

Widdrington Station & Stobswood Parish Council

Equality and Diversity Policy

This policy forms part of the Council's Employee Handbook. Any amendments to this policy will be incorporated into the Employee Handbook and re-issued to employees. Employees will be required to confirm that they have read, understood, and will comply with the policy.

This policy is written in accordance with the **Equality Act 2010**, relevant employment legislation, and guidance issued by the **National Association of Local Councils (NALC)** and the **Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC)**.

1. Our Commitment

Widdrington Station & Stobswood Parish Council is committed to providing equality of opportunity in employment and in the delivery of its services. The Council aims to create and maintain a working environment that is free from discrimination, harassment, bullying, and victimisation, and where everyone is treated with dignity and respect.

The Council recognises its responsibilities both as an employer and as a service provider and will take all reasonable steps to ensure compliance with equality legislation and best practice.

2. Legal Framework

Under the Equality Act 2010, it is unlawful to discriminate, harass, or victimise an individual because of a **protected characteristic**. These are:

- Age
- Disability
- Sex
- Gender reassignment
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race (including colour, nationality, caste, and ethnic or national origins)
- Religion or belief
- Sexual orientation
- Marriage and civil partnership (in employment only)

Unlawful discrimination may occur during recruitment, employment, or after employment has ended (for example, in the provision of references).

The Council will not unlawfully discriminate against members of the public in the provision of services, facilities, or goods.

3. Reasonable Adjustments and Disability Equality

The Council has a legal duty to make **reasonable adjustments** to remove barriers experienced by disabled people, both in employment and when accessing services.

This duty includes:

- Removing, adapting, or altering physical features;
- Adjusting policies, procedures, or working practices;
- Providing auxiliary aids or support where reasonable.

The Council will take a proactive approach by anticipating potential barriers and addressing them in advance, wherever practicable.

4. Forms of Unlawful Discrimination

The following forms of discrimination are prohibited:

- **Direct discrimination** – treating someone less favourably because of a protected characteristic, unless a lawful occupational requirement applies.
- **Indirect discrimination** – applying a provision, criterion, or practice that disadvantages people with a protected characteristic and cannot be objectively justified.
- **Harassment** – unwanted conduct related to a protected characteristic that violates dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment.
- **Victimisation** – subjecting a person to detriment because they have raised or supported a complaint under the Equality Act 2010.
- **Associative discrimination** – discrimination due to association with someone who has a protected characteristic.
- **Perceptive discrimination** – discrimination based on a perceived protected characteristic.
- **Failure to make reasonable adjustments** – where a disabled person is placed at a substantial disadvantage and reasonable steps are not taken to remove it.

The Council will also take reasonable steps to protect employees from harassment by third parties, including contractors, suppliers, or members of the public.

5. Equality in Employment Practices

The Council is committed to avoiding unlawful discrimination in all aspects of employment, including:

- Recruitment and selection
- Terms and conditions of employment
- Pay and benefits
- Training and development
- Promotion and career progression
- Discipline and grievance procedures
- Redundancy and termination of employment

Recruitment and Selection

Job descriptions and person specifications will be limited to requirements essential for effective performance of the role. Selection decisions will be based on objective criteria and merit, taking account of reasonable adjustments where required.

Disability, caring responsibilities, or personal circumstances will not be considered unless they are directly relevant and lawful.

6. Working Practices and Flexibility

The Council will consider the potential impact of its working practices, including hours, location, and patterns of work, and will seek to avoid unjustified indirect discrimination.

Requests for flexible working or contract variations will be considered fairly and in accordance with statutory requirements. Reasonable adjustments will be made where required to support employees with disabilities.

7. Equal Opportunities Monitoring

The Council may monitor the composition of its workforce and job applicants in order to assess the effectiveness of this policy and to identify any areas for improvement.

Any personal data collected for equality monitoring purposes will be processed in accordance with data protection legislation and the Council's Data Protection Policy and Privacy Notices.

8. Dignity at Work

The Council has a separate **Dignity at Work Policy** which sets out how issues of bullying and harassment will be prevented and addressed.

Employees are encouraged to report any bullying or harassment, including that carried out by third parties such as contractors, suppliers, or visitors. The Council will take appropriate action to address such behaviour.

9. Training and Awareness

The Council will provide appropriate equality and diversity training and guidance to:

- Councillors and employees involved in recruitment and decision-making;
 - Employees to help them understand their rights and responsibilities;
 - Managers to enable them to respond effectively to complaints of discrimination, bullying, or harassment.
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10. Employee Responsibilities

All employees have a responsibility to support the Council's commitment to equality and diversity.

Employees must not engage in discrimination, harassment, bullying, or victimisation. Such behaviour will be treated as a disciplinary matter and may constitute gross misconduct, potentially leading to dismissal without notice.

Employees may be held personally liable for unlawful discriminatory acts.

11. Grievances and Complaints

Employees who believe they have been subjected to unlawful discrimination, harassment, or victimisation should raise the matter using the Council's Grievance Procedure.

Complaints involving bullying or harassment will be managed in accordance with the Dignity at Work Policy.

The Council will treat all complaints seriously and will not penalise employees for raising concerns in good faith, even where a complaint is not upheld.

12. Monitoring and Review

This policy will be monitored periodically by the Council to ensure its effectiveness and compliance with current legislation and NALC/SLCC guidance.

The policy will be reviewed and updated where necessary to reflect changes in law, best practice, or the operational needs of the Council.