

Western Valley

Parish Council

EQUALITY POLICY

1. Introduction

The Parish Council is committed to pursuing an equal opportunities approach in the employment of its staff and in every aspect of Council activity and recognises its statutory duties under legislation in terms of service provision and employment and is committed to meet them by complying with this policy.

2. Legislation and Codes of Practice

The Council Recognises its responsibilities under equality legislation and related codes of practice including the following:

- The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (amended 1976)
- The Equal Pay Act 1970
- The Race Relations Act 1976, 2000(amended) and 2003 (amended)
- The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and amendments
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- Equalities Act 2010

It is **unlawful** to discriminate against an individual on the following “protected characteristics”:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

3. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide equal opportunities to all employees, irrespective of their characteristics (unless there are genuine occupational qualifications or objectively justified reasons for a different approach to be taken) and an equality of opportunity in the provision of services and access to Parish Council facilities.

The Council believes that opportunity and freedom from discrimination are fundamental human rights, and actively opposes all forms of discrimination, victimisation or harassment on the grounds of any of the protected characteristics defined in the Equality Act 2010.

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4. The Council as a Service Provider

The Council recognises and welcomes the changing pattern of households and population in the parish and is aware of the diverse requirements that will need to be met in the future.

The Council aims to provide its services without discriminating against any part of society or the residents on the grounds of sexual orientation, religion or belief, disability, gender or age.

5. The Council as an Employer

The Council recognises its responsibilities to provide equal opportunities in employment, and to avoid discrimination and harassment. All employees whether full-time, part-time, fixed term contract, agency workers or temporary staff, will be treated fairly and equally.

Selection for employment, promotion, training, remuneration 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 and the talents and resources of the workforce will be fully utilised to maximise the efficiency of the council. Every employee is entitled to a working environment that promotes dignity and respect to all. No form of intimidation, bullying or harassment will be tolerated. The commitment to equal opportunities in the workplace is good management practice and makes sound business sense as it seeks to utilise the talents available from the local community, representing Society as a whole.

Breaches of the Parish Council's equal opportunities policy will be regarded as serious misconduct and could lead to disciplinary proceedings. Employees are entitled to complain about discrimination or harassment or victimization through the council's Grievance procedure.

Prospective candidates wishing to raise a complaint should do so, in writing, to the Clerk within 15 working days, at the latest, of the alleged incident. An investigation will then be conducted by the Clerk, or an independent person appointed for the purpose, who will report to the Council

6. The Council as a Body of Elected Representatives

The Council recognises its responsibilities under the Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010, s.149) to provide equal opportunities for any member or prospective member wishing to serve their community as an elected or co-opted member of The Council,

6.1. Use of Amanuenses

A councillor with a disability that impairs their ability to carry out day-day council communications shall have an amanuensis appointed to (a) assist them with their responsibilities and (b) safeguard council rules of confidentiality, which would otherwise be breached if a councillor were to share confidential information or materials.

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An amanuensis, or scribe is someone who, in the context of parish council activities, writes down or keys a councillor's dictated words, and reads materials aloud to a councillor.

A relevant disability is any physical, intellectual or mental health disability that affects written or spoken communication, and could involve, for example, impaired vision, hearing, dexterity, literacy or numeracy.

A councillor who declares a relevant need shall have an amanuensis appointed to them as soon as possible after taking up office. It shall be the responsibility of the clerk to the council, together with the chair or other designated councillor to organise the appointment of an amanuensis, in discussion with the councillor.

Where possible, the clerk shall be the appointed amanuensis. Where the amanuensis is not the clerk, they shall report to and be accountable directly to the clerk, unless the amanuensis is another councillor.

An amanuensis shall be acceptable to the councillor, the clerk and the chair of the council.

An amanuensis shall not advise or offer an opinion to the councillor on a council matter or join in discussion with the councillor as though they were a member of the council.

An amanuensis shall be able to produce an accurate record of the councillor's words. They must be able to write legibly and use a keyboard. They are not expected to have a knowledge of council terminology or regulations.

It is the councillor's responsibility to direct the amanuensis in day -to-day needs.

The amanuensis:

- Shall write or key communications and other documents exactly as they are dictated
- Shall read communications and other documents exactly as they are written
- Shall offer no content suggestions or interpretations to the councillor
- Shall not advise the councillor on what to think or how to respond to an issue
- Shall be subject to the same rules of confidentiality as the councillor.

6.2. Members who are also Carers

In law, it is illegal to discriminate against a carer because of their responsibilities as a carer, or because of the individual(s) they care for. A Councillor / Member who is a registered carer of a someone with a protected characteristic, is by extension also protected from discrimination against those same characteristics.

Where, in the duties of their caring of an individual, a Member has a requirement to be accompanied at a meeting of the Council or any Committee; Sub-Committee or Working Group by the individual they care for, they shall so be accompanied. In such situations it is acceptable to the Council that the person being cared for to remain present for the whole of the meeting, including any confidential section, where the public and press are excluded.

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The cared for person, with a protected characteristic shall:

- offer no content suggestions their Member/Councillor/Carer
- not advise or offer any content suggestions to their Member/Councillor/Carer on what to think or how to respond to an issue
- be subject to the same rules of confidentiality as their Member/Councillor/Carer.

7. Commitment

The Parish Council will comply with all current and future legislation referring to equality and diversity and will aim to promote good practice in all aspects of the organisation. The Council will publicise this policy on the website with all other policy documents and will highlight it in recruitment and relevant official documentation.

8. Review

This document was approved for use at the meeting of the Parish Council on 12th October 2023, it shall be reviewed periodically, at least once per council term or if legislation dictates.

Signed:

Dated: 12th October 2023

S Peacock, Chairman