

Equal Opportunities Policy

Part 1: General Statement

Chelmsford Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) exists to support, promote and develop local voluntary and community action.

Chelmsford CVS recognises the richness and creativity of a diverse society and is committed to ensuring that no individual, group or community is disadvantaged or excluded from playing an active part in society because of their race, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexuality, religion, age, class and geographical location.

Chelmsford CVS aims to achieve equality of opportunity in its activities, and recognises that discrimination and associated disadvantages affect a wide range of groups and individuals in society. It will work to positively challenge direct and indirect discrimination, to help to reduce inequalities so that all groups are included in the mainstream economy and society.

This document is the Equal Opportunities Policy of Chelmsford Council for Voluntary Service operating at:

Burgess Well House
Coval Lane
Chelmsford
Essex
CM1 1FW

The purpose of this policy is to provide overall guidance and direction to trustees, staff and volunteers. In addition, Chelmsford CVS will seek to share its experiences and promote good practice in the areas of equalities and inclusion in its work with its membership and with external agencies.

The content and effectiveness of this policy will be reviewed on a regular basis, particularly as the organisation changes in nature and size and at times of legislative change.

The Director (Lorraine Jarvis) is responsible for ensuring the policy is implemented.

Signed:

The Chair (Brian Mister)

Date:

Part 2: Scope

This Policy has been developed to encompass the requirements of current legislation where it is applicable to Chelmsford CVS operational and working practices, i.e., in the provision of services and in employment.

The Policy covers all the activities of Chelmsford CVS, including the services it provides as well as the promotion, publicity, direction and operation of those services. The main legislation in the field of equality relates to discrimination on the grounds of gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief, age:

- Race Relations Act 1976 and its amendments
- Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and 1986 amendment
- Sex Discrimination (Gender Reassignment) Regulations 1999
- Equal Pay Act 1970
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974
- Employment Relations Act 1999
- Employment Act 2002
- Part-time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2000
- Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003
- Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003
- Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006

Part 3: Service Delivery

Chelmsford CVS is committed to ensuring equality of access to all its services, and is working to ensure that all the services it provides directly and through its membership are accessible to all. As far as possible, services offered will be flexible and responsive to the changing needs of the community in which they are offered.

Membership

Chelmsford CVS will continue to work to ensure that its membership is widely representative of the community, and that its trustee board reflects this. We will work to redress any imbalance of under-represented groups.

Chelmsford CVS will raise awareness of equal opportunities issues through its communications networks, and support and encourage other organisations to adopt improved practices.

Membership of Chelmsford CVS will be denied to groups that openly support discrimination or discriminatory practices.

Direct Services

Chelmsford CVS strives to remove barriers that may exclude groups from making full use of its services, and contributing to local policy and decision making processes.

Wherever possible, Chelmsford CVS takes care to provide services in premises which are accessible and inviting to all members of the community. Steps are taken to be as inclusive as possible when arranging meetings, in terms of timing, geographical location, and physical space. Adaptations that may be required to existing premises and practices will be considered as the matter is raised.

Chelmsford CVS recognises that not everyone has access to personal transport or is able to use it and endeavours to plan its services and activities with this in mind.

Communication

Chelmsford CVS is working to ensure that information and communication is clear and accessible to all, and promotes sensitivity in the use of spoken and written language.

Translators and induction loop systems will, wherever possible, be available at meetings and events, on request.

Chelmsford CVS is working to ensure wide and regular publicity of its services is aimed at all sections of the community. Wherever possible and when relevant, Chelmsford CVS will strive to make this material available in translation, audiotape and large print.

Complaints Procedure

Chelmsford CVS has a widely publicised Complaints Procedure in place, which is offered as a mechanism to monitor and change behaviour and working practices that contravene the aims of this Equal Opportunities Policy.

Part 4: Employment Practice

Chelmsford CVS is committed to treating all workers fairly and respectfully and to setting systems in place which are designed to provide access to equal opportunities.

Recruitment

Appropriate training is available to all involved with the recruitment and selection of staff, to ensure that Chelmsford CVS meets its legal obligations, and stated commitment to equality of opportunity. Individuals taking part in the recruitment process are involved at the earliest possible stage.

Each vacancy is supported by a job description, person specification (with guidance on whether the stated criteria are 'essential' or 'desirable' for the position), and an application form. Where possible, consideration is given to flexible working patterns. A separate equal opportunities monitoring form is included with the application pack, which is detached on receipt of the application form, so that it is not seen by the recruitment panel. Salaries are in line with appropriate scales as published by the National Joint Council.

Vacancies are advertised openly and as widely as economically practicable. Advertisements are clearly written, contain a summary of the key aspects of the job description and person specification, and have timescales that are realistic, to encourage applicants from all sections of the community. Advertisements state clearly that Chelmsford CVS is: '*Working towards equality of opportunity*'.

During the recruitment process, two sets of scoring grids are used: one that sets out the selection criteria for short-listing (based on the person specification), and one which sets out questions for the interview panel (based on the job description and person specification). Reimbursement of reasonable travel expenses is offered to candidates attending interviews.

Interview questions are not varied from candidate to candidate, and it is the responsibility of each member of the panel to ensure that follow up questions used to explore individual experience are non-discriminatory. Care is taken to ensure that the questions asked and tasks set are appropriate to check for the skills and competencies needed for the post. Personal questions, which may be perceived to be intrusive and imply potential discrimination, are not included. The question: '*What do you understand by the statement Equality of Opportunity?*' is asked of every candidate at interview.

Decisions taken at short-listing and interview are recorded, and all short-listed candidates are advised either that they have not been selected, or that they will be made an offer of employment. Upon request, unsuccessful candidates are provided with oral feedback on why they were not selected. References are taken up to inform the decision of the interview panel.

Terms & Conditions of Employment

Newly appointed staff members are provided with a written contract, within the statutory timescales, stating the terms and conditions of their employment, and are made aware of grievance and disciplinary procedures. A formal initial induction procedure is in place so that all staff are aware of all applicable employment policies, practices and guidance.

Training

Induction, supervision, appraisal and work reviews are put into place, which are relevant and appropriate to the post. Appropriate training for development within the post is positively encouraged.

Training is available for staff, board members and volunteers on all issues relating to equality of opportunity, to strengthen understanding and working practices.

Harassment, Bullying and Victimisation

Harassment includes behaviour that is offensive, frightening or in any way distressing. It may be intentional bullying which is obvious or violent, but can be unintentional, subtle and insidious. It may involve nicknames, teasing, name calling or other behaviour which is not with malicious intent but which is upsetting. It may not be targeted at an individual(s) but consist of a general culture which appears to tolerate, for example racist or ageist jokes. Harassment and bullying in the workplace will not be tolerated.

Victimisation is when an individual is treated detrimentally because they have made a complaint or intend to make a complaint about discrimination or harassment or given evidence or intend to give evidence relating to a complaint about discrimination or harassment. Chelmsford CVS will take reasonable steps to prevent victimisation in the workplace.

Individuals are made aware that if they harass or victimise colleagues, they could be personally liable and may have to pay compensation themselves, in addition to anything that the organisation may be ordered to pay.

Grievance Procedure

Chelmsford CVS has grievance and disciplinary procedures in place, which will be used as a mechanism to discourage behaviour and working practices that challenge the aims of this Equal Opportunities Policy.

References

Discrimination, harassment or victimisation following the end of a working relationship covers issues such as references either written or verbal. References issued are restricted to fact surrounding employment skills and competencies.

Fair Retirement

Chelmsford CVS adopts the statutory retirement age. Employees are informed in writing of their anticipated retirement date and of their right to make a request to work beyond retirement age at least 6 months in advance (but no more than 12 months before the intended date). If they do make such a request, Acas guidance will be followed in dealing correctly with it.

Volunteers

Chelmsford CVS is committed to creating a welcoming, supportive and inclusive environment for volunteers and has a Volunteer Policy which should be read in the context of this Equal Opportunities Policy.