



Berwick-upon-Tweed Town Council Equality and Diversity Policy

Introduction

Berwick is a historic town situated in the north of Northumberland. It's unique history and heritage as the physical manifestation of the border between Scotland and England is reflected in its culture, geography, demographics and history. It is also, however, a town of the Twenty First Century, looking forward to the challenges and opportunities change brings. This Equality and Diversity Policy is intended to fit, and to reflect Berwick, and the role of the Town Council in the the civic, corporate and wider community lives of Berwick.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that Berwick Town Council (BTC) acts towards those they engage with, whether outwardly (such as service users, constituents, clients, customers and individual members of the public) or inwardly (such as contractors, employees and councillors) with respect, measurably equitable treatment, an appreciation of difference, and as is determined by the public equality duty, an active approach to reducing barriers to participation, engagement and employment.

It is important that such guidance reflects both the values of BTC and its role and responsibilities. BTC is committed to treating "everyone with respect and fairness according to the equalities act". This policy will lay out concrete steps to ensure that happens, and a measurable determination of what equality and fairness look like in practice. This commitment to both the spirit and the practice of the Equality Act (2010) is commensurate with our role and responsibilities in the life of Berwick-upon-Tweed

What Does Equality Mean?

At BTC we see equality as meaning that all individuals have an equal opportunity and access to engagement and employment with us. To ensure this we will take active steps to:

- Recognise barriers which exist,
- Reflect on our role in the existence of those barriers, and
- Take steps to remove or ameliorate such barriers as we are responsible fully or partially for.

This iterative approach to equality is in keeping with the BTC approach to work, and sets in place a process of achieving equality.

What does Diversity mean?

Diversity means a celebration of difference, and valuing people because of that difference not in spite off. BTC sees strength in the recognition of diversity and difference, whether visible or invisible. Respecting everyone as an individual is not only beneficial for the individual but also for BTC. To demonstrate this respect for diversity we will take active steps to:

- Recognise where there may be a lack of diversity,
- Reflect on our role in encouraging more diverse engagement, and
- Take active steps to ensure that every individual feels respected and valued however they come into contact with BTC.

The value of organisational humility will take primacy here, as we consider how others may be best placed to ensure diverse communities are represented and championed. Equality and diversity are not interchangeable, instead they are interdependent, and act as pillars or support on each other.

Scope

This policy applies to every Councillor, employee of BTC, and any other person or organisation employed by the Council to work or to deliver services on its behalf, including those employed through contractual, commissioning or grant-aided arrangements. All employees, contractors and councillors have a personal responsibility to treat everyone with respect, consideration and in a non discriminatory way and to promote the same levels of behaviour in colleagues.

Our Commitment

The Equality Act of 2010 made clear the different ways in which it is unlawful to treat someone, such as direct and indirect discrimination, harassment, victimisation and failing to make a reasonable adjustment for someone with a protected characteristic. In keeping with our commitment to the spirit of the act, and not just the letter of the law, we will not tolerate behaviours which are unlawful, or unfair, towards someone with a protected characteristic.

What are protected characteristics?

Protected characteristics are those aspects of a person's identity which it has been judged can lead to unfair treatment and discrimination. The spirit of the act is to acknowledge this unequal treatment has historically existed, and try to protect individuals against it.

The nine protected characteristics are sex; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race (including ethnic origin, colour, nationality and national origin); disability; sexual orientation; religion and or belief; and age.

The act prohibits unfair treatment in the workplace, when providing goods, facilities and services, when exercising public functions, in the disposal and management of premises, in education and by associations (such as private clubs).

What counts as unfair or illegal treatment and behaviour?

Discrimination

- Direct Discrimination is when someone is treated less favourably because they have a protected characteristic.

-Indirect Discrimination is putting in place a rule or way of doing things that has a detrimental impact on someone with a protected characteristic (when this cannot be justified under exceptional circumstances).

BTC commit to examine all policies and procedures to remove indirect discrimination, and to have robust, confidential and timely reporting procedures for all discrimination. If you believe yourself to be a victim of direct or indirect discrimination you can report this (in confidence) to the Town Clerk and it will be dealt with according to our complaints or grievance procedures.

Harassment

Harassment is unwanted conduct which has the purpose or effect of violating someone's dignity or which is hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive to someone with a protected characteristic or there is any connection with a protected characteristic (for example, you are treated as though you have a particular characteristic, even if the other person knows this isn't true).

Harassment can be distressing to experience, and to report. We commit to having robust, confidential and timely reporting procedures for all harassment and to offer proportionate support. If you believe yourself to be a victim of harassment you can report this (in confidence) to the Town Clerk and it will be dealt with according to our complaints or grievance procedures.

Victimisation

Victimisation is treating someone badly because they have done a 'protected act', or because an employer, service provider or other organisation believes that you have done or are going to do a protected act. The reason for the treatment does not need to be linked to a protected characteristic.

A protected act is:

- making a claim or complaint of discrimination (under the Equality Act),
- helping someone else to make a claim by giving evidence or information,
- making an allegation that you or someone else has breached the Equality Act,
- doing anything else in connection with the Equality Act.

BTC commit to supporting anyone associated with the council making a claim, complaint or allegation under the Equality Act and that such a claim, complaint or allegation will not lead to unfavourable or further discriminatory treatment.

When does this policy apply?

This policy applies to all conduct in the workplace and also to conduct outside of the workplace that is related to the activities of BTC (e.g. at meetings, social events and social interactions with colleagues) or which may impact on BTC reputation (e.g. the expression of views on social media, contrary to the commitments expressed in this policy, that could be linked to BTC).

No form of intimidation, bullying or harassment will be tolerated. If you believe that you may have suffered discrimination because of any of the above protected characteristics, you should contact the Town Clerk, or, if your complaint concerns the Town Clerk, their Line Management Committee.

Conclusion

BTC fully recognise our legal duty to tackle discrimination and will not permit any act of discrimination, harassment or victimisation on the basis of any protected characteristics. To support our commitment to equality and diversity **we will:**

- Seek opportunities to promote equality and diversity
Regularly monitor, assess and consult on the impact of our policies, services and functions to ensure they treat all members of the community equally, and reflect different needs and opinions,
- Use our influence in communities and with our partners and businesses to generate opportunities for the people of Berwick-upon-Tweed, and
- Make equality and consideration of different needs a part of our everyday business.

We expect all of our Councillors, employees and contractors to:

- Treat all members of the public and colleagues with dignity and respect at all times, and
- Consider different needs and opinions to make our services as inclusive and accessible as possible. Promote access to services and employment opportunities to all parts of the community with consideration of different access needs.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY DECLARATION:

I have read and understood this Equality and Diversity Policy and agree to work to the expected standards. Regardless of my background and circumstances, I agree to treat all colleagues and visitors with respect and dignity while carrying out the duties and responsibilities of my role with Berwick Town Council.