



Equal Opportunities Policy

Our commitment

Wokingham Borough Council is committed to providing equal opportunities in employment and to avoiding unlawful discrimination in employment and against customers.

This policy is intended to assist the Council to put this commitment into practice. Compliance with this policy should also ensure that employees do not commit unlawful acts of discrimination.

Striving to ensure that the work environment is free of harassment and bullying and that everyone is treated with dignity and respect is an important aspect of ensuring equal opportunities in employment. The Council has a separate dignity at work policy, which deals with these issues.



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Version	Date	Description
1		Author Maureen Vaughan-Dixon
2	2008	Amended due to changes in legislation and removal of bullying and harassment section.
3	01/11/10	Amended due to changes in legislation
3.1	25/05/14	Reviewed and updated to include principles on the front page.
4	30/10/15	Reviewed and updated to new format
Document Approvals		
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Director, Finance & Resources:	n/a no material change	

The law

It is unlawful to discriminate directly or indirectly in recruitment or employment because of age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, pregnancy, maternity, race (which includes colour, nationality and ethnic or national origins), sexual orientation, religion or belief, or because someone is married or in a civil partnership. These are known as "protected characteristics".

Discrimination after employment may also be unlawful, e.g. refusing to give a reference for a reason related to one of the protected characteristics.

Staff should not discriminate against or harass a member of the public in the delivery of our services. 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, service providers have an obligation to think ahead and address any barriers that may impede disabled people from accessing a service.

In addition as a public body the Council is duty bound to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Equality Act 2010; advance equality of opportunity; and foster good relations. The duty applies to all of the protected characteristics, except marriage and civil partnership, which is only covered by the first part of the duty, i.e. the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act. Further information on the Public Sector Equality Duty is on the Grapevine.

Types of unlawful discrimination

Direct discrimination is where a person is treated less favourably than another because of a protected characteristic. An example of direct discrimination would be refusing to employ a woman because she is pregnant.

In limited circumstances, it is permissible to 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 (although it does not explicitly include pregnancy and maternity, which is covered by indirect sex discrimination) 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. For example an employee appointed to a position that is later withdrawn when the manager learns they have a caring responsibility for a dependant could be regarded as direct discrimination by association.

Perceptive discrimination is where an individual is directly discriminated against or harassed based on a perception that they have a particular protected characteristic when in fact, they do not. An example is where an employee is ridiculed by team members because they believe he is gay when in fact they are heterosexual. The employee could bring a claim of harassment.

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, 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.

Equal opportunities in employment

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

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 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 and will refuse such requests only 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.

The Council will monitor the ethnic, gender and age composition of the existing workforce and of applicants for jobs (including promotion), and the number of people with disabilities within these groups, and will consider and take any appropriate action to address any problems that may be identified as a result of the monitoring process.

Dignity at work

The Council has a separate dignity at work policy concerning issues of bullying and harassment on any ground, and how complaints of this type will be dealt with.

Customers, suppliers and other people not employed by the Council

The Council will not discriminate unlawfully against customers using or seeking to use goods, facilities or services provided by the Council.

Employees should report any bullying or harassment by customers, suppliers, visitors or others to their manager who will take appropriate action.

Training

The Council will provide training in equal opportunities to managers and others likely to be involved in recruitment or other decision making where equal opportunities issues are likely to arise.

The Council will provide training to all existing and new employees and others engaged to work at the Council to help them understand their rights and responsibilities under the dignity at work policy and what they can do to help create a working environment free of bullying and harassment.

Your responsibilities

Every employee is required to assist the Council to meet its commitment to provide equal opportunities in employment and eliminate 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 and could lead to dismissal without notice.

Grievances

If you consider that you may have been unlawfully discriminated against, you may use the Council's grievance procedure to make a complaint. If your complaint involves bullying or harassment, the grievance procedure is modified as set out in the 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.

Monitoring and review

This policy will be monitored periodically by the Council to judge its effectiveness and will be updated in accordance with changes in the law. In particular, the Council will monitor the ethnic and gender composition of the existing workforce and of applicants for jobs (including promotion), and the number of people with disabilities within these groups, and will review its equal opportunities policy in accordance with the results shown by the monitoring. If changes are required, the Council will implement them.

Information provided by job applicants and employees for monitoring purposes will be used only for these purposes and will be dealt with in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

Further information

A Guide for Managers on protected characteristics and what to be aware of in relation to employing and recruiting people is available on the Grapevine.