

DIVERSITY AND EQUALITY IN EMPLOYMENT

1 GENERAL STATEMENT OF POLICY

The County Council aims to promote a society in Northumberland which embraces the diversity of the whole community, where unjustifiable discrimination or prejudice does not exist and where all individuals are treated with courtesy, dignity and fairness including in the provision of services and employment.

The County Council understands the benefits to the community of having a diverse and highly effective workforce. The Council values the added contribution that its employees can make when it recognises their individual differences. These individual differences are defined in law as the following “*protected characteristics*”: age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage or civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex and sexual orientation. The County Council is determined to eliminate unfair discrimination in all its forms and to establish and implement equality through its employment policies and practices. We will ensure that equality issues are fully considered, including undertaking equality impact assessments where appropriate, as an integral part of the policy development and decision-making processes within the County Council.

The County Council and its employees will, in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
- advance equality of opportunity between different groups; and
- foster good relations between different groups.

Advancing equality involves:

- removing or minimising disadvantages experienced 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; and
- encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.

The County Council opposes all forms of unlawful and unfair discrimination. All employees, whether part-time, full-time or temporary, will be treated fairly and with respect. Selection for employment, promotion, training 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 within the workplace. Developing the talents and resources of the workforce will enhance the effectiveness of the organisation.

2 OUR COMMITMENT

- Create an environment in which individual differences and the contributions of all our employees are recognised and valued.
- Give every employee a working environment that promotes dignity and respect to all. No form of intimidation, bullying or harassment will be tolerated.
- Provide training, development and progression opportunities to all staff.
- Continuously review all our employment practices and procedures to endeavour to ensure fairness.
- Considering breaches of our equality policy as misconduct which could lead to action being taken under the Council’s disciplinary procedure.
- Monitoring and reviewing the policy at least every two years or earlier if required.
- Seek to develop employment policies, procedures and practices to ensure fair and consistent treatment in the areas of recruitment and selection, pay, promotion, training, performance management, grievance handling and the application of all terms and conditions of

employment.

Policies, procedures and practices will be subject to consultation with relevant parties and will be kept under review and amended as necessary in the light of experience and developing best practice.

3 RESPONSIBILITY FOR POLICY

The Head of Transformation is responsible for developing and reviewing this policy in conjunction with the Chief Executive and other Corporate Directors, providing advice and training, issuing of guidelines to assist implementation of the policy and ensuring that effective monitoring systems and procedures are in place.

Individual Corporate Directors are responsible for ensuring that the policy is implemented and maintained within their services, for collecting and providing statistical information and for the identification of specific action plans and measures to improve overall performance and compliance with the policy objectives.

Because of legislation governing the way schools are managed, schools will adopt their own policies regarding equality issues. This document therefore does not apply to such establishments although the adoption of this policy as a model is recommended.

4 PUBLICISING THE POLICY

This policy will be posted on the Council's HR and recruitment webpages and will be available to every employee and to all job applicants.

All appropriate training, induction and management development courses will make reference to the policy and its provisions.

5 RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION PROCEDURES

Advertising

Normally, all vacancies will be advertised internally and externally concurrently on the County Council's website. Exceptions include situations involving reorganisations or where there is a threat of redundancy or where the Head of Transformation has agreed an exemption.

When posts are advertised externally care will be taken to ensure that the methods used do not unreasonably or unfairly restrict the pool of likely applicants, and encouragement will be given to attract applicants to fulfil our wish for a diverse workforce.

Job Centre Plus will receive details of all externally advertised job vacancies.

All internal advertisements and vacancy bulletins will indicate that all candidates will receive fair and equal treatment. Applications in alternative formats will be made available for disabled applicants.

All job applicants are required to complete a standard application form. C.V.s will not be accepted.

Job Requirements

For each vacant post there will be, as a minimum, a job description, a person specification, a copy of this policy, and an application form.

Every effort will be made in the preparation of job descriptions and person specifications to ensure that they only include requirements relevant to the effective performance of the duties of the post.

Similarly, recruitment literature, including advertisements, will only include those essential and desirable requirements that are necessary and justifiable for the effective performance of the job.

The job criteria given in person specifications will only refer to specific qualifications where they are directly relevant to the job. In such cases we will also indicate that equivalent or alternative qualifications are acceptable.

Shortlisting

To produce a shortlist all applicants will be considered together and the selection criteria will be applied consistently to all candidates by reference to the person specification.

Shortlisting and interviewing panels will comprise at least two (ideally three) officers/members including a sex and race mix where practicable.

Guaranteed Interview Scheme

All applicants who have a disability will be offered an interview if they meet the minimum essential criteria as outlined in the person specification. Disabled applicants will be given the opportunity to identify adjustments they require to attend for interview.

Interview

The purpose of an interview is to assess each candidate's capabilities in relation to the requirements of the job. Therefore, interviewers will seek to phrase questions so as to enable an objective assessment of the criteria as identified in the person specification to be made.

Interview panels will not ask unnecessary or inappropriate questions about an applicant's personal circumstances. Where there are special requirements attached to a job e.g. unsocial hours, interviewers may ask every candidate whether they understand and are able to fulfil all the obligations of the post.

Selection Tests

The County Council will only use properly validated selection tests from reputable suppliers, carried out by trained testers and undertake to use the results only for the purposes for which they were intended. Disabled applicants will be given the opportunity to identify adjustments they require to undertake selection tests.

Appointment

We will make appointments only on the basis of the best match between the individual, identified through the stages of the selection procedure (application form, interview, selection tests etc.) and the post, identified by reference to the job description and person specification, without regard to any other non-material factors, e.g. gender, being married or in a civil partnership, sex,, race, ethnic origin, nationality, disability, religion or belief, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, pregnancy or age except where there is a Genuine Occupational Requirement (GOR).

The overriding principle is that the most suitable person for the job is appointed. Where appropriate, reasonable adjustments will be made to support disabled employees.

Criminal Records

We shall take no account of spent criminal offences, except for those occupations where there are exemptions under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 or where the County Council has a duty under other legislation to protect vulnerable sectors of the community. Any vacancy number containing an "X" indicates that the successful candidate will require clearance through the disclosure procedure administered by the Criminal Records Bureau.

Recruitment Complaints

A Recruitment Complaints Procedure exists for use by internal and external job applicants who believe that they have been unfairly treated during the recruitment and selection process.

Applicants who believe they have been unfairly treated will be provided with a copy of the Recruitment Complaints Procedure, which states that in the first instance the matter should be taken up with the Appointing Officer. All complaints will be carefully considered and responses provided within the timescales set out in the procedure.

6 TRAINING

The needs of the County Council and the needs of individual employees in carrying out their duties, in preparing for changes to these duties, and for career development, will form the only basis for selection for training. Availability of funds will limit the level of training activities and Corporate Directors will establish priorities accordingly.

Any restrictions on access to training will not directly or indirectly discriminate on the grounds of any protected characteristic or any other factor which cannot be objectively justified.

Ideally, all staff involved in recruitment and selection should have received equalities training. As a minimum, all staff involved in recruitment must be familiar with this policy and the County Council's Recruitment Code of Practice.

All employees will receive training in order to increase their awareness of equality and diversity issues.

7 CONDITIONS OF SERVICE AND EMPLOYMENT PROCEDURES

The County Council will apply all conditions of service and employment procedures fairly. The County Council is committed to the principle of equal pay and flexible working.

8 MONITORING THE POLICY

The County Council has established procedures for monitoring recruitment and selection, promotion, training, the management of capability, discipline, absence, grievances and reasons for leaving the Council's employment.

9 HARASSMENT AND DISCRIMINATION

To make the best use of the talents of our employees and to protect their well being, the County Council strives to provide a working environment where staff are treated with dignity, courtesy and respect. Every employee is under a duty to behave appropriately at all times and we actively seek to prevent harassment, discrimination, bullying and all other forms of unwarranted or improper behaviour in the workplace.

Employees who believe they have been subject to unwelcome and objectionable behaviour at work are able to use the Dignity at Work Policy and as necessary, the Grievance Procedure, which contains provisions specifically designed for that purpose. Complaints will be dealt with the utmost sensitivity and confidentiality.

Any employee who commits an act of discrimination or personal harassment will be liable to disciplinary action, and ultimately the possibility of dismissal.