

PRUDHOE TOWN COUNCIL EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY POLICY

ADOPTED at the Ordinary Meeting on 28TH May 2026

Highlighted text identifies updates and additions incorporated as of May 2026.

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1. Policy Statement

1.1 The Council is committed to providing the highest quality of service provision and recognises that the implementation of an effective Equality Policy is an integral part of such an approach.

1.2 The Council will treat all its employees, partners and customers with dignity and respect, free from discrimination, victimisation and harassment.

1.3 The Council understands its obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and is fully committed to its duty, imposed by section 149 of the 2010 Act.

1.4 The Council is committed to the principle of equal opportunities and declares its opposition to any form of less favourable treatment, whether through direct or indirect discrimination, on the grounds of the protected characteristics as specified in the Equality Act 2010.

1.5 The Council is an Equal Opportunities employer and provider of services.

1.6 The Council is committed to the promotion, maintenance and protection of the rights of individuals.

1.7 The Council will ensure that all recipients of the services delivered directly by the Council are guaranteed the same opportunity.

1.8 All policies of the Council will be designed to support the principles and practices equal opportunity, to foster a fully integrated community and maintain racial harmony

2. Scope of the Policy

2.1. The Council, as a corporate body, has responsibility as an employer, a service provider and a public authority.

2.2. Both Councillors and employees as individuals also have responsibilities, as well as rights.

3. Responsibility for Implementation of the Policy

3.1 The Council has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy.

3.2 The Clerk is responsible for monitoring and reviewing the operation of this policy and making recommendations for changes to minimise risks to our work.

3.3 All employees, volunteers and Councillors should ensure that they take the time to read and understand the policy. Any breach of this policy should be reported to the Chair/Clerk.

3.4 Questions regarding the content or application of this policy should be directed to the Clerk.

3.5 Complaints and disclosures of breach of this policy by Councillors will be referred to the Monitoring Officer at Northumberland County Council and dealt with via the Council's Adopted Code of Conduct.

4. The Law

Under the Equality Act 2010, it is unlawful to discriminate against an individual on the basis of the following protected characteristics:-

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

These are defined as “protected characteristics” under Section 4 of the Equality Act 2010.

Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 places a Public Sector Equality Duty on Town Councils, requiring them to have due regard to the need to:

Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and any other conduct prohibited by the Act

Advance equality of opportunity between individuals who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

Foster good relations between individuals who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) requires public authorities, including Town Councils, to actively consider how their decisions, policies, and services impact people with protected characteristics.

Meeting these duties may, in some circumstances, require treating certain individuals more favourably in order to achieve equality of opportunity. For example, it may be appropriate to provide a disabled person with priority access to accessible allotments or facilities.

The Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023, which came into force on 26 October 2024, introduced a proactive legal duty on employers, including the Council, to take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment of employees during the course of their employment. This duty is preventative in nature and requires action to be taken before incidents occur, rather than solely in response to complaints.

The duty extends to harassment occurring within the workplace, at work-related events, and during interactions with members of the public, contractors, elected members, or other third parties. Failure to comply may result in an uplift of up to 25% in Employment Tribunal compensation awards, and the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) may also take enforcement action against the employer.

The Employment Rights Act 2025, being implemented in phases from December 2025, further strengthens these obligations. From October 2026, employers will be required to take “all reasonable steps” to prevent sexual harassment, replacing the current requirement to take “reasonable steps”. The legislation will also extend protection to cover third-party harassment of employees by members of the public, contractors, service users, or other non-employees across all forms of harassment, not solely sexual harassment.

In addition, disclosures made by employees relating to sexual harassment will qualify as protected disclosures for whistleblowing purposes. Employees raising concerns relating to sexual harassment will therefore be protected from detriment, victimisation, or dismissal as a result of making such disclosures.

5. Types of unlawful discrimination

Direct discrimination is where a person is treated less favourably than another because of a protected characteristic.

In limited circumstances, employers can directly discriminate against an individual for a reason related to any of the protected characteristics where there is an occupational requirement. The occupational requirement must be crucial to the post and a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.

Indirect discrimination is where a provision, criterion or practice is applied that is discriminatory in relation to individuals who have a relevant protected characteristic such that it would be to the detriment of people who share that protected characteristic compared with people who do not, and it cannot be shown to be a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.

Harassment is where there is unwanted conduct, related to one of the protected characteristics (other than marriage and civil partnership, and pregnancy and maternity) that has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity; or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. It does not matter whether or not this effect was intended by the person responsible for the conduct.

Associative discrimination is where an individual is directly discriminated against or harassed for association with another individual who has a protected characteristic.

Perceptive discrimination is where an individual is directly discriminated against or harassed based on a perception that they have a particular protected characteristic when they don't, in fact, have that protected characteristic.

Third-Party Harassment is harassment of an employee by a person who is not their colleague, such as a member of the public, a contractor, a councillor acting in a personal capacity, or a representative of a partner organisation. From October 2026, under the Employment Rights Act 2025, employers will be required to take all reasonable steps to prevent third-party harassment of their employees covering all protected characteristics.

Victimisation occurs where an employee is subjected to a detriment, such as being denied a training opportunity or a promotion because they made or supported a complaint or raised a grievance under the Equality Act 2010, or because they are suspected of doing so. However, an employee is not protected from victimisation if they acted maliciously or made or supported an untrue complaint.

Sexual Harassment is unwanted conduct of a sexual nature which has the purpose or effect of violating an individual's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. Under the Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023, employers have a proactive duty to take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment — not merely to respond to it after it occurs. This duty applies to all settings connected with employment, including off-site work, work-related social events, and interactions with members of the public.

6. The Council as an Employer

The purpose of this policy is to ensure equality of opportunity for all employees and prospective employees, regardless of their protected characteristics, unless there is a genuine occupational requirement or other objectively justifiable reason for adopting a different approach.

The Council is committed to promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion and opposes all forms of unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and unfair treatment on the basis of any protected characteristic as defined by the Equality Act 2010.

All employees, including full-time, part-time, temporary, fixed-term, and agency workers, together with all Councillors, will be treated fairly, consistently, and with dignity and respect.

Recruitment, promotion, training, pay, and access to benefits or opportunities will be based solely on merit, aptitude, and ability.

The Council may collect, monitor, and analyse diversity information relating to employees where such information is provided voluntarily. This information will be used to help identify equality issues, inform decision-making, and support the development of equality objectives. The Council will also consider the equality impact of new policies, procedures, and service changes and will seek to mitigate any identified adverse impacts.

The Council is committed to:-

- Making reasonable adjustments for disabled employees and job applicants in accordance with the Equality Act 2010
- Supporting employees through significant life events and personal circumstances, including pregnancy, maternity, paternity, adoption, caring responsibilities, and health-related matters
- Taking all complaints of discrimination, harassment, bullying, and victimisation seriously and investigating them appropriately
- Providing equality, diversity, and inclusion training and guidance to employees and Councillors
- Maintaining a working environment that is free from bullying, harassment, intimidation, and victimisation
- Taking proactive and reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace in accordance with the Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023. This includes undertaking risk assessments, maintaining appropriate policies and reporting procedures, and providing regular training and awareness measures
- Taking all reasonable steps, from October 2026 onwards, to prevent third-party harassment of employees under the Employment Rights Act 2025, including harassment by members of the public, contractors, service users, or others encountered during the course of employment. The Council will seek to ensure that appropriate standards of conduct are reflected within relevant contractual arrangements
- Ensuring that employees who report sexual harassment or related concerns are protected from detriment, victimisation, or dismissal in accordance with whistleblowing protections under the Employment Rights Act 2025
- Ensuring that no confidentiality clause, settlement agreement, or contractual provision is used to prevent employees from raising or disclosing concerns relating to discrimination, harassment, or victimisation
- Promoting equal access to training, learning, and professional development opportunities for all employees

Everyone has the right to work in an environment where they are treated with dignity, courtesy, and respect. The Council will not tolerate any form of bullying, intimidation, harassment, or discriminatory behaviour.

The Council will encourage and support all employees and Councillors in fulfilling their responsibilities under this Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy.

Any breach of this policy by an employee may be treated as misconduct and may result in disciplinary action in accordance with the Council's procedures.

Any breach of this policy by a Councillor may be dealt with under the Council's Code of Conduct and referred to the Monitoring Officer where appropriate.

The Council recognises that promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion is not only a legal responsibility but also good management practice. It supports the effective use of skills,

experience, and talent from across the community and helps ensure that the Council reflects and serves the diverse needs of society.

This policy is fully supported by all Members of the Council and reflects recognised good practice within the local government sector, including the model employment framework developed by the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC)

7. The Council as a Service Deliverer

- The Council is committed to ensuring that all service users are treated fairly, respectfully, and without discrimination when accessing or participating in any Council service, activity, or facility.
- To support equitable and inclusive service delivery, the Council will:-
- Seek to ensure that services are accessible to all members of the community
- Provide information in alternative formats, where reasonably requested, such as large print, audio, Braille, or community languages
- Consider the diverse needs of the community when planning, delivering, and reviewing services and activities
- Engage with and involve a wide range of community groups and stakeholders in service planning and development where appropriate
- Make reasonable adjustments to support service users with disabilities in accordance with the Equality Act 2010
- Provide employees and Councillors with appropriate equality, diversity, and inclusion training relevant to service delivery
- Seek to ensure that Council premises, facilities, and venues used for Council activities are accessible, inclusive, and welcoming to all sections of the community
- Promote positive relationships, mutual respect, and understanding between different groups within the community
- The Council aims to ensure that all service users feel valued, respected, and able to access services fairly and equally, regardless of their protected characteristics or any other personal circumstance.

8. Community Engagement

The Council is committed to promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion throughout the local community. The Council will:-

- Work collaboratively with community partners and organisations to celebrate diversity and encourage inclusion
- Support initiatives and activities that promote understanding, respect, and positive relationships between different sections of the community
- Give due consideration to equality implications when making decisions, developing policies, and delivering services
- Use its influence, partnerships, and leadership role to promote positive equality and inclusion practices within the local area
- Challenge discrimination, exclusion, and inappropriate behaviour where it is identified
- Seek to ensure that community events, activities, and facilities organised or supported by the Council are inclusive and accessible to all
- Engage proactively with underrepresented and seldom-heard groups within the community

- Promote and share examples of good equality, diversity, and inclusion practice with other local organisations and partners

9. Training

Employees and Councillors will have the opportunity to undertake equality and diversity training.

Training and guidance will include:

- Legal responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010
- Duties arising from the Public Sector Equality Duty
- The practical application of equality, diversity, and inclusion principles within Council activities and decision-making
- Identifying, preventing, and responding to discrimination, harassment, bullying, and victimisation
- Promoting and maintaining an inclusive and respectful working environment
- Awareness of current best practice, guidance, and relevant case studies

10. Language and Communications

The Council is committed to ensuring that its communications are inclusive, accessible, and respectful to all members of the community. The Council will:

- Use clear, inclusive, and non-discriminatory language in all communications and publications
- Make key information available in alternative formats upon request, where reasonably practicable
- Seek to ensure that public meetings, consultations, and events are accessible to all members of the community
- Use a range of communication methods and channels to engage with different sections of the community effectively
- Consider accessibility requirements in relation to digital communications, social media, and the Council's website
- Regularly review communication methods and materials to ensure they remain accessible, inclusive, and appropriate for the needs of the community

10. Monitoring and Review

The Clerk will be responsible for reviewing this policy annually to ensure that it remains compliant with current legal requirements and reflects recognised best practice.

Any proposed amendments to the policy will be presented to the Council for consideration and approval.

The annual review process will include:-

- Consideration of any changes to legislation, statutory guidance, or relevant case law
- Evaluation of lessons learned through the implementation and operation of the policy
- Consideration of feedback received from employees, Councillors, service users, and other stakeholders
- Review of progress made against identified equality objectives and commitments
- Identification of any areas for improvement and recommendations for further action where appropriate