

EQUALITY & DIVERSITY POLICY

Introduction

Equality brings quality for everyone and the creation of a fairer society where everyone can participate and achieve their potential. Equality is not about treating everyone the same; equality is about valuing a person 'as an equal' regardless of their characteristics and treating people according to their needs in order to achieve an equal or fair outcome. An equal society values human diversity, recognising that diversity brings a range of skills, knowledge, values, styles, perspectives and ideas.

Cranbrook Town Council is firmly committed to promoting equality of opportunity and to combating discrimination both in the way we deliver services to the public and through our actions as an employer. We also seek to promote the principles of equality to the wider community and to provide leadership by example.

To achieve this the Council aims to ensure that no member of the public, elected councillor, employee, potential employee or volunteer is discriminated against irrespective of, for example, their gender, physical or mental disability, race, national or ethnic origin, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief, marital status or trade union involvement.

Aims and Objectives

Cranbrook Town Council is committed to challenging inequality and discrimination and celebrating diversity so that:

- People achieve their own potential and a good quality of life.
- Everyone can access our services, facilities or information.
- There is public involvement and influence over decision-making, planning, policy and service delivery.
- Cranbrook builds and maintains a strong, safe and inclusive community.
- People have trust and confidence to report incidents of abuse or discrimination.
- Our workforce is supported and broadly reflects the diversity of the community.

If we work together, equality is something we can all benefit from and this policy aims to bind us in our commitment.

Legal Duties

Under the Equality Act 2010, as a public authority we have legal duties to:

1. Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other prohibited conduct.
2. Advance equality of opportunity.
3. Foster good relations between people.
4. Publish objectives to demonstrate how we will meet criteria 1-3 above and publish information on our performance.

The duties apply to the nine “protected characteristics”: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation.

The Council is committed to complying with all statutory equality requirements and this Policy has been developed in the context of the following legislation (non-exhaustive):

- Equal Pay Act 1970
- Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (and 1979 and 1986)
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Race Relations Act 1976 and Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000
- Disability Discrimination Act (1995 & 2005)
- Sex Discrimination (Gender Reassignment) Regulations 1999
- Part-time Workers Regulations 2000
- Fixed-term Employees Regulations 2002
- The Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003
- The Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003
- Civil Partnerships Act 2005

The Council acknowledges and welcomes its legal duties and will use the legislation and national guidance as a framework to maintain or improve standards and be accountable to the people we serve.

Our Supporting Policies, Structures and Processes

In order to reduce the risk of unlawful discrimination we have a number of supporting policies, structures and processes, in addition to this policy. These include:

- Code of Conduct for Members
- Recruitment standards, a competency framework and learning and development opportunities
- Discrimination and harassment defined as gross misconduct under the Grievance & Disciplinary Policy
- Supporting guidance and information, including information about community needs, views and profiles
- Accessibility Statement with regards to our website and access to online information

The disability access to buildings is a current industry standard:

- Unacceptable Customer Behaviour Policy and Acceptable Behaviour Policy for staff
- Feedback (complaints) procedure for customers
- Communication standards including policies and guidance for translations, interpreting and alternative formats

Roles and Responsibilities

Everyone who uses services, facilities and information provided by the Council should be treated in line with this policy. This includes service users/customers, members of the public, partners, contractors, employees, workers and elected councillors.

The **Town Clerk** ensures good governance of the organisation and has overall responsibility to ensure this policy is consistently applied and taken into account when setting strategic direction and reviewing performance. S/he and any line managers must ensure staff are aware of the policy and trained to meet its requirements and that equality is clearly incorporated into policy, design and delivery of services and functions, where relevant.

All **elected councillors and employees** must comply with this policy and breaches may lead to disciplinary action. We expect our councillors and employees to adhere to these five principles:

- 1) Ensure acceptable behaviour
- 2) Respond to complaints and incidents in a positive and pro-active way
- 3) Provide access to services, facilities and information
- 4) Recruit and employ people fairly
- 5) Meet specific needs

Contractors, Suppliers and Consultants are expected to meet equality standards within contracts and service level/delivery agreements. We will not award contracts if a commitment to equality and fairness is not demonstrated and breaches may lead to termination of contracts. Organisations doing business with us are welcome to adopt our equality policy for their own use.

Volunteers (although not specifically protected under the Equality Act 2010) are expected to comply with, and be treated in line with, the spirit of this policy.

Any concerns relating to equality and diversity should be brought to the **Town Clerk's** attention in the first instance who will determine how to deal with the concern.

Five Principles

1	Ensure acceptable behaviour	<p>The Council will treat everyone with dignity and respect, i.e. fairly and according to their needs. We will try not to make assumptions and respect property, culture, beliefs and ideas. We think about how our actions will affect others: We are aware the effect our own behaviour and body language has on others. We do not use language or images which would be regarded as racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic or insulting about disability, age, or religion and belief. We tell people if their behaviour has been unacceptable and advise on appropriate alternatives, so they are given the opportunity to change.</p>
2	Respond to complaints and incidents in a positive and proactive way	<p>Everyone has the right to complain in good faith about discrimination without being victimised at any time. This means people should be able to raise concerns without feeling awkward, threatened or isolated. If someone complains about discrimination we handle complaints properly and sensitively, using the complaints procedure.</p> <p>The Council takes appropriate and speedy action if an incident of hate crime occurs on Council property or business (such as racist graffiti or assault). This may involve removing graffiti or supporting people affected by the incident including signposting to specialist, independent organisations. The police may need to be contacted, subject to a victim's wishes.</p>
3	Provide access to services, facilities and information	<p>The Council provides a welcoming, friendly environment which is easily accessible to all, easy access to services, facilities and information where needed and we are honest about what we can and cannot do. We make information as accessible and easy-to-read as possible, using plain English and we follow guidance on font size, contrast, typeface and in alternative formats and languages, if needed. The Council also has a legal duty to anticipate reasonable adjustments for disabled people.</p> <p>Our online content follows web-accessibility standards and where possible, people can change the typeface and colours to suit their own needs. We have adopted an Accessibility Policy to ensure our website complies with new online legislation The Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No.2) Accessibility Regulations 2018.</p> <p>When organising meetings or events we make sure we know if delegates have any specific requirements such as diet, access or communication support. An accessible venue will have, as a minimum, accessible toilet facilities and wheelchair access to the rooms and hallways to be used.</p>

		<p>We involve people, including minority and disadvantaged communities, as far as possible in the design, delivery, monitoring and prioritisation of services so that their needs can be met in the best way.</p> <p>Council buildings and facilities must be audited for their compliance with Schedule 2 of the Equality Act and disability access related building regulations, with plans for changes to be made to physical features if they do not comply.</p>
4	Recruit and employ people fairly	<p>Employees, contractors, volunteers, people applying for a job or trainees must not be discriminated against because of a protected characteristic. This means that people must be provided equality of opportunity in all aspects of recruitment, selection, appraisal, training, promotion/transfer, work allocation, supervision, reward, recognition, retirement, redundancy, career development and any other conditions of employment or work environment. Everyone must be provided with a work environment where they are free from harassment or other barriers to performing their role, including reasonable adjustments to the work environment. When advertising jobs, we will make sure that they draw the attention of a wide range of applicants using non-discriminatory job criteria, job descriptions and person specifications. Applicants with disabilities will be shortlisted on essential criteria only.</p>
5	Meet specific needs	<p>The way we operate and the images and language we use must reflect and be sensitive to the diverse communities we have, however small. The categories below reflect the 'protected characteristics' as defined within the legal framework.</p> <p>Age Equality applies to people of all ages but those at most risk of prejudice and discrimination are younger and older people. Age-specific services, conditions and benefits may be provided if they meet a General or Specific Exception or can be objectively justified or for positive action purposes, e.g. concessions, asking for proof of age when selling age-restricted goods.</p> <p>Gender Identity and Sex Equality covers men, women, gender re-assignment, gender identity, pregnancy and maternity. Those most at risk of prejudice and discrimination are women (who are often parents/carers of young children and older dependants), men with caring responsibilities and people undergoing or who have undergone gender reassignment. The Council supports flexible working, equal pay, equal opportunities to career development etc.</p> <p>Disability Equality applies to disabled people as defined under the Equality Act 2010, including people with a physical</p>

<p>Meet specific needs continued...</p>	<p>impairment, sensory impairment, learning disability or difficulty, mental health condition, long term health condition or illness, cognitive impairment or severe disfigurements. Most frequent barriers faced by disabled people include physical access to facilities, including transport, buildings, streets; communications access (written word or images, speech or sounds); attitudes and assumptions made; and stressful situations. The Council will take steps to meet needs and achieve equal outcomes even if this requires “more favourable treatment”. For example, putting disabled parking bays near to the entrance, adjusting an application process, providing support or advocacy, or making reasonable adjustments to overcome barriers for disabled people. For an adjustment to be considered ‘unreasonable’ the cost or inconvenience would have to far outweigh the benefit.</p> <p>Where a disabled job applicant does not meet the essential criteria, the Council will make reasonable adjustments to the role which would remove any disadvantage they may face. Staff with a disability must be asked, at least once a year and usually during the appraisal process, what can be done to make sure they can develop and use their abilities at work. When a member of staff becomes disabled, every effort must be made to keep them in employment. If they cannot perform their current duties they should be given a priority interview for a suitable alternative job to avoid them leaving employment.</p> <p>Where practicable, people with physical disabilities should be able to access buildings and environments through the same routes as other people. The Council will provide clear and simple signage and maps which use easy words and symbols to aid communication of information. We will check that automatic doors allow enough time to get through. Install loop systems and train staff how to use them. Use visual alerting/intercom systems alongside audio. Make sure reception desks have a lowered section which is not obstructed. Put buttons to open doors/access lifts at a height suitable for wheelchair users and keep them free from obstruction. We will consider evacuation procedures for disabled people in the event of an emergency. Wheelchair accessible fire exits should be clearly signposted and where there is more than one floor, safe areas with a means of communication should be provided.</p> <p>Racial Equality applies to all people; skin colour, race, national origin, nationality, settled and travelling communities of Travellers and Gypsies, ethnicity (shared history, cultural traditions, ancestral origin, language). Those at most risk of</p>
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	Meet specific needs continued...	<p>prejudice and discrimination are those from ethnic minority communities including Travellers and Gypsies.</p> <p>Religion and Belief Equality applies to all people; those who follow a particular faith or religion and those who do not such as atheists and agnostics. Cultural and religious festivals, Sabbaths and holidays should be acknowledged and recognised across the Council so that leave is not unreasonably withheld from staff who may wish to celebrate them. Respect people’s rights to dress in accordance with a genuine religious requirement (e.g. clothing, headwear or jewellery). Dress restrictions should only apply where there is a substantial and proven risk to health, safety and security or the dress is proven to interfere with a member of staff’s ability to perform their duties, or any other substantial and objective reason.</p> <p>Sexual Orientation Equality, Marriage and Civil Partnership applies to all people including heterosexual people. But, gay, lesbian and bisexual people are most at risk of prejudice and discrimination. When asking questions about marital status also include civil partnership, however people should not be expected to classify either/or unless this is relevant. Only ask questions which may reveal marital/partnership status or sexual orientation if it is essential and do not force people to disclose such information.</p>
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Further Reading

Equality Act 2010: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

Cranbrook Town Council

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