

**SOUTHWELL TOWN COUNCIL: EQUALITY & DIVERSITY POLICY**

**CONTEXT**

Southwell Town Council (STC) has an unequivocal commitment to equality. It is required to comply with the Equality Act 2010. It is conscious of the existence in the wider community of discrimination against people owing to their particular characteristics and beliefs. Moreover, STC is aware that, sometimes, discrimination can occur unintentionally.

Everyone is different and has something unique to offer (Diversity); STC aims to make the most of everyone’s talents.

Councillors, STC employees, service providers and visitors on the Council’s premises are required to actively adhere to the Equality & Diversity Policy.

**AIMS**

1. To treat all people with dignity and respect in an environment free from discrimination, harassment and victimisation. To ensure that no form of intimidation is tolerated.
2. To ensure that diversity is recognised and respected. By doing so, STC creates an environment where everyone feels valued for their talents, skills and competencies. Therefore, human resources are fully utilised.
3. To ensure that related complaints/observations are taken seriously and dealt with quickly and fairly.

**THE LAW**

The 2010 Equality Act legally protects people from discrimination both in the workplace and in wider society. This means it is against the law to discriminate against anyone because of:

1. age
2. being or becoming a transsexual
3. being married or in a civil partnership
4. being pregnant or having a child
5. disability
6. race, including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin
7. religion, belief or lack of religion/belief
8. sex
9. sexual orientation.

These are known as the PROTECTED CHARACTERISTICS.

Additionally, people are protected from discrimination if they are associated with someone who has a protected characteristic e.g. family member, friend.

**FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION**

Discrimination may occur in the following forms:

1. direct discrimination: this means treating someone with a protected characteristic less favourably than others
2. indirect discrimination: putting rules/regulations in place which places someone with a protected characteristic at an unfair advantage
3. harassment: unwanted behaviour linked to the protected characteristics which violates a person’s dignity and/or creates an offensive environment for them
4. victimisation: treating someone unfairly because they have complained about discrimination and/or harassment. The law aims to protect a person from retaliation for bringing or supporting a complaint of discrimination and/or harassment.

**‘WHISTLEBLOWING’**

This is where someone reports a perceived wrongdoing in the public interest. A ‘whistle-blower’ is protected by law and must not be treated unfairly.

A ‘whistle-blower’ can raise a concern at any time about an incident which happened in the past, is happening now or it is believed might happen in the near future. Observations which count as ‘whistleblowing’ are

1. a criminal offence
2. someone’s health and safety being at risk
3. a risk of, or actual damage to the environment
4. a miscarriage of justice
5. a breach of the law
6. the covering up of wrongdoing.

Personal grievances are not included unless such are judged to be in the public interest.

**ACTION**

STC will have regard to the Equality and Diversity Policy in all business it undertakes. Other personnel policies will be reviewed against the values stated in this policy.

An important part of implementing a policy is monitoring its effectiveness. To this end, the Risk Assessment Panel (RAP) will exercise due diligence on behalf of STC.

Anyone who believes that they have been subjected to discrimination or harassment has a right to seek redress. Where the matter pertains to STC, in the first instance, it should be reported to the Chair of STC (the Chair) or, if this is inappropriate, to the RAP. It will be dealt with confidentially and promptly.

Any Councillor or member of staff considered to be in breach of this policy will be subject to disciplinary action.

Any visitor or service provider considered to be in breach of this policy will instigate urgent, appropriate/serious action, as determined by the Chair.

If necessary, the Chair/RAP will instruct the Chair of the HR group to arrange an investigation which, normally, should be completed within 10 working days. Based solely on the outcome of the investigation, the Chair/RAP will determine if a disciplinary hearing is necessary or if any other action/s should be instigated.

Any such hearing will be arranged by the Chair of the HR group and, normally, should take place within 15 working days of the submission of the investigation report. The disciplinary hearing panel will comprise 3 members; wherever possible, members of the panel will comprise both genders.