WHITEHILL
TOWN COUNCIL
Serving Whitehill & Bordon

EQUALITY & DIVERSITY POLICY

Date of Adoption: 26.04.2014 Date of Review: 08.10.2026 Next Review: 10.2028

1. Introduction

Whitehill Town Council (WTC) recognises that it has moral and legal responsibilities to be fair and is committed to promoting equality and tackling discrimination.

This means treating people fairly, valuing difference and removing barriers that prevent people from participating fully in public life and reaching their full potential.

This Equality and Diversity Policy outline our legal responsibilities and the commitments we have made which help us to ensure equality is an integral part of the way we reach decisions, provide services, recruit staff and work with other organisations.

Implementation of this policy is the responsibility of Whitehill Town Council through elected members, employees and others acting on its behalf.

2. Legal Requirements

The Equal Opportunities Act

The Equality Act came into force from October 2010 and brings together all legal requirements on equality. Under the Act everyone has the right to be treated fairly at work or when using a service. It protects people from discrimination on the basis of certain characteristics, these are:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage & civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race – this includes ethnic or national origins, colour or nationality
- religion or belief – this includes lack of belief
- sex & sexual orientation
- Under the Equality Act 2010 these are known as “protected characteristics”.

3. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide equal opportunities to all employees, irrespective of their characteristics (unless there are genuine occupational qualifications or objectively justified reasons for a different approach to be taken). We oppose all forms of unlawful and unfair discrimination whether it is direct or indirect discrimination, victimization or harassment on the grounds of any of the protected characteristics defined in the Equality Act 2010.

4. Scope

All WTC employees whether full-time, part-time, fixed term contract, agency workers or temporary staff, will be treated fairly and equally. Selection for employment, promotion, training, remuneration or any other benefit will be on the basis of aptitude and ability. All employees will be helped and encouraged to develop their full potential and the talents and resources of the workforce will be fully utilised to maximise the efficiency of the council.

5. Our Commitment

Every employee is entitled to a working environment that promotes dignity and respect to all. No form of intimidation, bullying or harassment will be tolerated. This is further defined in the Officer Member Protocol adopted by the council.

The commitment to equal opportunities 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. Breaches of our equal opportunities policy will be regarded as serious misconduct and could lead to disciplinary proceedings. Employees are entitled to complain about discrimination or harassment or victimization through the council's Grievance procedure.

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

Other Personnel policies will be reviewed against the values stated in this main Equal Opportunities policy to ensure that the council strives to remain an Equal Opportunities employer.

6. Uses of Policy

Staff Handbook, Induction of staff and Members, decisions relating to Recruitment and Selection, Training and Development, Promotion, Remuneration, Retirement, cross-referenced to Grievance, Disciplinary and Officer Member Protocol.

The public sector Equality Duty came into force on 5th April 2011 and is a key measure under the Equality Act 2010. The Equality Duty ensures that all public bodies play their part in making society fairer by tackling discrimination and providing equality of opportunity for all.

7. The Equality Duty Aims

The following Equality Duty aims apply to our process of decision making including how we recruit & select staff; how we develop, evaluate and review policy; how we design, deliver and evaluate services, and how we commission and procure from others.

a. Eliminates unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act.

b. Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it. This involves considering the need to:

- remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics;
- meet the needs of people with protected characteristics; and
- encourage people with protected characteristics to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is low.

c. Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it. This involves tackling prejudice and promoting understanding between people who share a protected characteristic and others.

8. Our Commitment

WTC is committed to ensuring equality, fairness, inclusion and good relations are at the heart of everything we do - be it employment, policymaking or service delivery.

a. Staff Recruitment and Selection

WTC will ensure that our staff recruitment and selection policies are fair and equitable. We will continue to evaluate our procedures to identify and remove barriers, eliminating discrimination.

9. Elected Members

- WTC will provide access to training and guidance to Elected Members so that they are aware of the Council's Equality and Diversity Policy and their legal responsibilities and rights when exercising Council duties and functions.
- WTC will maintain a working/meeting environment that is inclusive, free of discrimination, harassment and bullying, where individuals are treated with dignity and respect.

- WTC will encourage elected members to highlight discrimination and challenge unacceptable language and behaviour.
- WTC will make reasonable adjustments where necessary, so that any obstacles a person faces as an elected member relating to a protected characteristic, are removed, reduced or prevented.
- WTC will publicise Council vacancies widely within the community.

10 Council Decision Making and Services

- WTC will ensure that we treat people with dignity and respect.
- WTC will consider the needs of all individuals in our day-to-day work. We will try to understand how different people will be affected by our activities so that our policies and services are appropriate and accessible to all and meet different people's needs.
- WTC recognise that people's needs may be different. We will take account of this when making decisions about policies or services and make reasonable adjustments where necessary and if reasonable to do so.
- WTC will consider the three aims of the Equality Duty at the start of the policy/service development/review process and in making final decisions. It will form an integral part of our decision-making process.
- WTC will consider what information we have and what further information may be needed to consider to the Equality Duty.
- WTC will take a proportionate approach to the Equality Duty; it will be one of a number of factors that need to be considered in decision making. The weight given to the Equality Duty, compared to other factors, will depend on how much it affects discrimination, equality of opportunity and good relations and the extent of any disadvantage that needs to be addressed.
- WTC will aim to provide all information in Plain English and alternative formats on request wherever possible, and it is reasonable to do so.

11. Working with Partners and Contractors

- WTC recognise that we are responsible for ensuring that any third parties who exercise functions on our behalf are capable of complying with the Equality Duty, are required to comply with it, and that they do so in practice.
- WTC will communicate our Equality and Diversity Policy to partners and contractors.
- WTC will obtain commitment from contractors/partners that they will comply with the Equality Duty and our Equality and Diversity Policy when carrying out work on our behalf.
- WTC will take equalities considerations into account when developing contract specifications and conditions.

b. Monitoring and Reviewing Our Equality and Diversity Policy

- WTC will keep a record of how decisions were reached to demonstrate that the aims of our Equality Duty were considered. We will consider collecting equality monitoring information if it is useful and relevant to do so.
- WTC will monitor and review our Equality and Diversity Policy at the lessor of every three years or law changes. This review will highlight good practice, identify areas for Equalities and Diversity Policy improvement and consider an Equality Action Plan for the coming year. Dealing with Complaints and Grievances Relating to Equality.

Complaints and grievances about discrimination will be properly handled through the council's respective policies.

Breaches of our Equality and Diversity Policy by employees will be regarded as misconduct and could lead to disciplinary action under the Council's Disciplinary Policy.