

EQUALITY & DIVERSITY POLICY

EQUALITY & DIVERSITY STATEMENT

Godalming Town Council recognises that everyone is different. The Council welcomes this diversity and wants to help every individual to meet their full potential. The Council aims to treat the people it serves and its staff members fairly, consistently and with respect, and expects its councillors, employees, contractors and service users to treat others in the same way.

The Council is fully committed to the elimination of unlawful and unfair discrimination in line with the Equality Act 2010. It is unlawful to discriminate directly or indirectly in recruitment or employment because of the following 'protected characteristics':

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

The Council takes all allegations of discrimination seriously and will investigate concerns and take appropriate action as required.

POLICY

INTRODUCTION

The Equality Act 2010 came into force in October 2010. The legislation covers a prescribed set of protected characteristics including age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

It also covers prohibited conduct including discrimination, adjustments for disabled persons, victimisation and harassment; services and public functions; premises; employment; contracts; and advancement of equality. The latter provision specifies a public sector equality duty, which applies equally to town and parish councils.

PURPOSE

Godalming Town Council is committed to pursuing an equal opportunities approach in the employment of its staff and in every aspect of Council activity and recognises its statutory duties under legislation in terms of service provision and employment and is committed to meeting them by complying with this policy.

The purpose of this policy is to provide equal opportunities to all employees, irrespective of their characteristics and an equality of opportunity in the provision of services and access to Council facilities. The Council opposes all forms of unlawful and unfair discrimination whether it be direct or indirect discrimination, victimization or harassment on the grounds of any of the protected characteristics defined in the Equality Act 2010. The Equality & Diversity Policy underpins all policies, procedures and strategies, therefore providing a strong foundation for equality in the Council and the services it provides.

This policy is designed to value diversity and to ensure equality of opportunity and access to services and that no one receives less favourable treatment on the grounds of:

- Race (i.e. colour, ethnic or national origin, nationality or citizenship)
- Gender reassignment
- Disability
- Sex
- Sexual orientation
- Age
- Religion or belief
- Caring for others
- Trade Union or political activities
- Pregnancy and Maternity
- Marriage and Civil Partnership

This list is not exhaustive.

EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY IN SERVICE DELIVERY

Godalming Town Council is committed to equality of opportunity in the provision of services and access to its facilities. The Council will deliver services that are relevant, of the highest quality possible and accessible. Training in relation to the roles and responsibilities of employees and the Council in delivering services will be sought and undertaken.

To improve delivery, information and access to services the Council will:

- ensure all employees, contractors and users of council services are informed about the Council's Equality and Diversity Policy;
- apply equal opportunities principles to work undertaken for the Council by external contractors, other organisations in receipt of council funding and in work with its partners; and
- rectify any elements of the Council's work which have the potential for discrimination and prejudice.

To promote equality and diversity with other partners the Council will:

- promote tolerance and respect between diverse groups and individuals;
- acknowledge and celebrate, wherever possible, the variety of lifestyles and cultures within the town;
- challenge all forms of discrimination within the Council and the wider community; and
- support the development of communities and assist them in challenging discrimination, harassment, bullying and violence.

EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY IN EMPLOYMENT, TRAINING AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

All employees whether full-time, part-time, fixed term contract, agency workers or temporary staff will be treated fairly and equally. Selection for employment, promotion, training, remuneration 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 Council.

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. This is further defined in the Dignity at Work Policy adopted by the Council.

The commitment to equal opportunities in the workplace is good management practice and makes sound business sense as it seeks to utilise the talents available from the local community, representing society as a whole.

To improve access and opportunity to employment and training the Council will:

- implement its Equality & Diversity Policy in its role as an employer;
- demonstrate its commitment in the way the Council:
 - recruits and selects people;
 - trains and develops people;
 - recognises the abilities that individuals demonstrate;
 - expects the highest standards of employee conduct and behaviour.
- not accept any form of unfair treatment, discrimination, bullying or harassment or removal of dignity by any of our employees or to any of our employees; and
- review and develop procedures in the context of equality and diversity.

Breaches of the Council's Equality & Diversity Policy will be regarded as serious misconduct and could lead to disciplinary proceedings. Employees are entitled to complain about discrimination or harassment or victimization through the Council's Grievance Procedure.

COMMITMENT

The Council is committed to equality and diversity and to the vision of improving the quality of life for local people.

The Council aims to be:

- accessible
- accountable
- fair
- inclusive
- proactive
- professional
- responsible
- transparent

Godalming Town Council is committed to achieving equality of opportunity and valuing diversity in all aspects of its work:

- a. through the delivery of its services to the community by ensuring that within reason, services are accessible to all and that the Council fully recognises the diversity of people's needs;

- b. through the way the Council recruits, employs and trains its workforce to enable it to provide better services;
- c. in the Council's leadership role, working with partners to promote the importance of treating every individual with dignity and respect.

Godalming Town Council will comply with all current and future legislation referring to equality and diversity and will aim to promote good practice in all aspects of the organisation. The Council will publicise this policy on its website and will highlight it in recruitment and relevant official documentation.

IMPLEMENTATION

The Council has ultimate responsibility for the effective implementation of the policy. The Staffing Committee is responsible for the implementation of all equal opportunities policies and procedures, the Town Clerk has overall delegated responsibility for co-ordinating the day to day operation of the policies and procedures. The policy will be reviewed at least every two years, to ensure it remains commensurate with the law and best practice.

In the implementation of this policy the Council will:

- ensure that people are treated solely on the basis of their abilities and potential;
- promote diversity and equality for all staff and value the contributions made by individuals and groups of people from diverse cultural, ethnic, socio-economic and distinctive backgrounds;
- promote and sustain an inclusive and supportive work environment which affirms the equal and fair treatment of individuals in fulfilling their potential and does not afford unfair privilege to any individual or group;
- treat part time staff fairly and equally;
- challenge inequality and less favourable treatment wherever practicable;
- promote an environment free of harassment and bullying on any grounds in relation to all staff, councillors, contractors and visitors attending the Council's offices or meetings.

The task of promoting social inclusion, tackling discrimination and encouraging equal opportunities are key issues for Godalming Town Council and the Council is committed to:

- eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
- advancing equality of opportunity between different groups;
- fostering good relations between different groups.

EQUALITY AIMS

Age: The Council shall not permit unlawful age discrimination.

Sexual Orientation: The Council shall not permit unlawful discrimination

Disability: The Council will remove barriers to participation by disabled people, wherever possible. Staff who become disabled whilst working with the Council will be offered reasonable adjustments to enable them to continue working.

Race/Ethnic Origin: The Council will encourage participation of minority ethnic groups in its activities.

Religion: The Council respects people from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds and will give due regard to the needs and requirements of people who adhere to a range of cultural and religious beliefs. This will

include staff needs in relation to dietary requirements, and requests for leave and facilities for religious observance.

Equal Pay:

The Council is committed to equal pay in employment. It believes its male and female employees should receive equal pay for like work, work rated as equivalent or work of equal value. In order to achieve this, the Council will endeavour to maintain a pay system that is transparent, free from bias and based on objective criteria.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Councillors and employees have a duty to co-operate with the Council to make sure that this policy is effective in ensuring equal opportunities and in preventing discrimination, harassment or bullying.

Action will be taken under the Council's disciplinary procedure against any employee who is found to have committed an act of improper or unlawful discrimination, harassment, bullying or intimidation. Serious breaches of this Equality & Diversity Policy will be treated as potential gross misconduct and could render the employee liable to summary dismissal.

Councillors and employees should also bear in mind that they can be held personally liable for any act of unlawful discrimination or harassment and that any such act may also be a criminal offence.

Employees must draw the attention of either their Line Manager/Supervisor, the Town Clerk or the Chair of the Staffing Committee as appropriate, to suspected discriminatory acts or practices or suspected cases of harassment or bullying. Employees must not victimise or retaliate against an employee who has made allegations or complaints of discrimination or harassment or who has provided information about such discrimination or harassment. Such behaviour will be treated as potential gross misconduct in accordance with the Council's disciplinary procedure.

The Council will also take appropriate action against any third parties or councillors who are found to have committed an act of improper or unlawful harassment against its employees.

REPORTING COMPLAINTS

Procedures for Employees

All allegations of discrimination or harassment will be dealt with seriously, confidentially and speedily. The Council will not ignore or treat lightly grievances or complaints of discrimination or harassment from employees

If you wish to make a complaint of discrimination, you should use the Council's Grievance Procedure.