



EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY POLICY

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ABSTRACT

As an employer and provider of services, Peterlee Town Council is committed to advancing equality of opportunity and providing fair access and treatment in employment and when delivering or procuring services or working in partnership.

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Corporate Services Manager

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1 Background

The Equality Act 2010 brought together a number of existing equality laws so that they are easier to use. It sets out the personal characteristics that are protected by the law and the behaviour that is unlawful. The Act was introduced in October 2010 to replace and simplify over 100 pieces of previous anti-discrimination Acts and regulations. On 5 April 2011, the public sector Equality Duty came into force in England, Scotland and Wales. The Duty replaced all pre-existing race, disability and gender equality duties.

2 Protected Characteristics

The Equality Act introduced a number of protected characteristics. Under the Act people are not allowed to discriminate, harass or victimise another person because they have any of the protected characteristics. There is also protection against discrimination where someone is perceived to have one of the protected characteristics or where they are associated with someone who has a protected characteristic

The protected characteristics under the Act are:

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

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3 Equality Duty

This policy reinforces the Council's responsibility under the public sector equality duty which as created under the Equality Act 2010 and consists of a general equality duty and specific duties.

3.1 General duty

The Council has a general duty under section 149 of the Equalities Act 2010¹ to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

4 Policy statement

The Council's policy is to treat people fairly, with respect and dignity. The Council believes that everyone in Peterlee deserves good public services which take account of their needs and circumstances. As an employer, service provider, partner and community leader, the Council will ensure that all communities have opportunities to access the services, be involved in decision making and be part of the workforce. Equality is more than just meeting the legal obligations, and the Council will take action to improve its policies and everyday practice.

5 Responsibilities

The policy applies to every elected member, employee, volunteer and any other person or organisation employed by the Council to work or to deliver services on its behalf. This includes contractual and commissioning arrangements. The policy applies to all work related situations including social events and the use of electronic communications and social media.

It is the individual's responsibility to:

- Treat others fairly, with dignity and respect
- Follow Council policies and procedures
- Ensure documentation, information and activity is lawful
- Consider reasonable adjustments and other requirements relating to disabled people
- Challenge discrimination and unfair treatment, reporting it where appropriate
- Attend relevant training
- Ask for advice where necessary.

All actions, which are intentionally contrary to this policy, will be dealt with under the appropriate disciplinary procedure.

6 Our Commitment

The Council uses a variety of methods to demonstrate and progress its commitment to equality. As part of the specific duty the Council must develop and deliver equality objectives which are aligned to the Council Service Delivery Plan and developed annually. The Council is committed to integrating equality into planning, development, delivery and management. This is also evident through policy documentation, budgetary decisions and allocation.

7 Equality Objectives and Outcomes

We have founded our three equality objectives; putting the customer first, working with our communities and support our people through change, on the corporate priorities within the Council Plan. Our objectives are underpinned by 9 high level outcomes which relate to equalities. The following examples demonstrate how the equality objectives are put into practice. These along with other activities support our commitment to the Public Sector Equality Duty.

7.1 Putting the customer first

7.1.1 Equality Impact Assessment and Equality Analysis

We use a process of equality impact assessments to support the development of inclusive and responsive policies, procedures and service provision. These are carried out when a new policy, procedure or service is being developed or significantly changed, where a service review is taking place or where a potential inequality has been identified. An assessment includes an analysis of impacts on protected characteristics. This includes all Medium Term Financial Plan savings (MTFP) proposals as well as delegated decisions.

7.1.2 Putting the customer first

A range of access routes to services Responsive and customer focused services People are treated fairly and differences respected

7.2 Working with our Communities

Communities and stakeholders are engaged and communicated with Effective partnership working Support our people through change Employee and member wellbeing.

7.2.1 Disabled Access

We are responsible for a significant number of buildings and public spaces throughout the County. We provide a range of services and employment from a large number of these. In order to identify and address areas for improvement, we have developed an Access Plan process to prioritise where improvements will have the most positive impact on service users, visitors and employees in the most cost effective ways.

7.2.2 Commissioning and Procurement

Effective procurement can drive progress in equality and embed real improvement. Integrating equality into our commissioning and procurement work improves services by making them more appropriate and responsive to the needs of different groups.

7.2.3 Community Cohesion Toolkit

This policy sets out how the Council will respond to incidents. It acts as a guidance tool for those responding to hate incidents and facilitating community cohesion.

7.2.4 Consultation and Involving others

In order to ensure our services are inclusive and responsive we will involve and consult employees, elected members, trade union, adults and children who use our services, on service changes, including communities and organisations who represent protected groups.

7.3 Support our people through change

7.3.1 Employee Policies and Practices

As a fair and supportive employer, we will ensure our policies and practices do not discriminate and treat staff with dignity and respect. The principles of Equality are embedded within our employment policies. Within the Recruitment and Selection policy, we ensure fair recruitment processes which encourage applicants from all groups in the community. 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. Any bias, which could lead to unjustifiable discrimination either direct or indirect, will be eliminated.

This includes our commitment to reasonable adjustments. This takes into consideration the way employment is structured, removing physical barriers and providing specific support. We are required to take positive and proactive steps to prevent, remove or reduce barriers to employment. All employees of the Council and job applicants will be made aware of the provisions of this policy.

As an employer we will provide a safe and accessible working environment, creating a culture which is free from discrimination, harassment, bullying and victimisation. We will monitor our employment procedures to avoid unlawful discrimination and ensure consistent treatment.

All employees will receive fair and transparent pay, reward and employment conditions, as well as options to access learning and development opportunities. The following policies demonstrate our commitment to equality as an employer. Further advice and guidance can be found in the specific employment policies:

- Attendance Management
- Recruitment and Selection
- Grievance procedure
- Learning and Development

8 Monitoring

This policy links to the actions identified within Service plans. These actions will be monitored on a quarterly basis through service plan monitoring and also through the annual update to demonstrate our compliance with the public sector equality duty.

9 Complaints

There are a number of ways to report equality issues or complaints:

- Employees can raise issues informally with their line manager or Corporate Services Manager. Formal complaints should follow the grievance procedure.
- Councillors can report issues through the member officer protocol or the code of conduct depending on the nature of the complaint.
- Members of the public can use the corporate and statutory complaints procedures. We will take prompt action to investigate any complaints. Anyone who has complained will not be treated unfavourably or victimised. However, if a complaint is found to be malicious this will be dealt with under the appropriate disciplinary procedure.

10 Contact details

If you would like any further advice or would like the document in an alternative format, please contact the Town Clerk or Corporate Services Manager using the contact details below:

Email: ian.morris@peterlee.gov.uk or Janet.hugill@peterlee.gov.uk

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