will be treated fairly and with respect. Selection for employment, promotion, training or any other benefit will be on the basis of aptitude and ability. All employees will be helped and encouraged to develop their full potential and the talents and resources of the workforce will be fully utilised to maximise the efficiency of the organisation.

Discrimination, Victimisation and Harassment

The Equality Act 2010 sets out the different ways in which it is unlawful to treat someone. The types of discrimination are:

Direct: when someone is treated less favourably than another person because of a protected characteristic

By Association: direct discrimination against someone because they associate with another person who possesses a protected characteristic

Perceptive: direct discrimination against an individual because others think they possess a particular protected characteristic

Indirect: can occur when there is a condition, rule, policy or practice that applies to everyone but particularly disadvantages people who share a protected characteristic

Harassment: unwanted conduct related to a relevant protected characteristic, which has the purpose or effect of violating an individual's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that individual

Third Party Harassment: the harassment of employees by people who are not employees that has occurred on at least two previous occasions

Victimisation: when an employee is treated badly because they have made or supported a complaint or raised a grievance under the Equality Act or are suspected of doing so

Public Sector Equality Duty

The Public Sector Equality Duty ensures that all public bodies play their part in making society fairer by tackling discrimination and providing equality of opportunity for all. It is a duty on public bodies that ensures the needs of all individuals are considered in day to day work – in policy shaping, delivering services, and in relation to employees.

Stowmarket Town Council needs to consciously think about the three aims of the Equality Duty as part of the decision making process:

1. Have due regard to the need to **eliminate unlawful discrimination**, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act
2. Have due regard to the need to **advance equality of opportunity** between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it
3. Have due regard to the need to **foster good relations** between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

In order to fulfil the Equality Duty it is essential that we ensure:

Knowledge

Those who exercise the Council's functions need to be aware of the requirements of the Equality Duty. Compliance with the Duty involves a conscious approach and state of mind.

Timeliness

The Equality Duty must be complied with before and at the time that a particular policy is under consideration or decision is taken – that is, in the development of policy options, and in making a final decisions. We cannot satisfy the Act by justifying a decisions after it has been taken

Real consideration

Consideration of the three aims of the Equality Duty must form an integral part of the decision making process. It is not a matter of tick boxing; it must be exercised in substance, with rigour and with an open mind in such a way that it influences the final decision.

Sufficient information

The decision maker must consider what information he or she has and what further information may be needed in order to give proper considerations to the Equality Duty.

Review

The Town Council must have regard to the aims of the Equality Duty not only when a policy is developed and decided upon, but also when it is implemented and reviewed.

Monitoring

To monitoring our Equality and Diversity Policy Statement, Stowmarket Town Council will gather individual personal information, as described below, on the diversity of potential recruits and of existing employees and annually compare and analyse this against:

- jobseekers in Stowmarket
- employees at similar sized local authorities nationwide
- employees at other local authorities in Suffolk

To gather monitoring data, we will ask job applicants for information on their racial origins, gender and disabilities on a sheet that can be detached from the application form. This way, the information can be kept separate from the selection process. **This information will only be used for equality monitoring and not in the short listing process.** Reasons for selection and rejection of applicants for vacancies must be recorded. We will also monitor the existing workforce to get an accurate picture of the organisation and to identify any inequalities. These records will be maintained for monitoring and analysing purposes ONLY. Employees will be able to check or correct their own records, otherwise access will be strictly restricted.

The Town Council does not expect to find exactly the same proportions of men and women or other groups, but will look for significant differences between groups and question why there is a difference.

If we find that the Council is not attracting the jobseekers expected we will look at the recruitment and selection procedures to see if one group is benefiting at the expense of another or if a particular group is disadvantaged. If we find that sections of the workforce are not progressing within the organisation, we will review our procedures and practices and consider using legal positive action, if appropriate.

The Council will only ask health related questions before offering an individual a job if the questions help us to decide if an applicant can carry out a function that is essential to the job, to decide whether reasonable adjustments need to be made for the selection process or to monitor the diversity of applicants.

Compliance

The Town Council will aim to ensure that due regard is given to the aims of this policy by considering all of our functions in order to determine which of them are relevant to each protected characteristic.

Councillors

All Councillors are bound to adhere to equal opportunities principles by the Code of Conduct. Council staff will make every effort to accommodate Councillors with particular needs.

Employees

The content of this policy in relation to employees is available in the Employee Handbook. All employees will be equally encouraged to apply for suitable training and employment opportunities appropriate to their role. Wherever possible, efforts will be made to identify and remove unnecessary or unjustifiable barriers and provide appropriate facilities and conditions of service to meet the special needs of disadvantaged or underrepresented groups, for example, considering job sharing and part time working.

Vacancies

Vacancies will, where appropriate, be advertised internally and externally, widely across all sections of the community to ensure knowledge of the vacancies reach underrepresented groups. Selection criteria will be kept under constant review to ensure they are justifiable on non-discriminatory grounds as being essential for the effective performance of the job.

Positive Action

If candidates for a role were both as qualified to be recruited or promoted, the Council would be allowed to take into consideration perceived disadvantages or under-representation in the workforce when deciding who to recruit – this means we would be able to favour the candidate from the under-represented or disadvantaged group.

Premises

All Town Council premises are compliant with, or will be adapted to comply with, the Equality Act 2010. Where buildings are not in compliance, staff will do all that is reasonable possible to ensure that service users are able to access facilities. All staff will respect and be sympathetic to the needs of minority groups and ensure that they receive the same level of service as other members of the community.

The Council is committed to challenging inequality, discrimination and disadvantage. Endeavouring to ensure equality of opportunity for all sections of the community and workforce is an integral part of this commitment.