

Northumberland County Council Equality and Diversity Policy

Northumberland is one of the largest counties in the country. There are densely populated urban areas in the south east of the County with widespread rural areas in the north and west, many with pockets of deprivation, where rural isolation and accessing services are key challenges.

1. Key Principles

1.1 Northumberland County Council actively opposes discrimination. We are committed to making the County Council an accessible and inclusive organisation that welcomes and respects the diversity of people who live and work in the County, elected members, employees and visitors to Northumberland. We are working to eliminate unfair discrimination and promote equality, in the employment and training of employees and in our delivery of services. We are committed to ensuring council services are accessible and free from prejudice and unlawful discrimination. We are fully committed to undertaking the duties placed on us as an employer, service provider and public body under the Equality Act 2010 and other relevant legislation to combat discrimination and promote equality.

2. Who this Policy Applies to

2.1 This policy applies to every Councillor, employee of Northumberland County Council, and any other person or organisation employed by the Council to work or to deliver services on its behalf, including those employed through contractual, commissioning or grant-aided arrangements. All employees have a personal responsibility to treat everyone with respect, consideration and in a non discriminatory way and to promote the same levels of behaviour in colleagues.

3. Equality Act 2010

3.1 The Act brings together for the first time the legal requirements on equality that the private, public and voluntary sectors need to follow. It affects equality law at work and in delivering services and running clubs. It replaces many existing equality laws including:

- The Equal Pay Act 1970
- The Sex Discrimination Act 1975
- The Race Relations Act 1976
- The Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

3.2 The Equality Act 2010 requires that people be treated fairly at work or when using services. It protects people from discrimination on the basis of certain characteristics. These are known as **protected characteristics**. They vary slightly according to whether a person is at work or using a service. Every person has one or more of the protected characteristics, so the act protects everyone against unfair treatment. There are nine protected characteristics that provide protection from discrimination for employees. These are:

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

3.3 There are eight protected characteristics of people who use services. These are:

- Age (over 18)
- Disability
- Sex
- Gender reassignment
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sexual orientation

3.4 The Equality Act sets out the different ways in which it is unlawful to treat someone, such as direct and indirect discrimination, harassment, victimisation and failing to make a reasonable adjustment for a disabled person.

3.5 The act prohibits unfair treatment in the workplace, when providing goods, facilities and services, when exercising public functions, in the disposal and management of premises, in education and by associations (such as private clubs).

3.6 These are the main forms of prohibited conduct.

- Discrimination. This includes:
 - Treating a person worse than someone else because of a protected characteristic (known as direct discrimination).

- Putting in place a rule or way of doing things that has a worse impact on someone with a protected characteristic than someone without one, when this cannot be justified (known as indirect discrimination).
- Treating a disabled person unfavourably because of something connected with their disability when this cannot be justified
- Failing to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people.
- Harassment
 - Unwanted conduct which has the purpose or effect of violating someone's dignity or which is hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive to someone with a protected characteristic or in a way that is sexual in nature.
- Victimisation
 - Treating someone unfavourably because they have taken (or might be taking) action under the Equality Act or supporting somebody who is doing so.

3.7 The law also protects people from being discriminated against:

- By someone who wrongly perceives them to have one of the protected characteristics.
- Because they are associated with someone who has a protected characteristic. This includes the parent of a disabled child or adult or someone else who is caring for a disabled person.

4. Equality Commitments

4.1 We fully recognise our legal duty to tackle discrimination and will not permit any act of discrimination, harassment or victimisation on the basis of any the protected characteristics listed above. We will not discriminate because of working patterns or trade union membership and we will regard any harassment or bullying on these of any other grounds as a serious matter. We will take disciplinary action against employees who are found to have disregarded this policy. A specific policy for tackling bullying and harassment is available for employees.

4.2 To support our commitment to equality and diversity Northumberland council will:

- Seek opportunities to promote equality and diversity
- Regularly monitor, assess and consult on the impact of our policies, services and functions to ensure they are fair and reflect different needs and opinions
- Use our influence in communities and with our partners and businesses to generate opportunities for the people of Northumberland
- Make equality and consideration of different needs a part of our everyday business.

4.3 To do this we will expect all of our Councillors, employees and contractors to:

- Treat all customers and colleagues with dignity and respect at all times
- Provide the best possible standards of service to all our customers
- Consider different needs and opinions to make our services as inclusive and accessible as possible
- Promote fair access to services and employment opportunities to all parts of the community.

5. Specific Commitments in Employment

5.1 Northumberland County Council is committed to being a fair and supportive employer, developing skills within our workforce so that employees are able to deliver high quality services to everyone

5.2 In order to achieve this we will:

- Carry out recruitment fairly
- Consider equality requirements in all employment policies and practices
- Provide training information to employees
- Treat all employees fairly, with dignity and respect at all times
- Tackle unacceptable behaviour in the workplace
- Provide employees from all parts of the council with opportunities to influence the development of our policies and practice
- Reward employees fairly
- Promote a good work-life balance and opportunities to work flexibly
- Support disabled employees by making reasonable adjustments
- Monitor the make-up of our workforce and seek to make our workforce reflect the population of Northumberland
- Make employees aware of how to raise issues if they feel discrimination has taken place
- Publicise bullying harassment and victimisation policies to employees
- Make employees aware that contravention of this policy will be considered a disciplinary offense.

6. Implementing the Policy

6.1 We will ensure that Councillors, employees of Northumberland County Council, and any other people or organisations employed by the Council to work or to deliver services on its behalf are made aware of this policy and their responsibilities for implementing it. We will communicate this policy to employees through the staff bulletin, through managers, trade union representatives and send a copy to job applicants and new employees will be made aware that they are required to implement this policy.

We will support and encourage employees in their responsibilities by providing training, written information and guidance on the intranet and additional guidance and advice, where appropriate.

- 6.2 The Policy will be available on our website and made available in alternative formats on request.
- 6.3 We will develop our approach to equality and diversity by making improvements in employment, service delivery and how we engage with local people
- 6.4 We will regularly monitor and report our progress in relation to published equality and diversity based objectives.

7. Leadership and management

7.1 The Senior Management Team takes overall responsibility for the development of equality and diversity and for ensuring that progress is reviewed and actions instigated, supported by the Equality diversity and human rights steering group.

7.2 All managers at all levels are responsible for:

- actively promoting equality and diversity
- creating a climate where complaints can be raised without fear of reprisal
- challenging unacceptable behaviour
- encouraging and supporting diversity within their teams
- integrating equality and diversity objectives into service plans
- identifying and acknowledging examples of good practice
- encouraging positive attitudes to equality and diversity
- ensuring employees are aware of their responsibilities in relation to this policy and equalities legislation
- ensuring a diverse range of views and different needs have been considered at an early stage to identify barriers to access and potential for unintentional discrimination in the provision of services or employment
- encouraging awareness of different and diverse needs.

8. Keeping this policy up to date

8.1 We will review this policy on a regular basis and will carry out consultation with representative groups, service users, contractors, councillors, employees and members of the public before implementing the policy.