



Okehampton Town Council

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Equality and Diversity Policy

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to ensure equal opportunities for everyone who comes into contact with Okehampton Town Council, irrespective of their characteristics (unless there are genuine occupational qualifications or objectively justified reasons for a different approach to be taken).

Introduction

The Council is committed to achieving equality of opportunity and valuing diversity in all areas of its work. Striving to ensure that the Council's environment is free of harassment and bullying and that everyone is treated with dignity and respect. The Council will not discriminate against or harass anyone in the provision of its services or functions.

The Council welcomes and celebrates diversity, accepting that the majority view is not always right and will strive to build equality of opportunity into the work of the Council. Compliance with this policy should also ensure that employees do not commit unlawful acts of discrimination.

Legal Position

The Equality Act 2010¹ provides legal protection from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society. The 2010 Act makes it unlawful to discriminate directly or indirectly against an individual on the grounds of 'protected characteristics':

- Age
- Disability²
- Sex
- Gender reassignment
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Sexual orientation
- Religion or belief
- Marriage and civil partnership

Types of unlawful discrimination are listed in appendix A, at the end of this policy.

¹ [Equality Act 2010 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/10/section/1)

² Neurodiversity including ADHD, autism, dyslexia and dyspraxia. Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism, dyslexia and dyspraxia are forms of neurodivergence – there are others too. Being neurodivergent will often amount to a disability under the Equality Act 2010, even if the person does not consider themselves to be disabled.

It is unlawful to fail to make reasonable adjustments to overcome barriers to using services caused by disability. The duty to make reasonable adjustments includes the removal, adaptation or alteration of physical features, if the physical features make it impossible or unreasonably difficult for disabled people to make use of services. In addition, the Council has an obligation to think ahead and address any barriers that may impede disabled people from accessing a service.

The public sector equality duty³ is a duty on public authorities to consider or think about how their policies or decisions affect people who are protected under the Equality Act. All public authorities, including local councils, must comply with the public sector equality duty and take steps to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- advance equal opportunities for all
- foster good relations between all individuals

Recruitment

Person and job specifications will be limited to those requirements that are necessary for the effective performance of the job. Candidates for employment or promotion will be assessed objectively against the requirements for the job, taking account of any reasonable adjustments that may be required for candidates with a disability. Disability and personal or home commitments will not form the basis of employment decisions except where necessary.

The Council will avoid unlawful discrimination in all aspects of employment including recruitment, promotion, opportunities for training, pay and benefits, discipline and selection for redundancy. 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 Council.

Council as an Employer

Every employee is entitled to a working environment that promotes dignity and respect to all. No form of intimidation, bullying or harassment will be tolerated. The Council has adopted a Dignity at Work Policy concerning issues of bullying and harassment on any ground, and how complaints of this type will be dealt with.

The council will consider any possible indirectly discriminatory effect of its standard working practices, including the number of hours to be worked, the times at which these are to be worked and the place at which work is to be done when considering requests for variations to these standard working practices. Such requests will only be refused if the council considers it has good reasons, unrelated to any protected characteristic, for doing so. The council will comply with its obligations in relation to statutory requests for contract variations. The council will also make reasonable adjustments to its standard working practices to overcome barriers caused by disability.

Breaches of the Equality and Diversity Policy would be regarded as serious misconduct and could lead to disciplinary proceedings. Employees are entitled to make a formal complaint through the Council's Grievance Procedure.

³ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2011/2260/contents/made>

Employee Responsibility

Every employee is required to assist the council to meet its commitment to provide equal opportunities in employment and avoid unlawful discrimination. Employees can be held personally liable as well as, or instead of, the council for any act of unlawful discrimination. Employees who commit serious acts of harassment may be guilty of a criminal offence.

Acts of discrimination, harassment, bullying or victimisation against employees or customers are disciplinary offences and will be dealt with under the council's disciplinary procedure. Discrimination, harassment, bullying or victimisation may constitute gross misconduct.

Council as a Service Provider

The council will, to the best of its ability, provide functions and services that all members of the public can access. Making reasonable adjustments where practicable. The council will not discriminate unlawfully against those using or seeking to use the services provided by the council and is committed to ensuring that its services are accessible to all and responsive by:

- Ensuring delivery of services in ways that are sensitive to everyone's needs.
- Ensuring that all employees, contractors and partners have the information they need to provide equality of opportunity and that this is reflected in their conduct.
- Ensuring that the community can access council facilities and events.
- Ensuring the information provided about Council services is accessible to the community.

Grievances

If you consider that you may have been unlawfully discriminated against, you should consult the Council's Complaints Policy.

The council will take any complaint seriously and will seek to resolve any grievance that it upholds. You will not be penalised for raising a grievance, even if your grievance is not upheld, unless your complaint is both untrue and made in bad faith.

The council will not discriminate unlawfully against those using or seeking to use the services provided by the council. You should report any bullying or harassment by suppliers, visitors or others to the council who will take appropriate action.

APPENDIX A

Types of unlawful discrimination

Direct discrimination is where a person is treated less favourably than another because of a protected characteristic.

In limited circumstances, employers can directly discriminate against an individual for a reason related to any of the protected characteristics where there is an occupational requirement. The occupational requirement must be crucial to the post and a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.

Indirect discrimination is where a provision, criterion or practice is applied that is discriminatory in relation to individuals who have a relevant protected characteristic such that it would be to the detriment of people who share that protected characteristic compared with people who do not, and it cannot be shown to be a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.

Harassment is where there is unwanted conduct, related to one of the protected characteristics (other than marriage and civil partnership, and pregnancy and maternity) that has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity; or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. It does not matter whether or not this effect was intended by the person responsible for the conduct.

Associative discrimination is where an individual is directly discriminated against or harassed for association with another individual who has a protected characteristic.

Perceptive discrimination is where an individual is directly discriminated against or harassed based on a perception that they have a particular protected characteristic when they do not, in fact, have that protected characteristic.

Third-party harassment occurs where an employee is harassed and the harassment is related to a protected characteristic, by third parties.

Victimisation occurs where an employee is subjected to a detriment, such as being denied a training opportunity or a promotion because they made or supported a complaint or raised a grievance under the Equality Act 2010, or because they are suspected of doing so. However, an employee is not protected from victimisation if they acted maliciously or made or supported an untrue complaint.

Failure to make reasonable adjustments is where a physical feature or a provision, criterion or practice puts a disabled person at a substantial disadvantage compared with someone who does not have that protected characteristic and the employer has failed to make reasonable adjustments to enable the disabled person to overcome the disadvantage.