



EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION POLICY

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Reviewed and updated May 2026 to incorporate the Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023 (in force 26 October 2024) and the Employment Rights Act 2025.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy

1. Policy Statement

The Council is committed to providing the highest quality of service provision and recognises that the implementation of an effective Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy is an integral part of such an approach.

The Council will treat all its employees, partners, councillors, volunteers, contractors and customers with dignity and respect, free from discrimination, victimisation, and harassment, whilst recognising, respecting, and valuing differences.

The Council understands its obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and is fully committed to its duty, imposed by section 149 of the 2010 Act (the Public Sector Equality Duty).

The Council is committed to the principle of equal opportunities and declares its opposition to any form of less favourable treatment, whether through direct or indirect discrimination, on the grounds of the protected characteristics as specified in the Equality Act 2010.

The Council is an Equal Opportunities employer and provider of services.

The Council is committed to the promotion, maintenance, and protection of the rights of individuals and to promoting human rights and freedom, based on the principles of dignity and respect.

All policies of the Council will be designed to support the principles and practices of equal opportunity, diversity, and inclusion, to foster a fully integrated community and maintain harmony.

2. Scope of the policy

The Council, as a corporate body, has responsibility as an employer, a service provider, and a public authority.

Both Councillors and employees as individuals also have responsibilities, as well as rights.

This policy applies to all staff, councillors, volunteers, and contractors working for or on behalf of the Council.

3. Definitions

For clarity, this policy defines:

Equality means ensuring everyone has the same opportunities and is treated with respect and dignity. It's not about treating everyone the same but recognising that everyone is different and has different needs that should be accommodated.

Diversity means recognising, respecting and valuing differences between people, including but not limited to differences in backgrounds, life experiences, skills, and perspectives.

Inclusion means creating an environment where everyone feels welcome, respected, and able to participate fully. It involves removing barriers that might exclude certain people or groups.

Protected Characteristics are the nine characteristics protected under the Equality Act 2010: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

Direct Discrimination occurs when someone is treated less favourably than another person because of a protected characteristic they have or are thought to have.

Indirect Discrimination occurs when a requirement, condition or practice is applied that has a disproportionate negative impact on people with a particular protected characteristic and the requirement cannot be objectively justified.

Harassment is unwanted conduct related to a relevant protected characteristic, which has the purpose or effect of violating an individual's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that individual.

Victimisation occurs when someone is treated badly because they have made or supported a complaint or raised a grievance under the Equality Act 2010.

Sexual Harassment is unwanted conduct of a sexual nature which has the purpose or effect of violating an individual's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. Under the Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023, employers have a proactive duty to take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment — not merely to respond to it after it occurs. This duty applies to all settings connected with employment, including off-site work, work-related social events, and interactions with members of the public.

Third-Party Harassment is harassment of an employee by a person who is not their colleague, such as a member of the public, a contractor, a councillor acting in a personal capacity, or a representative of a partner organisation. From October 2026, under the Employment Rights Act 2025, employers will be required to take all reasonable steps to prevent third-party harassment of their employees covering all protected characteristics.

4. Responsibility for implementation of the policy

The Council has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy.

The Executive Officer is responsible for monitoring, enforcing, and reviewing this policy.

In accordance with the Public Sector Equality Duty, the Council will publish equality objectives every four years. These will be reviewed annually, alongside progress towards these objectives.

All employees, volunteers and Councillors should ensure that they take the time to read and understand the policy. Any breach of this policy should be reported to the Chair or Executive Officer.

Questions regarding the content or application of this policy should be directed to the Executive Officer.

5. Legal Position

Under the Equality Act 2010 it is unlawful to discriminate against an individual on the following grounds:

a) age b) disability c) gender reassignment d) marriage and civil partnership e) pregnancy and maternity f) race g) religion or belief h) sex i) sexual orientation

These are known as "protected characteristics" in section 4 of the 2010 Act.

Section 149 of the 2010 Act imposes a Duty on Town Councils to consider:

a) The need to eliminate discrimination and harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act; b) To advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; c) To foster good relations between those who share protected characteristics and those who do not.

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) requires public authorities like Town Councils to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

Meeting the general duty may mean treating some people more favourably than others. For example, it is reasonable to treat a disabled person more favourably than a non-disabled person by allowing them priority access to accessible allotments.

The Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023 came into force on 26 October 2024 and imposes a new proactive duty on all employers, including the Council, to take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment of employees in the course of their employment. This is an anticipatory duty — the Council must act before incidents occur, not only in response to complaints. The duty extends to harassment that may occur in the workplace, at work-related events, and where employees interact with members of the public, contractors, or elected members. Failure to comply may result in employment tribunal compensation being increased by up to 25%, and the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) may take direct enforcement action.

The Employment Rights Act 2025 (in force in phases from December 2025) strengthens these duties further. From October 2026, the duty on employers will be elevated from “reasonable steps” to “all reasonable steps” to prevent sexual harassment, and employers will also be required to take all reasonable steps to prevent third-party harassment (harassment of employees by members of the public, contractors, or other non-employees) covering all types of harassment, not only sexual harassment. The Act also provides that any disclosure by an employee relating to sexual harassment constitutes a protected disclosure for whistleblowing purposes, meaning employees who report sexual harassment are protected from detriment and dismissal.

6. Equality Impact Assessments

The Council will, when undertaking new initiatives, creating new policies, or making significant changes to services, conduct Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) to:

- Identify potential positive and negative impacts on individuals or groups with protected characteristics
- Identify and implement actions to mitigate any potential negative impacts
- Ensure that the needs of diverse groups are appropriately considered in Council decision-making

EIAs will be conducted with appropriate consultation and input from relevant stakeholders, including community representatives where feasible.

7. The Council as an Employer

The Purpose of this policy is to provide equal opportunities to all employees or prospective employees, irrespective of their characteristics (unless there are genuine occupational requirements or objectively justified reasons for a different approach).

The Council opposes all forms of unlawful and unfair discrimination, victimisation, or harassment on the grounds of any protected characteristics defined in the Equality Act 2010.

All employees, whether full-time, part-time, fixed contract, agency workers or temporary, and all Councillors, will be treated fairly and equitably.

Selection for employment, promotion, training, remuneration or any other benefit will be based on aptitude and ability.

The Council will collect, monitor and analyze diversity data on employees (where provided voluntarily) and use this to understand equality issues and inform objectives and decisions. The Council will also assess the impact on equality of all new policies, procedures, and changes to services, and take action to mitigate adverse impacts.

The Council will:

- Make reasonable adjustments and accommodations for disabled employees or prospective employees
- Support employees through life events such as pregnancy, maternity, paternity, adoption, caring responsibilities, and health issues
- Take seriously and investigate all complaints of discrimination, harassment, and victimisation
- Provide equality and diversity training to all employees and councillors
- Create a work environment free from bullying, harassment, and victimisation
- Proactively take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment of employees in the course of their employment, in compliance with the Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023 (in force 26 October 2024). This includes conducting a sexual harassment risk assessment, maintaining an up-to-date anti-harassment policy, providing regular training, and establishing clear and accessible reporting mechanisms
- Take all reasonable steps to prevent third-party harassment of employees (from October 2026, under the Employment Rights Act 2025), including harassment by members of the public, contractors, or others with whom employees come into contact in the course of their work. The Council will ensure that contracts with third parties include appropriate expectations of conduct towards Council staff
- Ensure that employees who report sexual harassment are protected as whistleblowers under the Employment Rights Act 2025, and will not suffer detriment or dismissal as a result of making such a disclosure. No non-disclosure agreement or contractual clause will

be used to prevent an employee from making or disclosing allegations of harassment or discrimination

- Ensure all employees have equal access to relevant professional development opportunities

Everyone is entitled to a working environment that promotes dignity and respect to all. No form of intimidation, bullying or harassment will be tolerated.

The Council will encourage and develop all employees and Councillors to support and carry out the requirements of the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy.

Breaches of our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy by employees will be regarded as misconduct and could lead to disciplinary proceedings.

Breaches of our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy by Councillors will be considered under the Code of Conduct and referred to the Monitoring Officer.

The commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion in the workplace is good management practice and makes sound business sense as it seeks to utilise the talents available from the local community, representing Society as a whole.

This policy is fully supported by all Members of the Council and adopts the model contract as devised by the employee professional body in the local government sector (the Society of Local Council Executive Officers).

8. The Council as a Direct Service Deliverer

The Council's service users have the right to expect fair and non-discriminatory treatment whilst participating in or receiving all the Council's services or activities.

To ensure equitable service delivery, the Council will:

- Ensure services are accessible to all sections of the community
- Provide information about services in a range of formats on request (e.g., large print, audio, Braille, community languages)
- Consider the diverse needs of the community when planning and delivering services
- Consult with and involve diverse community groups in service planning and development
- Make any reasonable adjustments necessary for service users with disabilities
- Train staff and councillors in equality issues relevant to service delivery
- Ensure that facilities used by the Council are accessible and welcoming to all sections of the community
- Take steps to foster good relations between different community groups

The Council's service users should feel valued and have equal access to services irrespective of their protected characteristics or any other factor.

9. Community Engagement and Leadership

As a community leader, the Council will:

- Work with community partners to celebrate diversity and promote inclusion
- Support initiatives that foster understanding between different sections of the community
- Consider equality implications in all its decisions and actions
- Use its influence and partnerships to promote good equality practices locally
- Challenge discrimination and exclusion where it exists
- Ensure town events and activities are inclusive and accessible
- Engage with underrepresented groups within the community
- Share good equality practice with other local organisations

10. Procurement and Contracting

The Council requires contractors and suppliers to comply with equality legislation and the Council's policy, and to demonstrate compliance where appropriate.

When procuring goods and services, the Council will:

- Make equality requirements clear in tender specifications and contracts
- Ensure accessibility criteria are appropriately considered
- Consider social value and community benefits in procurement decisions
- Monitor contractor performance on equality issues
- Take appropriate action if contractors fail to meet expected equality standards

The Council will also encourage suppliers to adopt good equality practices, such as providing staff training and developing their own equality policies.

11. Funded Groups and Those Working on Behalf of the Council

The Council requires funded groups and those working on behalf of the Council, e.g., Allotment Associations, to comply with equality legislation and the Council's policy.

Groups and organisations receiving Council funding or support will be expected to:

- Demonstrate a commitment to equality principles
- Make their services accessible to all potential users
- Respond to the diverse needs of the community they serve
- Not discriminate unlawfully in their activities
- Consider reasonable adjustments for disabled people

The Council will provide guidance and support to help these organisations meet equality requirements.

12. Training

Employees and Councillors will undertake regular equality and diversity training.

For Councillors:

- Initial equality training will be offered within three months of the start of a Council term
- Refresher training will be provided
- Additional role-specific equality training may be provided where relevant

For Employees:

- Initial equality training will be provided during induction
- Refresher training will be provided
- Additional role-specific equality training may be provided where relevant

Training will cover:

- Legal requirements under the Equality Act 2010
- Public Sector Equality Duty responsibilities
- Practical application of equality principles in Council work
- Recognising and addressing discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- Creating an inclusive environment
- Current best practice and case studies

13. Implementation and Enforcement

The Executive Officer is responsible for implementation and compliance.

Complaints about the Council's services and compliance with this policy, whether delivered by the Council or another, will be dealt with through the Council's Complaints Procedure.

Complaints and disclosures of breach of this policy by employees will be dealt with under our Disciplinary Procedure.

Complaints and disclosures of breach of this policy by Councillors will be referred to the Monitoring Officer at Northumberland County Council and dealt with via the Council's Adopted Code of Conduct.

14. Language and Communications

The Council will:

- Use inclusive and non-discriminatory language in all its communications
- Make key information available in alternative formats upon request
- Ensure public meetings are accessible to all
- Use a variety of communication channels to reach different sections of the community

- Consider the accessibility of digital communications and the Council website
- Regularly review communications to ensure they remain inclusive and accessible

15. Monitoring and Review of the Policy

The Executive Officer shall be responsible for reviewing this policy annually to ensure that it meets legal requirements and reflects best practice.

Any proposed amendments to this policy shall be reported to and approved by the Council.

The annual review will:

- Consider changes in legislation or case law
- Incorporate lessons learned from policy implementation
- Consider feedback from staff, councillors, and service users
- Review progress against equality objectives
- Make recommendations for improvement where needed