



**Burnham-on-Sea
& Highbridge**
TOWN COUNCIL

Equality Policy

Date Adopted: 2023

Introduction

We recognise that we have moral and legal responsibilities to be fair and are committed to promoting equality and tackling discrimination. This means treating people fairly, valuing difference and removing barriers that prevent people from participating fully in public life and reaching their full potential.

This Equality Policy outlines our legal responsibilities and the commitments we have made which help us to ensure equality is an integral part of the way we reach decisions, provide services, recruit and support employees and work with other organisations.

Implementation of this policy is the responsibility of Burnham-on-Sea and Highbridge Town Council through elected members, employees and others acting on its behalf.

Legal Requirements

The Equality Act came into force from October 2010 and brings together all legal requirements on equality. Under the Act everyone has the right to be treated fairly at work or when using a service. It protects people from discrimination on the basis of certain characteristics, these are:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- pregnancy and maternity
- race – this includes ethnic or national origins, colour or nationality
- religion or belief – this includes lack of belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

It also applies to marriage and civil partnership, but only in respect of the requirement to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination.

The public sector Equality Duty came into force on 5th April 2011 and is a key measure under the Equality Act 2010.

The Equality Duty ensures that all public bodies play their part in making society fairer by tackling discrimination and providing equality of opportunity for all.

The Equality Duty Aims

The following Equality Duty aims apply to our process of decision making including how we act as an employer; how we develop, evaluate and review policy; how we design, deliver and evaluate services and how we commission and procure from others:

1. Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act
2. Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it. This involves considering the need to:
 - Remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics;
 - Meet the needs of people with protected characteristics; and
 - Encourage people with protected characteristics to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is low.
3. Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it. This involves tackling prejudice and promoting understanding between people who share a protected characteristic and others.

Our Commitment

We are committed to ensuring equality, fairness, inclusion and good relations are at the heart of everything we do - be it employment, policy-making or service delivery.

Recruitment, Selection and Employment

- We will ensure that our recruitment, selection and employment policies are fair and equitable and will continue to evaluate our procedures.
- We will actively identify the individual needs of employees and make reasonable adjustments to the working environment where necessary.
- We will ensure that all employees have equal access to training and development opportunities in line with their needs and abilities.
- We will give serious consideration to requests for flexible working arrangements.
- We will provide guidance to employees so that they are aware of the Council's Equality Policy and their legal responsibilities and rights.
- We will treat employees fairly with dignity and respect, maintaining a working environment that is inclusive, free of discrimination, harassment and bullying.
- We will encourage employees to report discrimination, unacceptable language and behaviour to the Town Clerk.

Elected Members

- We will provide training and guidance to elected members so that they are aware of the Council's Equality Policy and their legal responsibilities and rights when exercising Council duties and functions.
- We will maintain a working/meeting environment that is inclusive, free of discrimination, harassment and bullying, where individuals are treated with dignity and respect.
- We will encourage elected members to highlight discrimination and challenge unacceptable language and behaviour.

- We will make reasonable adjustments where necessary, so that any obstacles a person faces as an elected member relating to a protected characteristic, are removed, reduced or prevented.
- We will publicise Council vacancies widely within the community.

Council Decision Making and Services

- We will ensure that we treat people with dignity and respect.
- We will consider the needs of all individuals in our day to day work. We will try to understand how different people will be affected by our activities so that our policies and services are appropriate and accessible to all and meet different people's needs.
- We recognise that people's needs may be different. We will take account of this when making decisions about policies or services and make reasonable adjustments where necessary.
- We will consider the three aims of the Equality Duty in policy/service development/review and decision making.
- We will consider what information we have and what further information may be needed in order to give proper consideration to the Equality Duty.
- We will take a proportionate approach to the Equality Duty, it will be one of a number of factors that need to be considered in decision making. The weight given to the Equality Duty, compared to other factors, will depend on how much it affects discrimination, equality of opportunity and good relations and the extent of any disadvantage that needs to be addressed.
- We will aim to provide all information in Plain English and alternative formats on request.

Working with Partners and Contractors

- We recognise that we are responsible for ensuring that any third parties who exercise functions on our behalf are capable of complying with the Equality Duty, are required to comply with it, and that they do so in practice.
- We will communicate our Equality Policy to partners and contractors.
- We will obtain commitment from contractors/partners that they will comply with the Equality Duty and our Equality Policy when carrying out work on our behalf.
- We will take equalities considerations into account when developing contract specifications and conditions.

Monitoring and Reviewing Our Equality Policy

- We will monitor and review our Equality Policy on an annual basis. This review will highlight good practice, identify areas for improvement and consider an Equality Action Plan for the coming year.

Dealing with Complaints and Grievances Relating to Equality

- Complaints and grievances about discrimination will be properly handled through the council's respective policies.
- Breaches of our Equality Policy by employees will be regarded as misconduct and could lead to disciplinary action under the Council's Disciplinary Policy.