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Equality Policy

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Introduction

The Council introduced its Equal Opportunities in Employment Policy in 1984 to support existing legislation as well as to embrace the other groups within society who were not protected by law i.e. lesbians and gay men. The Council recognises that equality of opportunity is essential to the success of the organisation in terms of employment practices and service delivery.

Clearly much has happened in the years subsequent to its introduction. The Council's unique position as a model of good practice both in employment and service delivery has been brought into sharper focus.

It is therefore important in a climate of constant change where key relationships, particularly for example that between purchaser and provider, are under closer scrutiny, that the Council reaffirms its commitment to equal opportunities.

The Council believes that by understanding the diverse needs of its potential and existing employees, as well as providing an environment which eliminates discrimination in all its forms, it will attract and retain a motivated and multi-skilled workforce to provide a quality service.

This document sets out an ongoing progressive agenda, and in doing so attempts to embrace the following themes:

- The cultural diversity of the Borough of Sandwell which should not only be valued but be reflected in its workforce at all levels.
- The strategy of valuing employees is a key area of the successful implementation of this Policy, and in terms of employees delivering even better services.
- That equality of opportunity cannot be realised without the involvement and commitment of all parties and a common understanding of the vital and essential role of Equal Opportunities in context of the Council's corporate values. In particular, the recognition that the role of managers is crucial in delivering the objectives of the Policy to achieve the corporate values.
- The workforce should reflect the composition of the wider community at all grades and levels.

Policy Statement

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council is committed to achieving the highest standards of employment practice. Equality of opportunity for all sections of the workforce is an integral part of this commitment. The Council will not tolerate less favourable treatment on grounds of: sex, race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, disability, marital status, sexual orientation, gender re-assignment, responsibility for dependants, age, trade union or political activities, religion or belief, spent offences or any other reason which cannot be shown to be justified.

The Council seeks to provide a positive role model for other organisations in the community.

To achieve these aims the Council will continue to:

- Ensure that its employment practices provide equality of opportunity for both current and prospective employees and promote a work culture that values diversity. This principle will apply to: recruitment and selection, training and development, promotion and redeployment and all other terms and conditions of employment. Steps will be taken to address the under-representation of employees. To achieve this positive action will be introduced as contained in legislation and their effectiveness will be monitored and reviewed. A representative workforce at all levels and grades provides greater sensitivity to and understanding of community needs.
- Use the Equality Act 2010 and any other appropriate legislation as a framework for action to support initiatives
- Work in partnership with community groups and other agencies to remove any barriers to fair and equal treatment.
- Apply these principles to work undertaken for the Authority by all external contractors and other organisations in receipt of Council funding.
- Implement the Equality Standard for Local Government.
- Set objectives, evaluate and monitor progress (through staffing trends) and report to the Leader/Deputy Cabinet Advisory Team.

Policy Aim

The purpose of this policy is to provide a framework within which the potential and abilities of all employees are fully utilised, regardless of race, religion and belief, gender, disability and sexual orientation.

This policy is intended to ensure that the Council meets its legal obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and complies with the various codes of practice.

Scope of the Policy

- This policy embraces equality of opportunity as a strategic way of transforming and improving the composition of the workforce.
- In addition, regular workforce monitoring will be undertaken by the Human Resources Service and through Staffing Trends to determine positive action measures. The effectiveness of the positive action measures will be reported to the Leader/Deputy Cabinet Advisory Team.

Implementing the Policy

In the spirit of devolving levels of responsibility for the policy to employing CAT's, who shall be responsible for the implementation, monitoring and communication of the policy, overall responsibility for the policy rests with the Leader/Deputy Cabinet Advisory Team.

Aims and Objectives

The Council through its Policy aims to:

- Reinforce the Council's position as a 'good employer' and its unique position as a provider of services and a source of employment opportunities.
- Ensure that equality issues remain high on the Council's priorities and systematic ongoing actions are developed by Human Resources Service to address these issues.
- Ensure that responsibilities are recognised and acted upon by Members and employees within the organisation of their collective and individual roles in the pursuit of equality of opportunity.
- Draw together a human resource good practice guide and to set out a proactive agenda in which discrimination is recognised and challenged as an organisational issue which necessarily demands an organisational response, firmly dealing with those who act in a discriminatory manner.

- Learn from mistakes, share that learning and incorporate it into good practice guidance.
- Give a high priority to the training and development of employees in the field of equality and related issues.

Obligations on Employees

Employees must be aware of their responsibilities as well as the Council's commitment to equal opportunities. These obligations include:

- Co-operation with measures introduced in consultation with Trade Unions to ensure there is equality of opportunity and non-discrimination in employment and service delivery matters;
- Ensuring that all employees with responsibility for service delivery arrangements, selection decisions in recruitment, promotion, transfer and training, do not discriminate, failing which appropriate action will be taken against that employee.
- Not persuading or seeking to persuade other employees, unions or management to practice unlawful discrimination in employment matters;
- Drawing the attention of management to suspected discriminatory acts or practices in employment matters suggesting strictest action against perpetrators of discriminatory practice and
- Offering protection to employees from victimisation who have made complaints or provided information about instances of discrimination or harassment.