



Equality And Diversity Policy And Code Of Practice

This policy sets out the procedure to ensure that the Town Council deals with people and provides services in a fair and consistent way.

Approved by Council 22 April 2024

Agreed

Equality And Diversity Policy Statement

North Petherton Town Council is fully committed to equality of opportunity in employment and service delivery.

We recognise that it is essential to employ the best people to deliver high quality services to our clients and, as such we will ensure that prejudice, stereotypes and irrelevant factors are not used to exclude potential candidates for jobs within the Council or to prevent people from doing their jobs to the best of their ability or to prevent people standing for the office of Councillor.

We also recognise that equality is part of achieving efficiency, effectiveness and value for money in the way we use resources, including the way we recruit, employ and manage. It is therefore a key element of our culture to ensure that all councillors, employees and volunteers are valued equally, and equality practices become integral to the way we work throughout the Council.

This policy seeks to:

- Enhance and promote high quality services which are responsive to the needs of service users, partners and stakeholders.
- Assist in creating a productive and prejudice free working environment which treats all councillors, employees and volunteers fairly and with respect.
- Demonstrate and promote a commitment to equality by challenging discrimination and valuing diversity amongst Councillors, employees, volunteers and service users.
- Improve the motivation, performance, skills and morale of the workforce.

We acknowledge that equal opportunity is the responsibility of everyone within the Town Council, and the projects it supports, particularly those who have line management and decision making responsibilities.

The Town Council's commitment to equality of opportunity will ensure that no potential councillor or councillor, or job applicant or current employee or volunteer, or anyone using our services will receive less favourable treatment because of

- Age
- Disability
- Marriage and Civil Partnership
- Pregnancy and Maternity
- Race
- Religion or Belief
- Sex
- Sexual Orientation
- Caring responsibilities
- Part-time working

All councillors, employees and volunteers will be made fully aware of this policy and, without exception must adhere to its requirements. Any employee or volunteer who feels that they have grounds for complaint in relation to discrimination, bullying, harassment or victimisation has the right to pursue their complaint through the relevant internal policies and procedures. Any Councillor who feels that they have grounds for

complaint in relation to discrimination, bullying, harassment or victimisation should contact the Monitoring Officer at Somerset Council.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 North Petherton Town Council values the diversity of the community we serve. We therefore strive to ensure that our services reflect the needs of all people within the community. All individuals can expect to receive equal access to employment and our services.
- 1.2 The Town Council is committed to ensuring equality of opportunity in employment by treating the diverse range of employees in a fair and equitable manner and that we do not unfairly discriminate against any job applicant or existing employee.
- 1.3 The Town Council is dedicated to ensuring that volunteers and service users are treated fairly and equitably, where diversity is valued as part of their experience and no person is unfairly discriminated against.

2. The Town Council's Commitment

- 2.1 As an employer we will:
 - Ensure that our recruitment and selection procedures are fair and equitable.
 - Train all councillors and employees who participate in recruitment.
 - Make reasonable adjustments to the workplace to minimise barriers to employment faced by disabled people.
 - Consult with employees regarding development of this strategy.
 - Provide a working environment where harassment and bullying is unacceptable behaviour which will be challenged.
- 2.2 As a service provider we will:
 - Minimise the barriers faced by people using our buildings and facilities.
 - Train all councillors, staff and volunteers to recognise the diverse needs of the people we serve.
 - Produce a range of information about our services and make that information available in various formats, if requested.
 - Provide mechanisms for employees and service users to express their views about our services.

3. Who Does The Policy And Code Of Practice Apply To?

- 3.1 This policy and code of practice covers all councillors, employees, volunteers, and service users.

4. Responsibility

- 4.1 All employees, volunteers, service users and elected members are expected to treat each other and members of the public equally and with respect regardless of: age, disability, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race,

religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation, caring responsibilities or any other factor irrelevant to a person's work.

- 4.2 The Town Clerk, the Mayor, the Deputy Mayor and the Chairs of Town Council Committees will be responsible for ensuring this policy is respected and followed.

5. Publicising/Distribution Of The Policy And Code Of Practice

- 5.1 Councillors, Employees and volunteers will be made fully aware of this policy and Code of Practice and without exception must adhere to its requirements. Any councillor, employee or volunteer who feels that they have grounds for complaint in relation to discrimination, bullying, harassment or victimisation has the right to pursue their complaint through the relevant procedure.
- 5.2 New councillors, volunteers, employees and job applicants will be informed of the existence of this policy during recruitment and a copy will be provided as part of the induction information.

6. Code Of Practice - Purpose

- 6.1 The purpose of this Policy and Code of Practice is to give practical guidance to promote equality of opportunity within the Town Council for all councillors, volunteers, employees and potential employees in accordance with the principles set out within the document and in the provision of services. The Code also gives advice on the initial measures which need to be taken to achieve equality of opportunity and shows the close link between equal opportunities and good employment practice and fair service provision.
- 6.2 This Code does not seek to cover all circumstances at this stage. It will be expanded and developed as necessary as the Town Council identifies areas of concern and will be amended to form a comprehensive guide.

7. TRAINING

- 7.1 The Town Council is committed to the on-going training and development of its employees and volunteers. The principles of equality and fairness must be applied in considering programmes for individuals and teams within the Town Council. (see also the Town Council's Training and Development Policy)
- 7.2 The Town Council will, within the resources available, introduce procedures within its training programme to assist the implementation of its policy in such areas as staff development, information to members/employees on recruitment practices and service provision.
- 7.4 Appropriate training will be provided for key personnel in contact with members of the community.

8. Complaints Procedure

- 8.1 Internal and external job applicants who think that they have been unfairly treated during the recruitment and selection process should direct their complaints to the Town Clerk, who will initiate and monitor appropriate action.
- 8.2 The provisions of this policy will be covered by the Town Council's established discipline, grievance and complaints procedures.
- 8.3 Employees and volunteers who feel that they have been discriminated against in relation to recruitment, promotion, training opportunities or any other terms on the grounds of sex, race, religion, marital status, age, disability or any other factor irrelevant to a person's work should pursue their complaint through the Town Council's Grievance Procedure. During this process, employees will retain their individual statutory rights should they wish to pursue the complaint further.
- 8.4 In respect of complaints from prospective employees who feel they have suffered any kind of harassment, as detailed above, they should pursue their complaint through the Town Council's Complaints Procedure. During the process, individuals will retain their individual statutory rights should they wish to pursue their complaint further.
- 8.5 Any employee who commits an act of discrimination or personal harassment will be liable to disciplinary action.
- 8.6 Any member of the community or service user that has a complaint about a service which has been provided or not provided, or about an employee of the Town Council, may complain to the Town Council under the provisions of its Complaints Procedure.
- 8.7 Any Councillor who feels that they have been discriminated against by a member of staff or another Councillor on the grounds of sex, race, religion, marital status, age, disability or any other factor irrelevant to a person's work should in the first instance raise the matter with the Mayor. In the case of alleged discrimination or harassment by a Councillor the Monitoring Officer will be informed.

9. Provision Of Services To The Community

- 9.1 Provision of services to the community will be based on principles of fairness and accessibility for all sections of the community.
- 9.2 The Town Council will comply with guidance set out in the relevant legislation and associated guides in relation to the provision of goods, facilities or services to the community.
- 9.3 The Town Council will seek to ensure that all its services are publicised widely and that, as far as reasonably possible, the timing of events and access to facilities and buildings are designed to ensure that minority groups are not discriminated against.

- 9.4 The Town Council will seek to consult the community and the community's representatives wherever possible when it proposes changes to its services.
- 9.5 An Equality and Diversity Policy has benefits for employers, as well as responsibilities, as detailed below:
- Fair treatment in all aspects of employment.
 - Right to raise a grievance if employees feel they have been discriminated against.
 - Employees and volunteers are responsible within the policy for providing equal opportunities to each other and members of the public.
- 9.6 The commitment of all employees and volunteers is important in order that the policy can be effective, anyone who may have concerns should contact the Town Clerk for advice.

10. Monitoring

- 10.1 Monitoring systems will be developed and maintained by the Town Clerk and periodic reports will be presented to the Council or relevant Committee.

11. Dealing With Abuses Of The Policy

- 11.1 Employees and volunteers who attempt to abuse this policy may face disciplinary action.
- 11.2 Councillors who abuse this policy will be reported to the Monitoring Officer as a matter of misconduct in accordance with the Councillor Code of Conduct.

12. Best Employment Practice

Discrimination Based on Stereotyped Decision Making

- 12.1 Persons responsible for making decisions affecting access to jobs, training or promotion or in providing goods, facilities or services may unintentionally use stereotypes in their decision making.
- 12.2 It is the tendency to see others as stereotypes which can lead most easily to discriminatory practices. It has an undesirable tendency for example either to affect negatively the chances of success of certain applicants or to channel them into particular occupations or positions deemed appropriate to the particular stereotype or to discriminate against them in the provision of services.
- 12.3 It is essential therefore that all individuals making decisions affecting access to jobs, training or promotion, or providing services, guard against discrimination based on common assumptions, that individuals because of their sex, race, marital status, colour, nationality, disability etc. possess characteristics that make them unsuitable for employment in certain types of jobs, or for the receipt of certain services.

Recruitment and Promotion

- 12.4 Recruitment and promotion will be based on fair and justifiable job-related criteria. Advertisements and job profiles will reflect clearly the specific needs of the position and every effort will be made to eliminate any bias which could lead to unjustifiable discrimination either direct or indirect.
- 12.5 The recruitment, promotion and selection process is of crucial importance to this policy and in order to eliminate direct and indirect discrimination it must be carried out according to consistent and objective job related criteria.
- 12.6 The main steps in the process to ensure this are detailed below:

Vacancy

- 12.7 **Time-table** – recruitment frequently takes place in pressurised circumstances. For the process to be carried out as efficiently as possible, it will be essential that a clear timetable is drawn up. This will ensure that interviews and interviewees know when they need to be available.
- 12.8 As each vacancy arises or new post is created a job description (JD) and person specification will be prepared.
- 12.9 The criteria listed should be the considered specification of the minimum requirements of the post and experience essential to meet those requirements and carry out the job satisfactorily. The criteria contained in the post profile should be strictly relevant to the job and not necessarily restrictive or inflated so as to exclude particular disadvantaged groups, for example, care should be taken when:
- Requiring specific qualifications rather than the ability or potential ability to do the job.
 - Age barriers or minimum periods of relevant experience.
 - Restrictions relating to physical ability etc.
- 12.10 When publishing vacancies, all applicants shall be informed of the Town Council's Equality and Diversity Policy.
- 12.11 **Application form** – used by the Town Council, will ensure that the form does not ask questions which are irrelevant to the consideration on merit for the post in question. The application form will not be used as a test of literacy unless a standard of literacy is a genuine requirement of the job.
- 12.12 **Short listing** – Short-listing will be undertaken by the appropriate members/officers and based upon the job description and the person specification.
- 12.13 **Interviewing** – All persons making appointments must endeavour to conduct interviews on an objective basis and shall deal only with applicant's suitability for the job and ability to fulfil the post requirements. Questions asked of candidates must relate only to the post. For example, candidates should not be asked questions about their personal circumstances or family commitments. Where

necessary, to ensure their availability for unusual work variations, it should be done in an objective manner and not be personalised.

Terms and Conditions of Service

12.14 Any local agreements and the implementation of National and Local Conditions of Service will be applied fairly to all employees.