

Equality Policy

Our Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Vision

Assistant Director for HR, OD and Engagement

“Worcestershire County Council is committed to eliminating all forms of discrimination, creating an inclusive organisational culture and meeting the diverse needs of all our communities in our County.

We aim for all employees to feel they can be themselves, thrive at work and feel respected for who they are. We are focussed on building inclusive behaviours that are built on a foundation of respect and appreciation for diversity and inclusion for everyone and in all its forms.

We recognise and value diversity of talent and aim to recruit, develop and retain talented people, value experiences, perspectives and skills. We recognise that being a diverse and inclusive employer helps us to develop a workforce which understands the needs of all our colleagues, and residents, whilst making a difference.

We are committed to ensuring that our services are needs based and that we support Worcestershire residents by fostering good relations between groups who share protected characteristics and those that don't. We will promote a culture of respect and dignity, and actively remove discrimination wherever we find it. We will identify and remove barriers for our job applicants and current employees and will ensure our services meet resident's needs through communication and engagement.”

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Introduction

Worcestershire County Council and Worcestershire Children First (the Council) takes great pride in the diversity of the community it serves and recognises the opportunities and benefits this offers the County. We want to build cohesive communities and recruit, retain and develop a diverse workforce where everyone feels valued, respected, included and welcome.

We recognise that people may experience barriers, which makes it difficult to participate in the life of our community and we aim to advance opportunity and promote the values of inclusion and belonging to everyone in Worcestershire.

1. Statement of intent

1.1 The Council is committed to equality of opportunity for everyone and understands that the diversity of our community and staff is a strength to the social and economic prosperity, and innovation in the county. The Council commits to working within the Equality Act 2010 and our Public Sector Equality Duty to ensure that no resident, visitor to the county, job applicant, employee or other person associated with the Council is treated inequitably or in an unlawful or unjustifiably discriminatory way.

1.2 The Council recognises that people may experience discrimination and less favourable treatment on the grounds of their protected characteristics – as described within the Equality Act 2010:

Age,
Disability,
Race,

Sex,
Gender reassignment,
Marriage/civil partnership,
Pregnancy and maternity,
Religion/belief,
Sexual orientation

We also recognise that people may experience discrimination in a range of ways and receive less favourable treatment for other reasons (e.g., on the grounds of their financial or economic status, unrelated criminal convictions, gender identity, education level or location of study, homelessness or lack of a fixed address, political view, or trade union activity).

- 1.3 The Council will also take proactive steps to pay 'due regard' to the need to enhance equality, tackle discrimination and help foster good community relations when exercising its functions. This will be through a variety of plans, our Equality Impact Assessments, ongoing initiatives, and projects, as well as our Equality Strategy, equality monitoring, and other related policies.
- 1.4 The leadership and day to day operation of this policy rests with all colleagues, specifically including Elected Members, the Chief Executive, the Directors and Chief Officer Group, and Heads of Service, and they must ensure that all employees within their area of responsibility, partners, and contractors, are aware of the policy and understand their role in its implementation.

2. Employment

- 2.1 The Council is one of the largest employers in the county of Worcestershire and in recognition of its role as a community leader, and its' firm commitment to equality of opportunity. The Council aims to be an inclusive employer, and to remove any barriers to employment at the Council. The Council will continuously review policies, practices, and procedures to identify and remove potential barriers to equality of opportunity.
- 2.2 The Council will ensure that no job applicant, employee, or leaver receives less favourable treatment which cannot be shown to be justifiable in line with the Equality Act 2010.

3. Employment commitments

- 3.1 Recruitment and selection criteria, and procedures will ensure that individuals are selected for employment (or volunteering), promoted, and treated fairly based on their relevant merits and abilities. It is also acknowledged that certain roles are exempt from such practices legally, (e.g., domestic abuse services/support or vulnerable adults' services etc.) where specific requirements are in place and offers for employment may be subject to a successful DBS check.
- 3.2 The Council is committed to having a workforce that is representative of the community it serves. The Council will proactively encourage people from under-represented groups to apply for roles within the Council and will support and enable people to obtain employment on merit.
- 3.3 Equality monitoring is an essential part of our commitment and general role as a public body. The Council will monitor the recruitment and selection process. It will monitor and publish data of the demographic representation within the workforce by reporting annually and in line with our statutory duties.
- 3.4 The Council will strive to ensure that its employment policy, practices, and arrangements are flexible and adapted to support, as far as is lawful, reasonable, and practicable, specific needs and requirements of individuals and groups.
- 3.5 The Council is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all staff, taking action against all forms of discrimination and harassment. The Council will not tolerate any harassment, whether physical or verbal or otherwise, of employees by members of the public or colleagues. The Council will act on any employee grievance relating to discrimination, victimisation or harassment. Colleagues will also be supported to report any hate crimes, through the appropriate channels and liaise with Victim Support where necessary.
- 3.6 The Council issues mandatory equality training to all employees, and specific training to managers.

4. Service delivery

- 4.1 Worcestershire County Council and Worcestershire Children First is committed to ensuring that its services are accessible, and current and potential users do not experience barriers in accessing services, whilst ensuring individual and group needs are met effectively and in a sensitive, appropriate and empathetic manner.
- 4.2 The Council will ensure that no user is subjected to unjustifiable discrimination or harassment in the delivery or access of our services.

- 4.3 In order to achieve this, our digitised assessment method for decision making, and Equality Impact Assessment will ensure that circumstances, impact and issues are considered at the outset of all proposals / projects, policy development and planning and become part of the process in the first phase of any decisions made. If and when negative impacts are identified, the Council will aim to understand the challenges and if appropriate, mitigate any negative impact. We acknowledge that this may not always be possible to remove negative impacts completely, and decisions made will take this into account at review stage.

5. Service Delivery Commitments

- 5.1 All service areas will ensure that services are responsive to the changing and varied needs in the community and that users receive equitable treatment when accessing services, or through any interaction and correspondence.
- 5.2 The Council will ensure that users are aware of their rights and entitlements when receiving services, and that participation and engagement are positively encouraged.
- 5.3 Reasonable adjustments will be made in the provision of services for people requiring them, and aim to reduce physical barriers to services, in line with the social model of disability. A Workplace Adjustments Passport is available for staff.
- 5.4 Equality Impact Assessments will be carried out across service areas where appropriate, through our digitised platform for decision making.
- 5.5 Complaints about services will be dealt with promptly and will be monitored against all equality areas covered by legislation.
- 5.6 We will aim to engage and consult with people across Worcestershire and ensure that equitable platforms for engagement and participation are built into our planning and development when identifying areas for consultation. We will proactively engage and promote involvement in public life for all members of the community, across Worcestershire.

6. Partners and third parties

- 6.1 It is recognised that there are stakeholders, partnerships and other third parties who collaborate and / or deliver services or have a relationship with the Council. It is

expected that all parties adhere to the Equality Policy, our values, ethics and practices and copies of this policy will be shared to those we work with, or made available

7. Procurement

- 7.1 The Council will ensure that contracts comply with this Equality Policy, strategy, and all relevant / related legislation. Through appropriate monitoring we shall ensure that individuals, voluntary organisations, or institutions acting on behalf or as agents of, the Council do not practice unlawful acts of discrimination.
- 7.2 The Council will encourage the local community to take up opportunities to contract and will seek, wherever appropriate, to offer contracts within the local community's ability to deliver, ensuring that they comply with Best Value and legislation on procurement and geographic location.
- 7.3 Contracts will be awarded on a fair and open evaluation process considering a range of factors including price, best value, and ability to deliver the contract. Reasonable opportunity for feedback to unsuccessful bidders will be offered where appropriate.
- 7.4 Contracts will be monitored by the Council to ensure that products, services, or facilities are being delivered as agreed, and to ensure that the continued delivery of such remain beneficial and advantageous to the Council and the community.

8. Responsibility for policy implementation

- 8.1 Strategic Directors, Chief Officer Group, Heads of Service, and all employees with supervisory remit are responsible, within their service area of work, for implementing and promoting this policy.
- 8.2 All Council employees and those who work on behalf of the Council are responsible for implementing the policy. They must adhere to it as part of their conditions of service and will be supported and encouraged by their managers. Any failure to do so will be considered in accordance with the Council's Disciplinary Procedures and Code of Conduct.
- 8.3 Employees and those serving the community for, or on behalf of the Council must not:

- Ignore incidents of discrimination,
- Unlawfully discriminate against anyone,
- Persuade, incite, or encourage another person to discriminate,
- Harass, victimise, or abuse other employees or members of the public for any reason

8.4 Employees are not expected to tolerate discrimination from service users, other employees, providers or any third party or partner.

9. Examples of harassment / unacceptable behaviour

9.1 Harassment

Within the Equality Act 2010 harassment is defined as unwanted behaviour, based on someone's protected characteristic (or a perception that they have a particular characteristic) that the recipient or a witness finds offensive. Harassment could relate to someone's race, sex (including pregnancy/maternity), disability, sexual orientation, age, religion/belief, or gender reassignment.

Unwanted behaviour could include:

- spoken or written abuse, using offensive words about a particular racial group, or using phrases or derogatory language
- offensive emails
- comments or posts on websites and social media
- circulating or displaying offensive material or insignia
- images and graffiti
- physical gestures and facial expressions that mock others
- 'banter' or jokes that are offensive to the recipient or others
- negative stereotyping
- telling people to "go back home" or implying certain groups or people are not welcome (implying they do not belong in the UK)
- 'outing' someone's sexual orientation, trans status or gender identity to another person without express permission from the individual or group in question
- refusing to use the correct pronoun for someone who may or may not have transitioned or has undergone gender reassignment

Anything that is unwelcome to the recipient is unwanted. The unwanted behaviour must have the purpose or effect of violating someone's dignity, or creating a degrading, humiliating, hostile, intimidating or offensive environment.

9.2 Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is defined in the Equality Act 2010 as: ‘unwanted conduct [related to a person’s sex] which has the purpose or effect of violating an individual’s dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment’.

Examples of sexual harassment include:

- sexual comments or jokes
- physical behaviour, including unwelcome sexual advances, touching and various forms of sexual assault
- displaying or sharing any image, pictures, photos, or drawings of a sexual nature
- sending emails with a sexual content

10. Policy History

Issued	29 th June 2022
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Updated	