

Equal Opportunities in Employment

The Council aims to provide equality of opportunity in its role as an employer and will take positive steps to create a diverse workforce reflecting the community it serves. It believes that all employees and prospective employees have the fundamental and basic right to be treated equally, fairly and with dignity and respect at all times and the Council will promote this right.

The Council is opposed to unfair discrimination and bullying, including discriminatory actions or harassment based on a person's race, colour, ethnic origin, nationality, religion, sex, marital status, family care responsibilities, disability, age, sexual orientation or any other personal or group attribute that is irrelevant to the person's ability to do the job.

This policy is not intended to confer contractual employment rights, but is intended to provide clear information to members, employees and prospective employees about the Council's intentions, what type of behaviour is and is not acceptable to the Council and actions the Council may take if the policy is breached.

All employees and prospective employees have the right to be treated equally and fairly without:

- unfair discrimination ,
- bullying or harassment from elected members, managers or other employees
- Inappropriate behaviour from members of the public.

The Council will take any allegation of discrimination, bullying or harassment seriously and will take appropriate action where such behaviour is found to have taken place.

Race and Religious Equality

The Council is working towards reflecting the ethnic diversity of the population it serves, at all levels in the organisation. It has Produced a Race Equality Scheme, which is monitored by the Services for All working Group.

The Council will take action to prevent racist behaviour or racial harassment or inappropriate behaviour linked to a person's religion or beliefs.

The Council will work towards meeting Area IV of the CRE's (Commission for Racial Equality) Equality Standard for Local Government. Area IVa covers Recruitment and Selection and Area IVb covers Developing and Retaining Staff.

The Council will comply with the Race Relations Act 1976 and subsequent amendments and the CRE's Code of Practice on eliminating racial discrimination.

Gender, Marital Status and Sexual Orientation Equality

The Council is working towards a gender balanced workforce, at all levels in the organisation. It has produced a Gender Equality Scheme, which is monitored by the Services for All Working Group.

The Council aims to provide a working environment that enables employees to balance their work and family responsibilities.

The Council will take action to prevent sexist or homophobic behaviour or harassment based on a person's gender, marital status or sexual orientation.

The Council will implement the national Single Status Agreement made in 1997 between the National Joint Council for Local Government Services and the trade unions.

The Council will comply with the Sex Discrimination Acts 1975 and 1986 and the Equal Pay Act 1970. The Council will comply with the Equal Opportunity Commission's Code of Practice on eliminating sex discrimination and the European Code of Practice on Protecting the Dignity of Women and Men at Work.

Disability Equality

The Council is working towards employing a similar proportion of disabled employees to those who are economically active in the population it serves, at all levels in the organisation. It has produced a Disability Equality Scheme, which is monitored through the Services for All working Group

The Council will take action to prevent harassment because of a person's disability.

The Council's definition of disability is as described in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

The Council will comply with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and the Code of Practice for the elimination of discrimination in the field of employment against disabled persons or persons who have had a disability.

Age Equality

The Council will employ people within the age ranges 16 to 65 on the basis of their competence to do the job, not based on the person's age. The Council will also seriously and genuinely consider any employees request to continue working beyond the age of 65.

The Council will provide relevant training to employees throughout their career, irrespective of age, unless the benefits from the training cannot be realised before the employee is due to retire.

Equal Opportunities in Employment in Action

The Council will promote equal opportunity in employment through the following actions.

1. Recruitment and selection

- encouraging job applicants from all sectors of the community through an open recruitment policy and by including an equal opportunities policy statement on job advertisements;

- Ensuring that the information provided to managers for selection purposes is free from information about the applicants gender, ethnicity, age or disability, thus ensuring that selection decisions are based on objective criteria related solely to the needs of the job;
- including both men and women in the selection decision making whenever practicable;
- making reasonable adjustments to selection procedures or the job to prevent unfair discrimination, for example because of an employee's disability, family care responsibilities or English language difficulties.

2. Flexible working

- providing flexible working arrangements to include flexible working hours, time off for observing key religious festivals (within existing leave arrangements), parental leave and part time working (e.g. through job sharing) at all levels.

3. Terms and conditions

- ensuring that all jobs are paid in accordance with the principles of equal pay for work of equal value, unless the reason for a difference is a non-discriminatory genuine material factor.

4. Training and development

- making all employees and elected members aware of this policy and their rights and responsibilities;
- ensuring new employees understand this policy as part of their induction;
- providing equal opportunities training for all managers to help them make fair employment decisions and apply the Council's procedures consistently;
- providing training for all front line employees to ensure that they know how to respond to the needs of a diverse community;
- providing job related training for all employees in line with the principles of the Investors In People standard.
- encouraging the personal and career development of all employees.

5. Fair employment policies and procedures

- reviewing and developing the Council's employment procedures to ensure that they are non-discriminatory;
- reviewing the Council's employment policies, procedures and practices to make sure that they are consistent with UK and EU equality legislation plus the Human Rights Act;
- treating all employees with dignity and respect;
- providing formal and informal opportunities for employees to raise problems, including allegations of discrimination, harassment and bullying;
- ensuring that decisions relating to disciplinary sanctions and dismissal are non-discriminatory

- treating any allegations of discrimination and harassment/bullying seriously and ensuring, as far as practicable, that, if necessary, appropriate actions are taken to prevent any recurrence;

6. Monitoring

- undertaking the following monitoring, in relation to gender, ethnic origin and disability and, where appropriate, age and working pattern:
 - the composition of the Council's workforce
 - the recruitment and selection of employees
 - participation in training provided by the Council
 - reasons why employees leave the Council's employ;
- ensuring that the Council's employment policies meet the requirement of level 1 of the Equalities Standard for Local Government, and working with the Services for All working group to improve the standard reached by the Council

7. Consultation

- consulting employees via the recognised trade union and through confidential employee surveys.
- consulting the community as part of Best Value reviews and via Ipswich and Suffolk Council for Racial Equality.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Elected Members are responsible for ensuring that their actions and decisions are consistent with this policy and that this policy is monitored and action taken to remedy inequalities, as far as practicable.

All employees are responsible for their own behaviour and must ensure that this is consistent with this policy at all times. Failure to comply with this policy will be treated seriously and may result in disciplinary action.

The Chief Executive and Chief Officers of each department are responsible for ensuring that this policy is complied with and that all employees are informed about their rights and responsibilities under the policy.

All managers are responsible for taking any allegation of discrimination, bullying or harassment seriously and for taking appropriate action under the Council's grievance, bullying and harassment or incident reporting procedures, seeking advice from Human Resources where necessary.

The Council will seek continuous improvement in relation to its performance as an equal opportunities employer. The Council will review the effectiveness of this policy on an annual basis, taking into account the outcome of the monitoring and consultation, identified above.