LOUGHTON AND GREAT HOLM PARISH COUNCIL

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY POLICY

Our commitment

Loughton and Great Holm Parish Council “the council” is committed to providing equal opportunities in all areas of our work avoiding unlawful discrimination.

This policy is intended to assist the council in putting this commitment into practice. Compliance with this policy should also ensure that individuals do not commit unlawful acts of discrimination.

Striving to ensure that the work and parish environment is free of harassment and bullying and that everyone is treated with dignity and respect is an important aspect of ensuring equal opportunities for everyone.

Our equality aim is to engage, think, plan, and act to ensure accessibility and equality for everyone, every day.

The law

It is unlawful to discriminate against individuals directly or indirectly because of their age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, pregnancy, maternity, race (which includes colour, nationality, caste, 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, eg. refusing to give a reference for a reason related to one of the protected characteristics.

The council will not discriminate against or harass a member of the public in the provision of services or goods. 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 feature makes 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.

Types of unlawful discrimination

Direct discrimination is where a person is treated less favourably than another because of a protected characteristic.

In limited circumstances, employers can 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 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.

Perceptive discrimination is where an individual is directly discriminated against or harassed based on a perception that he/she has a particular protected characteristic when he/she does not, in fact, have that protected characteristic.

Third-party harassment occurs where an individual is harassed and the harassment is related to a protected characteristic, by third parties.

Victimisation occurs where an individual is subjected to a detriment, such as being denied a training opportunity or a promotion because he/she made or supported a complaint or raised a grievance under the Equality Act 2010, or because he/she is suspected of doing so. However, an employee is not protected from victimisation if he/she 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 avoid unlawful discrimination in all aspects of employment including recruitment, promotion, opportunities for training, pay and benefits, discipline, and selection for redundancy.

Recruitment

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 into 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.

Working practices

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.

Equal opportunities monitoring

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.

The council treats personal data collected for reviewing equality and diversity in accordance with the data protection policy. Information about how data is used and the basis for processing is provided in the council's privacy notices.

Dignity at work

The council has a separate Anti-Bullying and Harassment work policy concerning issues of bullying and harassment on any ground, and how complaints of this type will be dealt with.

People not employed by the council

The council will not discriminate unlawfully against those using or seeking to use the services provided by the council.

You should report any bullying or harassment by suppliers, visitors or others to the council who will take appropriate action.

Training

The council will provide training and raise awareness of equal opportunities to those likely to be involved in recruitment or other decision-making where equal opportunity issues are likely to arise.

The council will provide training to and/or raise awareness of all staff engaged to work at the council to help them understand their rights and responsibilities under this policy and what they can do to help create a working environment free of bullying and harassment. The council will provide additional training to managers to enable them to deal more effectively with complaints of bullying and harassment.

Your responsibilities

Every employee is required to assist the council in meeting its commitment to provide equal opportunities in employment and avoid 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 individuals 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.

Loughton & Great Holm Parish Council seeks to eliminate discrimination both in the workplace and within the whole community and will develop the council's services, so they are provided fairly and equitably.

- All Councillors should have due regard to the elimination of discrimination, the advancement of equal opportunities, and the fostering of good community relations in all their work, decisions, and reviews.
- All employees working for the council will work to achieve the objectives outlined in this policy and develop appropriate procedures and plans.

Everyone associated with the council; council employees and people who work for the council (whether volunteers, temporary staff, or working for a partner) will conduct themselves in a manner that maintains the council's reputation on equality and accessibility while carrying out a council function and at other times when their actions could reflect on the council's reputation.

Grievances

If you consider that you may have been unlawfully discriminated against, you should refer to the council's Disciplinary and Grievance policy procedures to make a complaint. If your complaint involves bullying or harassment, the grievance procedure is modified as set out in the Anti-Bullying and Harassment 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 and reviewed periodically by the council to judge its effectiveness and will be updated following changes in the law.

Policy Adopted: October 2023

Last Revised and Approved: June 2025 (FC109/25), June 2026 (FC115/26)