Borough Council of
King's Lynn &
West Norfolk

Equality Diversity and Inclusion Policy

February 2025

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Executive Summary

West Norfolk has a strong sense of place. Our vision is to establish West Norfolk as a place on the map rather than an administrative boundary and ensure it is a welcoming rural district, with vibrant communities and successful, growing businesses. A place where people can thrive, the environment is protected, heritage is preserved, and development meets the needs of people as well as legislation. Our key priorities are:

- To promote growth and prosperity to benefit West Norfolk
- To protect our environment
- Efficient and effective delivery of our services
- To support our communities

As part of our vision, the Council is committed to ensuring equality for all residents of and visitors to West Norfolk, and to its employees. We will achieve this through:

- Creating an environment where people treat each other with dignity and respect
- Delivering accessible and fair services
- Ensuring all contractors and other third-party organisations we work with share our commitment to equalities

Our legal responsibilities are set out in the Equality Act 2010 which seeks to protect the rights of individuals and advance equality of opportunity for all. The Equality Act also places a requirement on all Local Authorities to comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED).

This policy outlines the arrangements the council has put in place to ensure we comply with the requirements of the Equality Act and fulfil our roles with regards to equalities as a community leader, service provider and employer in West Norfolk.

1 Introduction - Our Commitment

Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy sets out the Council's commitment promoting equality, diversity and inclusion within King's Lynn and West Norfolk –for our local communities, visitors and for our employees. It supports our Corporate Strategy which identifies our commitment to promoting growth and prosperity to benefit West Norfolk and our commitment to supporting our local communities. We recognise that celebrating diversity and actively removing any potential barriers to participation will help us achieve this. We also recognise the value of diversity within our workforce.

The Council will not tolerate unlawful discrimination, harassment or victimisation in service delivery or employment, and will take all reasonable steps to eliminate less favourable treatment of anyone with a personal characteristic which is protected under legislation. We will try to ensure our equality, diversity and inclusion practices go beyond our legal requirements to address and where possible remove barriers to participation for all our service users and employees.

The Council recognise that it has a role in promoting equality of opportunity and challenging discrimination. Our role as a community leader, service provider and employer places us in a unique position to work actively towards eliminating unlawful discrimination, ensuring all our service users and employees are treated with dignity and respect and have an equal chance to succeed.

This policy is supported by our Equality Objectives as outlined in Appendix 1 and will be supported by an annual equalities action plan which will be developed and monitored to ensure progress towards these objectives, and wider actions to embed and enhance the Council's commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion. Arrangements are in place to implement, monitor and review policies and practices with regards to equality, diversity and inclusion and we will hold to account all those who are in scope of this policy in order to achieve our equality objectives and discharge our equality duties.

2 Scope

This policy covers access to and provision of all Council services and activity, including services provided by the Council's wholly owned companies and services commissioned from a third party. It also covers the recruitment and employment of all employees directly employed by the Council or employed by its wholly owned companies.

The policy is for all staff, elected members, contractors and volunteers of the Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk. We expect everyone working for or on behalf of the Council to familiarise themselves with the policy and engage proactively with its implementation.

3 Aims

Through this policy the Council seeks to ensure equality for all our residents, visitors and our employees. The council aims to do this through the delivery of accessible and fair services, by treating our employees and service users with fairness and respect and ensuring all

contractors and other third party organisations we work with share our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion.

4 Objectives

4.1 The objectives of this policy are to:

- Ensure appropriate consideration is given to equality issues in the design and delivery of services/functions.
- Ensure all staff, elected members and volunteers and are aware of their responsibilities in relation to equalities, diversity and inclusion.
- Ensure that the council and the services we contract out do not discriminate against someone because of actual or perceived difference.
- Remove identified barriers to participation and ensure access for all members of the community.
- Ensure that the council remains committed to meeting the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and any future amendments to legislation.

5 Definitions

5.1 **Equality** is about ensuring that every individual has an equal opportunity to make the most of their lives and talents and believing that no one should have poorer life chances because of where, what or whom they were born, what they believe, or whether they have a disability. Equality recognises that historically, certain groups of people with particular characteristics e.g., race, disability, sex and sexuality, have experienced discrimination.

5.2 **Diversity** recognises that everyone is different in a variety of visible and non-visible ways, and that those differences are to be recognised, respected, valued, promoted and celebrated. They may include, but are not limited to, differences protected by equalities law.

5.3 **Inclusion** is the practice of including people in a way that is fair for all, values everyone's differences, and empowers and enables each person to be themselves and achieve their full potential and thrive.

In summary, equality, diversity and inclusion is not about treating everyone the same. It is about fairness and respect; giving people an equal and fair chance of opportunities, access to services and to fulfil their potential.

6 Legal Framework and Relevant Legislation

6.1 The Equality Act 2010

Our legal responsibilities are set out in the Equality Act 2010 (the Act) which seeks to protect people from discrimination. The Act also places a requirement on all Local Authorities to

comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). The Council is fully committed to complying with its duties and obligations under this legislation.

6.2 **Protected Characteristics**

Under the Equality Act it is unlawful to discriminate against an individual or the grounds of a range of characteristics, known as “protected characteristics”, these are:

- Age
- Disability – including people who are neurodiverse*
- Gender reassignment –
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

*Individuals are likely to be covered if their neurodivergence has a substantial and long-term adverse impact on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. This also extends to conditions such as ADHD, dyslexia and dyspraxia.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) definitions of protected characteristics are set out in Appendix 2.

In addition, the Council has identified other groups which are potentially disadvantaged which it wishes to consider when making decisions about how residents, visitors and staff are impacted by a new or revised policy, service or function. These are:

- Care Leavers
- Members of the Armed Forces community
- Those on low incomes – in receipt of benefits such as universal credit, job seeker’s allowance, personal independence payments (PIP)
- Carers/those with caring responsibilities

6.3 Unlawful Discrimination

Under the Equality Act, it is unlawful to discriminate, harass or victimise someone because they have, are perceived to have a protected characteristic, or are associated with someone who has a protected characteristic. The different ways someone can be unlawfully discriminated against are set out in the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Guide.

6.4 **The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)**

The Equality Act places a requirement on all Local Authorities to comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty, which places general and specific duties on the Council.

The general equality duty aims to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, and victimisation.

- 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

In addition to these general equalities duties, the Council's specific equality duties (arising from the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties for Public Authorities) Regulations 2017) are to:

- Publish equality objectives (The Council's equality objectives are set out in Appendix 1 and are published on our website at Equality | Equality | Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk
- Publish equality information, including gender pay gap information, on our employees Equality | Equality | Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk

Under the equality duty, Local Authorities are required to have due regard to:

- Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics
- Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people
- Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low

6.5 Hate Crime

A hate crime is any criminal offence which is perceived by the victim, or any other person, to be motivated by hostility or prejudice, based on a person's:

- disability or perceived disability
- race or perceived race
- religion or perceived religion
- sexual orientation or perceived sexual orientation
- transgender identity or perceived transgender identity

The Council takes all reported incidents of hate crime seriously and will continue to work with partner organisations, as part of the Norfolk Community Safety Partnership, to report and eliminate hate crime. Further information on Hate Crimes is included in the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Guide.

7 Roles and Responsibilities

7.1 The **Council** - has a range of roles and responsibilities with regards to equalities as a service provider and as an employer. In addition, our employees, elected members and contractors who we work with also have a role to play in ensuring the aims of this policy are achieved. The responsibilities for each of these groups are set out in more detail in the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Guide.

7.2 **As a community leader**, service provider and employer the council has an active role in removing barriers to participation and ensuring access to services for all members of the community. We will do this by:

- Ensuring fair and reasonable treatment and opportunities for all our residents, visitors, and employees
- Collaborating with others and promoting equality of opportunity
- Working with voluntary and community groups

7.3 **As A Service Provider**, our priority for the way the council does business is to operate within our means – providing important local services within our available resources. As a result, we continuously look closely at what really matters to the citizens of West Norfolk and focus our resources accordingly. Our Corporate Strategy outlines our current key priorities, many of which are focussed on improving the quality of life for people in west Norfolk.

To support the aims of this policy we will:

- Undertake equality impact assessments on all Council policies and policy decisions *(more information on the EIA process can be found in the Equality Impact Assessment Procedure)* Ensure that all the services we are responsible for are accessible and make reasonable adjustments for people with disabilities *(more information on reasonable adjustments can be found in the Equality Diversity and Inclusion Guide)* Ensure that all service users are treated with fairness, dignity and respect
- Require all contractors, suppliers and other third-party organisations we work with to share our commitment to equalities, diversity and inclusion
- Work with our partners, voluntary and community groups to promote understanding, tackle prejudice and foster positive relations between different communities
- Actively promote services and when necessary, targeting particular individuals and groups, where appropriate

7.4 **As An Employer,** the council wholeheartedly supports the principle of equal opportunity in employment and opposes all forms of unlawful or unfair discrimination. Our aim is to create a working environment which is supportive, prejudice free and which reflects the diversity of our local population. To support the aims of this policy we will:

- Promote a culture that values and respects difference, eliminating bullying, harassment and discrimination from our workforce and tackling behaviour which is unacceptable.
- Develop open, fair and consistent arrangements for the recruitment, selection and appointment of employees
- Work towards the employment of a workforce which represents the community it serves
- Provide access to learning, training and development opportunities for all employee and deliver training on equality, diversity and inclusion to employees
- Develop initiatives/procedures to enable employees to balance the demands of their home and work lives
- Monitor our workforce profile against our local community profile to work towards a workforce which is reflective of the community we serve

7.5 **All employees** have an integral role to play in both ensuring they work within the principles of this policy and promoting equality through their work. The council believes that all employees have a right to be treated with dignity and respect and the council will take steps to ensure this right is protected. In addition, employees have a responsibility to treat their colleagues with respect. Where employees believe that harassment or bullying has taken place, they should report it in accordance with the Dignity and Respect procedure.

7.6 **Elected Members** are responsible for ensuring that equality is incorporated within all council activity. Using Equality Impact Assessments elected Members will consider equality throughout the policy and decision making process. Elected members should ensure that they work within the principles of this policy and where they believe that unfair discrimination has taken place, they should report it. Training will be provided for Elected Members to assist them in fulfilling their role and responsibilities with regards to equality, diversity and inclusion.

8 Key Activities/Actions to Support this Policy

To support the delivery of this policy, the Council will undertake a range of activities, including:

8.1 Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs)

An EIA is a process for systematically identifying the potential impact of the council's policies, services and functions on different groups within the community. An EIA will help with anticipating and identifying any potential discriminatory or negative impacts on groups with protected characteristics.
Equality Impact Assessments will be undertaken in relation to all new policies, procedures, delegated decisions, services, functions and events and where any substantial updating is required to existing policies, procedures, services or functions. Further information can be found within our EIA Procedure.

8.2 Corporate Equalities Working Group

The Corporate Equalities Working Group is an Officer working group which leads and drives forward the equality, diversity and inclusion agenda within the Council, working towards the requirements of the Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy, equality objectives, equality action plan, legislation and best practice. Further information, including group membership, can be found in the Equality Diversity and Inclusion Guide and the EIA Procedure. The CEWG also plays a key role in supporting the EIA process. Further information on the CEWG can be found in our EDI Guide and EIA Procedure.

8.3 Our Work with Third Party Organisations and Contractors

We procure a wide range of goods and services from third parties and contract. We aim to ensure that all relevant third parties and contractors who work with us have the information they need to ensure equality of opportunity for their employees and

service users. The procurement and grants process require all relevant third parties and contractors to have an equality policy and we will seek sufficient information and evidence that compliance with equality legislation is taking place. This will follow the procedure set out on contract management, monitoring and evaluation in our contract standing order policy.

Equality Monitoring

Some services may ask users for personal information as part of their processes. When we ask employees or members of the public for personal information for our equality monitoring, we will only ask for the information we need. We will state why we need the information, and we will take care not to identify individuals through the information we collect, especially where it is shared or published. We will ensure than in doing so we comply with the law in relation to confidentiality, data protection and freedom of information.

8.4 Complaints Procedures

External Complaints - If a customer feels they been discriminated against in relation to council activity they should fill out the council's Discrimination Complaints Form, which is available here: Complaints, comments and compliments documents | Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk (west-norfolk.gov.uk) **(currently under review)**

Internal Complaints - If a member of our staff feels they have been discriminated against they should use the relevant procedures as outlined in the Employee Handbook. Complaints of harassment and bullying will be handled in accordance with the council's Dignity and Respect procedure.

8.5 Policy Monitoring

To support progress with the Council's equality objectives and wider work to support equality, diversity and inclusion an annual action plan will be produced to set out the various priorities and workstreams to be progressed each year. The action plan will be agreed by Senior Leadership Team and will be monitored on an ongoing basis via the Corporate Equality Working Group and Senior Leadership Team. In addition, report capturing progress on equality, diversity and inclusion work will be reporting to Cabinet on an annual basis.

Progress with actions towards our equality objectives will also be captured and published on the equality section of our website on an annual basis.

9 Associated Documents

9.1 Equality Diversity and Inclusion Guide
9.2 Equality Impact Assessment Procedure and associated forms
9.3 CEWG Terms of Reference and Group Membership

Appendix 1 - Equality Objectives 2025 – 2028

Equality Objectives – Services

We will:

- Use fair and evidence based decision making when reviewing or implementing new Council policies, services and functions, ensuring equality implications are taken into consideration and action is taken to remove or minimise potential barriers
- Improve the quality of life for people in West Norfolk through accessible information and services, making reasonable adjustments where necessary
- Ensure the Council's approach to equality, diversity and inclusion issues are regular reviewed and promoted

Equality Objectives – Employment

We will:

- Maintain a diverse workforce that reflects the community that we serve
- Maintain a working environment that is inclusive and where all staff are treated fairly, with dignity and respect. We have adopted UNISON's Dignity and Respect at work procedure which can be found on CIPHR and the intranet for further information and guidance.
- Ensure all our employment policies, practices and procedures comply with equalities legislation

Achievement of our equality objectives is supported by an annual action plan, with regular monitoring of progress against the agreed actions for the year, which will be reported to Cabinet via an annual Equality, Diversity and Inclusion monitoring report. In developing our action plan, the Council will use the Equality Framework for Local Government as a guide to benchmark our progress and identify areas for improvement/enhancement.

Appendix 2 – Protected Characteristics

Protected Characteristics

Age

A person belonging to a particular age (for example 32-year-olds) or range of ages (for example 18 to 30-year-olds).

See the EHRC advice and guidance on age discrimination.

Disability

A person has a disability if she or he has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on that person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

See the EHRC advice and guidance on disability discrimination.

Gender reassignment

The process of transitioning from one sex to another.

See the EHRC advice and guidance on gender reassignment discrimination.

Marriage and civil partnership

Marriage is a union between a man and a woman or between a same-sex couple.

Same-sex couples can also have their relationships legally recognised as 'civil partnerships'. Civil partners must not be treated less favourably than married couples (except where permitted by the Equality Act).

See the EHRC advice and guidance on marriage and civil partnership discrimination.

Pregnancy and maternity

Pregnancy is the condition of being pregnant or expecting a baby. Maternity refers to the period after the birth and is linked to maternity leave in the employment context. In the non-work context, protection against maternity discrimination is for 26 weeks after giving birth, and this includes treating a woman unfavourably because she is breastfeeding.

See the EHRC advice and guidance on pregnancy and maternity discrimination.

Race

Refers to the protected characteristic of race. It refers to a group of people defined by their race, colour, and nationality (including citizenship) ethnic or national origins.

See the EHRC advice and guidance on race discrimination.

Religion and belief

Religion refers to any religion including lack of religion. Belief refers to any religious or philosophical belief and includes a lack of belief. Generally, a belief should affect your life choices or the way you live for it to be included in the definition.

See the EHRC guidance on religion and belief discrimination.

Sex

A man or a woman.

See the EHRC guidance on sex discrimination.

Sexual orientation

Whether a person's sexual attraction is towards their own sex, the opposite sex or to both sexes.
See the EHRC advice and guidance on sexual orientation discrimination.