



EQUALITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION POLICY

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INTRODUCTION

The focus upon equality, which has led to equality legislation, has arisen through a desire for social justice which seeks to address inequalities that have denied whole groups of people fair access to resources, jobs, education and other things of social value. The Equality Act 2010 and the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) define equality and equal opportunities as:

"ensuring that every individual has an equal opportunity to make the most of their lives and talents, and believing that no one should have poorer life chances because of where, what or whom they were born, what they believe, or whether they have a disability. Equality recognises that historically, certain groups of people with particular characteristics e.g., race, disability, sex and sexuality, have experienced discrimination..."

Equality of opportunity is a legal requirement. However, more than this Neston Town Council believes it is good business sense to deliver a range of services in a manner that meets their individual needs and provides consistent value for money. To be efficient, Council must deliver services that are relevant, inclusive, well delivered, and cost effective. Efficiency, fairness as well as duty of care also demand equality within its work force. See also the Council's Dignity at Work Policy.

Diversity refers to all the socially significant ways in which people differ. It focuses on the way in which difference can be an asset. It highlights the importance of staff development and of customer engagement.

Diversity aims to:

"recognise, respect and value people's differences to contribute and realise their full potential by promoting an inclusive culture for all staff. Diversity is more than just tolerating differences. It is respecting, appreciating and understanding the varying characteristics of individuals."

Today, there is an expanded view of diversity that goes beyond the traditional 'equality' characteristics to embrace many more dimensions:

- Identity diversity: i.e., of age, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, race etc... The main subject of legislation.
- Functional diversity: different functions within an organisation.
- Professional diversity: different disciplines within a service or organisation.
- Cognitive diversity: different ways of thinking, interpreting and problem-solving within a team or business.
- Multi-agency diversity: different agencies contributing to a service or project.

Inclusion:

Inclusive leadership and management is at the heart of growing diversity as an asset

To embrace diversity involves a cultural shift which is broadly referred to as 'inclusion'. Employees feel included when, simultaneously, they perceive they are both similar to, and distinct from, their co-workers. This means the organisation needs to value the diversity of talents, experiences and identities that employees bring, and at the same time, they need to build common ground – common mission, values and ethos. Too much focus on diversity can lead to an over-emphasis on difference, and can reinforce isolation and stereotyping. Too much focus on commonality can de-value fresh perspectives and stifle creativity and innovation.

EQUALITY ACT 2010

The Equality Act became law in 2010. It covers everyone in Britain and protects people from discrimination, harassment and victimisation.

Everyone in Britain is protected. This is because the Equality Act protects people against discrimination because of the protected characteristics that we all have. Under the Equality Act, there are nine protected characteristics:

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

This Policy recognises the Council's general equality duty under the Equality Act 2010.

This Policy will be updated in line with National Legislation Changes as communicated by the Council's HR Advisors, and under the continuous improvement culture spelled out in the Council's Quality Policy.

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION POLICY STATEMENT

It is our legal duty is to ensure that all employees and service users are not subject to any form of discrimination, harassment and/or victimisation at any time on the basis of age, gender, gender reassignment, ethnic origin, colour, disability, illness (such as HIV or AIDS), marital status or being in a civil partnership, nationality, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity or social background.

The Council aspires to be an Equal Opportunities employer, service provider and community leader.

POSITIVE ABOUT EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The Council is committed to providing the highest quality of governance and service and recognises that the implementation of an effective Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy is an integral part of any approach based on quality of service and provision. [It is not a coincidence that an organisation that is able to provide services to meet the diverse needs of its users, usually carries out its core business efficiently. Equally, a workforce that has a supportive, inclusive environment is more productive.] The Council as a corporate body has responsibilities as an employer, a service provider and a public authority, but both Members and employees as individuals also have responsibilities as well as rights.

The Council is committed to ensuring that our services and employment practices are fair, accessible, responsive and appropriate for all residents, clients and service users, voluntary and business organisations and visitors in the community we serve, as well as the

dedicated staff we employ and volunteers and partners who work with us.

The Council will strive to advance equality of opportunity between people who share one or more of the nine protected characteristics (as listed above) and those who do not and to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. Diversity will be celebrated and inclusiveness aspired to.

The Council will engage with people it believes to have an interest in our approach to equality. It will undertake periodic Equality Assessments to help in deciding whether an existing or proposed policy, procedure, practice or service does (or may) affect people differently, and if so, whether it affects them in an adverse way and what can be done to change it. Periodic assessments and policy review will take place at least once per Council cycle.

Adherence to the Principles and Practices contained within the policy will be monitored on a regular basis. The Council will look for ways that it can make easier for everyone to engage with the policy including offering equality and diversity training to all councillors.

The Finance and Administration Committee will monitor the implementation of the Equality policy and all associated equality action plans, and will report at least once per year to the full council. The Human Resources Committee will undertake the periodic equality assessments for the Council's employees at least once per Council cycle.

POSITIVE AS AN EMPLOYER

The Council is committed to making full use of the talents and resources of all its employees. It will recruit, reward, develop, promote and transfer employees on the basis of the skills, relevant qualifications, experience, aptitude and ability they can bring to the job.

The Council will encourage and develop all employees to support and carry out the requirements of this Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy. All employees will be encouraged to identify and disseminate good practice. The Council will not discriminate directly or indirectly under any of the nine characteristics listed in the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Statement.

Recruitment

The Council recruitment process must result in the selection of the most suitable person for the job, in respect of experience and qualifications. It is against the Council's policy to discriminate either directly or indirectly on the grounds of any of the nine characteristics listed in its Equality Statement, at any stage of the recruitment process.

The Council staff must ensure that:

- all job opportunities are open to all applicants
- no prejudgement or assumptions are made by recruiters or managers
- all applications are given equal consideration
- no decision is made in advance regarding the outcome of recruitment
- all applicants and staff are made aware of the Council policy on recruitment

All recruitment publicity must positively encourage applications from all suitably qualified and experienced people and should avoid any stereotyping of roles. All publicity should state that the Council is an Equal Opportunities employer and welcomes diversity. All vacancies must be advertised in accordance with the Council's Personnel Policies.

The selection process must be carried out consistently at all levels. It must be fair and non-discriminatory. Application forms where used, must also state that the Council is an Equal Opportunities employer. The only criteria to be used in the selection process are those based on the skills, experience and qualifications essential for the job.

All aspects of The Council's recruitment and selection process will be monitored by the Council Manager/Chief Officer to ensure the Council meets its obligations as an Equal Opportunities and quality employer.

Training and Development

Training and development opportunities will be made available to all employees and any form of discrimination whether direct or indirect will not be tolerated. Priority will be given to training or development activity which is linked to the achievement of the Council's aims and objectives. Where resources permit, the Council will support training and development beyond the needs of the job which can be returned as a benefit to the Council i.e., increased flexibility, breadth of experience and commitment.

Terms and conditions

All employees will be treated equitably with respect to pay and other conditions of their contracts of employment.

Breaches of Policy

Employees who feel that they have been subject to discrimination should attempt to resolve the issue by talking to the individual whom they feel has acted inappropriately. If this does not resolve the issue then the employee can approach their manager or, if necessary, the Chief Officer under the Grievance Procedure.

Harassment

The Council will not tolerate or accept any form of harassment of its employees. All employees have the right to be treated with dignity and any contravention of this right may be subject to the appropriate grievance or disciplinary procedure. See also the Council's Dignity at Work Policy.

Discrimination against people with disabilities

The Council will discharge its duty to consider reasonable adjustments in making changes to the physical features of its premises or to its method of undertaking business where this can enable an employee to properly undertake their job role. We will think positively about disabled staff as we do with disabled customers.

Religious discrimination

Discriminatory behaviour which fails to acknowledge the rights and needs of people with different beliefs or practices will be treated as a disciplinary offence.

Bullying

Workplace bullying is a separate issue from sexual and racial harassment but the effects can be the same. Within the working environment bullying can be described as the use of a position or power to coerce others by fear, oppression or threat.

The Council will not tolerate bullying behaviour at any level and it is the responsibility of all managers to eliminate any form of bullying which they become aware of. Allegations of bullying will be dealt with under the grievance or disciplinary procedures. See also the Council's Dignity at Work Policy.

Victimisation

The Council will ensure that no employee is treated less favourably than other people because, for example they have brought proceedings, given evidence, or complained about the behaviour of someone who has been harassing or discriminating against them.

Age

The Council will ensure that no employee or potential employee is treated less favourably than others due to age. A full list of factors can be found at appendix 1.

Responsibilities:

- All employees of the Council have a responsibility to ensure that the Council's Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy is communicated and its requirements adhered to.
- All the Council staff will receive training and development in equality, diversity and inclusion. The Council policies on managing diversity are to be read along with the Employee Handbook.
- All Councillors will be offered training in equality, diversity and inclusion.

POSITIVE ABOUT SERVICE DELIVERY

The Council's clients have the right to expect fair and non-discriminatory treatment whilst participating in or receiving any of the Council's services. It will ensure that all recipients of the services delivered directly by the Council are guaranteed the same opportunity.

All aspects of the Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy impact on the manner in which it directly delivers services to and for its customers.

Adherence to the principles and practices contained within the policy will be monitored on a regular basis. The Council will look for ways that it can make its services accessible to all. Periodic assessments and policy review will take place at least once per Council cycle and this will include a review of service users experiences with regard to the policy.

Breaches of this Policy by staff will be subject to the disciplinary procedures.

Where any service is delivered indirectly by contractors, partners or volunteers, the Council will ensure that they understand its Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy and adhere to it. The periodic monitoring of the Policy will also include suppliers who supply goods and services to the Council. The supplier review will also take place at least once per Council cycle.

POSITIVE ABOUT COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

The Council has a local governance and community leadership role. Local residents, members of local organisations, businesses and visitors have the right to expect fair and non-discriminatory treatment when engaging with the Council.

The Council recognises the diversity within the community and seeks to reflect this in the work it undertakes within that community. All aspects of the Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy impact on the manner in which engages with the community. The Council aims to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

The Council will nominate a 'Diversity Champion', a Councillor who would be willing to work with such groups, to gain understanding and also to question Council when s/he feels that groups might be being under-represented or unfairly treated. This will be an annual appointment at the Annual Meeting of the Council.

Adherence to the principles and practices contained within the policy will be monitored on a regular basis. The Council, via its Diversity Champion, will invite representatives of protected characteristics periodically to give their views on the Council's performance on implementing this policy.

POSITIVE ABOUT DISABILITY

Inclusive

The Council believes that as far as possible, disabled customers should be able to obtain services in the same way as other customers who are not disabled. However, given the constraints of operating from existing buildings, there will be some situations where the

same treatment is not possible. In such cases, the Council will devise a solution as to how best to service our disabled customers, which demonstrates respect for their dignity.

Finding Out

The Council will periodically undertake an audit of its premises and operations to assess as far as possible, what customers with different disabilities may need in order to access our services. We will base this on good practice guidance and where appropriate talk to individual customers about any particular problems they encounter. As necessary, we will seek expert advice on finding solutions.

Existing Premises

The Council will focus particularly on considering reasonable adjustments to the physical features of the premises. Where a physical feature makes it impossible or unreasonably difficult for disabled customers to make use of a service, we will duly consider reasonable measures to: - remove the feature, or alter the feature, or provide a reasonable means of avoiding it, or provide a reasonable alternative method of making the service available.

Getting Better

The Council will plan the development of our business with disabled people in mind. We will ensure our staff are aware of disability issues and are trained to meet the needs of disabled customers.

POSITIVE ABOUT DEMOCRACY

Where councillors are to be elected, the Council will make information available as widely as possible about the election, and help people who are interesting in standing for election, with the objective of reflecting the diversity of the Parish.

When the Council seeks a co-opted member, it will advertise widely and will ensure that every applicant has an equal opportunity. All candidates will be given an opportunity to address a full Council meeting. There will be a vote of all Councillors at the meeting. The candidate with the highest number of votes will be co-opted onto the Council. The Council will always promote democracy, encourage all people to engage with it and vote at elections.