

# Equal Opportunities Policy

Draft at March 2026

Approved Date	
Review Date	
Replaces	Equal Opportunities Policy 2004
Policy Lead (Name, Position, Contact Details)	Christine Sheridan Director of Human Resources Ext 3242
Directorate	Human Resources
Version	Three

## Table of Contents

Introduction and scope	2
Definitions	3
Employees' responsibilities	4
Guidance for staff who feel they have been subjected to unlawful discrimination or victimisation	4
The Council's responsibilities	5
Appendix 1	6

## 1. Introduction and scope

- 1.1 The Council is committed to providing equal opportunities and promoting a good and harmonious working environment free from unlawful discrimination, harassment, bullying, intimidation and victimisation and where all employees are treated with dignity and respect, and their rights are protected.
- 1.2 The purpose of this policy is to ensure equal opportunities for employees and job applicants and a working environment in which all employees and job applicants will be treated on the basis of merit in a fair, consistent and objective manner and where unlawful discrimination and victimisation is understood to be unacceptable and individuals have the confidence to complain about it, should it arise, in the knowledge that their concerns will be dealt with promptly, appropriately and fairly and that they will not be made to feel disadvantaged in any way for having raised or pursued a concern in good faith.
- 1.3 This policy covers behaviour in any work-related setting both inside and outside the workplace, by and against fellow employees, casual workers, placement students or job applicants, during or outside of working hours, for example business trips or work-related social events or by way of electronic communication including email social media or by phone such as text message or app.
- 1.4 Northern Ireland Equality legislation provides specific protection against discrimination, harassment and victimisation on the protected grounds listed at 1.4.1 and 1.4.2, below. The Council is committed to complying with its obligations pursuant to applicable equality legislation and with section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 which requires the Council to:
  - 1.4.1 Have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between:
    - persons of different religious belief; political opinion; racial group; age; marital status or sexual orientation;
    - men and women generally;
    - persons with a disability and persons without;
    - persons with dependants and persons without.
  - 1.4.2 Promote equality irrespective of:
    - Gender (including sex, pregnancy, maternity leave, and gender reassignment);
    - Marital status and civil partnership status;
    - Religious belief and / or political opinion;
    - Race and / or Ethnic Origin; (throughout this document the word “race” is interpreted in line with the Race Relations (NI) Order 1997, as amended, to include colour, race, nationality or ethnic or national origins. Irish Travellers are recognised by the Order as being members of a racial group.)
    - Age;
    - Sexual Orientation.

1.4.3 In addition to the protected equality grounds set out at 1.5.1 and 1.5.2 above, the Council will comply with relevant legislation as it relates to:

- Trade union membership or non-membership
- Gender identity and gender expression
- Offending background\*

\*for the purposes of assessing an applicant's suitability for employment purposes, consideration will be given to all relevant circumstances including the background of the offences and other disclosures, the role, and such other matters that might be considered relevant to the position concerned, e.g. the responsibility of employers for child protection, for the care of funds, resources, the public and other employees.

1.5 This policy does not form part of and is not intended to vary the employment contract. It may be amended from time to time, as necessary, in accordance with the Council's Industrial Relations Framework.

1.6 This policy applies to all employees, casual workers, students on work placements and job applicants.

1.7 This policy should be read in conjunction with the other Council policies including the Code of Conduct; Bullying and Harassment Policy, Disciplinary and Grievance Procedure, LGSC Code of Procedure on Recruitment and Selection. See Appendix 1.

## 2. Definitions

2.1 **Direct Discrimination** occurs when a person is treated less favourably than another on the protected grounds set out at 1.4 above.

2.2 **Indirect Discrimination** occurs where a provision, criterion or practice is applied, which although equally applied to others, has the effect of disadvantaging a particular group of people, and cannot be justified.

2.3 **Victimisation** occurs when a person is treated less favourably than others because that person has, for instance, complained of alleged discrimination or has assisted someone to do so.

2.4 **Harassment** is unlawful and is defined as occurring when a person engages in unwanted conduct which is connected to the protected characteristics of another person and which has the purpose or effect of violating their dignity, or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

Further information can be found in the Bullying and Harassment Policy.

---

## 3. Employees' Responsibilities

- 3.1 All employees must ensure that they have read, understood and comply with this policy.
- 3.2 All employees must treat each other with dignity and respect.
- 3.3 Employees must not commit any acts of unlawful discrimination or victimisation against any other person, such as their co-workers, job applicants or customers.
- 3.4 Any employee who is aware of any incident of unlawful discrimination or victimisation is encouraged to bring it to the attention of a manager or supervisor.
- 3.5 Allegations of unlawful discrimination or victimisation may be investigated in accordance with the Council's disciplinary and/ or grievance procedure and may result in a sanction up to and including dismissal.
- 3.6 All staff should understand they can be held personally liable for acts of unlawful discrimination or victimisation in the course of their employment, against fellow employees, customers, suppliers and the public and that some matters may also be criminal offences.

#### **4. Guidance to staff who feel that they are being subjected to unlawful discrimination or victimisation**

- 4.1 If an employee considers that they are experiencing unlawful discrimination or victimisation, a number of options are available to them:
  - Keep a record of events and incidents
  - Get advice from their line manager, Trade Union representative or a member of the departmental HR team
  - Consider following the informal procedure outlined at 4.3 in this policy
  - Consider following the formal procedure outlined at 4.4 in this policy.
- 4.2 Depending on the nature of the complaint, the allegation of unlawful discrimination or victimisation will be investigated under the Council's Grievance Procedure and/or Disciplinary Procedure. Any decision in respect of how the allegation will be progressed will be made in consultation with the employee who has complained.
- 4.3 Informal approach to resolving complaints.

This stage is appropriate where the employee simply wants the unlawful discrimination or victimisation to stop. Employees can seek to resolve matters informally by approaching the person or people concerned directly, making it clear that they consider the behaviour in question to be offensive, unwelcome and should be stopped immediately. This may be enough to resolve the situation, particularly if the person concerned was unaware that their conduct was unwanted. If it is too difficult or the employee is reluctant to do this personally, employees may request a supervisor or manager approach the person or people concerned on their behalf. Employees should understand that this informal approach is optional.

There may however be occasions where an informal resolution may not be appropriate given the seriousness of the complaint or concern raised.

#### 4.4 Making a formal complaint.

An employee may elect to raise any allegation of discrimination or victimisation formally. The council may also determine that, due to the seriousness of the complaint or, if the behaviour persists following an informal approach, that the matter should be dealt with formally.

Should an employee wish to initiate a formal complaint they should do so by notifying their line manager in writing, specifying the grounds upon which the complaint is based. If the person the employee is complaining about is their line manager, they should submit their complaint to their line manager's manager or to Departmental HR. Depending on the nature of the complaint, the allegation of discrimination or victimisation will be investigated under the Council's Grievance Procedure and/or Disciplinary Procedure. Employees will have the right to be accompanied by a TU representative or colleague in accordance with the aforementioned Council Procedures.

- 4.5 If it becomes apparent that a complaint is deliberately false, frivolous, malicious or vexatious, and is not due to a misunderstanding or genuine mistake, it will be treated as a serious matter and may lead to disciplinary action.

## 5. The Council's Responsibilities

- 5.1 The Chief Executive and Senior Management have responsibility for the effective implementation of this policy and any relevant associated legislative duties. Senior management, together with all managerial and supervisory staff have responsibility for promoting equality and for ensuring this policy is implemented.
- 5.2 The policy will be communicated to all employees through induction training.
- 5.3 Complaints must be taken seriously, dealt with promptly and confidentially and in accordance with relevant procedures.

## 6. Confidentiality

- 6.1 Complaints and any related investigations and outcomes must be treated in strict confidence with only the necessary and relevant people involved as it is vital that employees who may wish to raise a complaint can be assured that the matter will be handled in the strictest confidence.

## **7. Commitment to Equality Monitoring and Proactive Measures**

We will monitor our workforce composition and undertake periodic reviews as required by the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 as well as carry out regular voluntary employee monitoring exercises. We will review recruitment and promotion outcomes and take proactive steps to reduce inequalities.

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **Associated Council Policies**

- Code of Conduct for Employees
- Local Government Employee & Councillor Working Relationship Protocol
- Computer Use Policy
- Disciplinary and Grievance Procedure
- Bullying and Harassment Policy Gender Identity and Gender Expression - Guidance and information for all staff
- Protection of Staff from Workplace Violence and Abuse from the Public
- Social Media Policy

### **Associated Legislation**

- The Equal Pay Act (Northern Ireland) 1970 (as amended)
- The Sex Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 1976 (as amended)
- The Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- The Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 (as amended)
- The Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 (as amended)
- The Northern Ireland Act 1998
- Sex Discrimination (Gender Reassignment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999
- The Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003
- Employment Equality (Age) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006