



Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy

September 2025



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Document summary

This policy sets out the Council's commitment to promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion across the entire employment lifecycle. It outlines expectations for employee behaviour, defines key terms such as discrimination and harassment, and explains how the Council supports an inclusive and respectful workplace for all.

Enquiries

HR Team: HRHelpdesk@hastings.gov.uk / 01424 451777

Policy written by

Verna Connolly (Head of People and Business Support)

Policy checked by

[REDACTED]

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Policy owned by HBC HR Team.

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Introduction

Each of our people make a unique contribution whether in terms of background, personal characteristics, experience, skills to the organisation. And we value our people for the differences they bring to the table. These differences - this diversity - is powerful.

To promote an inclusive culture, this policy outlines Hastings Borough Council's commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion throughout the employment lifecycle and sets out how we put this commitment into practice.

This policy does not form part of your contract of employment, and we reserve the right to amend or withdraw it at any time.

Scope

Our people must follow this policy. This includes employees, workers, contractors, volunteers, and apprentices. The policy also relates to job candidates and all employment stages.

Our commitment to you

A culture of equality, diversity and inclusion not only promotes our organisation fosters wellbeing and enables our employees to work better because they can be themselves and feel like they belong.

We promote trust, respect and a workplace without discrimination, harassment, bullying or victimisation.

We ensure that our recruitment, promotion, and retention procedures do not discriminate based on:

- disability
- gender, gender identity or gender reassignment status
- marital status
- race, racial group, ethnic or national origin, or nationality.
- religion or belief

- sexual orientation
- age
- civil partnership status
- pregnancy or maternity
- paternity
- part-time status
- fixed term status

What we expect from you

We expect you, and everyone must personally uphold, promote, and apply this policy.

Our culture will develop via daily work contacts, so we all have a responsibility to create the ideal environment.

Cultivating this culture takes time and requires ongoing commitment and nurturing. In our world gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or other differences often translate to biases, challenges and barriers that others may not have experienced. As a person adds other differences this effect can multiply. So, the experiences of a Black woman with a disability may be quite different to the experiences of a Black woman without a disability and quite different from the experiences of a white woman. This way of looking

at diversity and inclusion is known as "intersectionality" on diversity and inclusion.

We expect you to treat your colleagues, third parties, customers, suppliers, contractors, agency staff and consultants fairly and respectfully. Accepting other perspectives and letting others contribute allowing for different views and viewpoints.

Embedding such values and constructively addressing incorrect statements or work methods, you can help us create and sustain a truly inclusive workplace culture.

Any interactions with coworkers or other parties must be free from any form of discrimination, harassment, victimisation, or bullying.

If someone, authorises, condones discrimination, harassment, victimisation, or bullying, we will act against them including (for those to whom it applies) implementing disciplinary action following our disciplinary procedure.

You should be aware that you can be personally liable for discrimination and harassment.

Discrimination

The Equality Act 2010 prohibits discrimination because of certain protected characteristics.

These are:

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

Discrimination can be intentional or unintentional and may occur directly, indirectly, by [REDACTED] association, or by perception (see different types of discrimination, harassment, and sexual harassment under the Equality Act 2010 below).

There are also two specific types of discrimination that apply only to disability:

"discrimination arising from disability" and "failing to make reasonable adjustments".

Discrimination is not always obvious and can be subtle and unconscious. This stems from a person's general assumptions about the abilities, interests and characteristics of a particular group that influences how they treat those people (known as "unconscious bias"). Such assumptions or prejudices may cause them to apply requirements or conditions that put those groups at a disadvantage.

Examples include:

- steering employees into specific areas of work because of stereotypical assumptions without considering the attributes and abilities of individuals.
- recruiting or promoting individuals into roles because of assumptions about the reactions or preferences of other employees or clients
- using different standards for diverse groups of employees to judge performance.

Different types of discrimination under the Equality Act 2010

- **Direct discrimination:** Treating someone less favourably because of a protected characteristic compared with someone who does not have that characteristic (for example choosing not to recruit someone because they are a person with a disability, and you think they "wouldn't fit in" to the team).
- **Indirect discrimination:** Where a policy, procedure, or way of working that applies to everyone puts people with a particular protected characteristic at a disadvantage, compared with people who do not have that characteristic, unless there is a good reason to justify it. An example is introducing a requirement for all staff to finish work at 6pm. It is arguable that female employees, who statistically bear the larger share of childcare responsibilities could be at a disadvantage if the new working hours prevent them from collecting their children from school or nursery.
- **Associative discrimination:** Treating someone less favourably because they are associated with someone who has a protected characteristic, for example because their partner is transgender.
- **Discrimination by perception:** Treating someone less favourably because you perceive them to have a protected characteristic even if they do not, for example choosing not to promote someone because you mistakenly perceive them to be gay.

- **Discrimination arising from disability:** Treating someone unfavourably because of something connected with that person's disability and where such treatment unjustifiable. Examples include:
 - dismissing or not paying a bonus to someone because of their disability-related absence; or
 - disciplining someone for losing their temper where such loss of temper was out of character and was due to severe pain caused by them having cancer.
- **Failing to make reasonable adjustments:** Employers are legally obliged to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that aspects of employment, or the employer's premises, do not put a disabled person at a substantial disadvantage. Failing to comply with this duty is unlawful. Examples of reasonable adjustments might include:
 - allocating some of the disabled person's duties to a colleague
 - changing their working hours or place of work
 - adjusting procedures for assessing job candidates
 - modifying disciplinary and grievance procedures

Harassment covered by S26 (4) Equality Act 2010

Harassment is unwanted conduct related to a protected characteristic that has the purpose or effect of:

- violating someone else's dignity; or
- creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for someone else.

Sexual Harassment S26 (2 and 3) Equality Act 2010

Sexual harassment is:

- conduct of a sexual nature that has the purpose or effect of violating someone's dignity, or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment; and
- less favourable treatment related to sex or gender reassignment that occurs because of a rejection of, or submission to, sexual conduct.

This includes:

- Requests of a sexual nature
- Unwanted physical contact such as groping, patting, or kissing.
- Unwanted touching of intimate parts
- Physically blocking someone's movement.
- Making sexual remarks about someone's clothing appearance.

The Employment Rights Act 2023 strengthened protections against workplace harassment, which can include language-based harassment. This includes offensive jokes or language that targets a protected characteristic.

You should refer to our Anti-harassment and Anti-bullying policy for further information on our procedure for reporting harassment.

Victimisation

Victimisation occurs when someone is mistreated because they have submitted a discrimination or harassment complaint or have supported someone else's case by providing a witness statement that supports the allegations.

Bullying

There is no legal definition of bullying. However, define bullying as relentless, offensive frightening, malicious, insulting or misuse power usually persistent, that undermines, humiliates, or injures the person.

Bullying can be physical, verbal, or non-verbal conduct. It is not necessarily face to face and can occur via email, phone calls, online or social media. Bullying may occur at work or outside work.

If the bullying relates to a person's protected characteristic, it may also constitute harassment and, therefore, will be unlawful (see Harassment).

You should refer to our Dignity at Work policy for further information on our procedure for reporting bullying.

Equality of opportunity

Recruitment

We take reasonable steps to encourage job applications from as diverse a range of people as possible.

Recruitment decisions must be made without discrimination and all managers involved in recruitment exercises must have completed diversity and inclusion training.

Every recruiting selection panel member should challenge themselves and others to avoid preconceptions, unconscious bias, and prejudice in recruitment decisions.

Career development

Any decision about a person's promotion or professional development must occur without discrimination.

We regularly assess recruitment and promotion selection criteria and processes to avoid discriminatory impact on a certain group.

Inclusion of People with a Disability

Recruiting people with a disability

The recruitment team will consider disabilities before a recruitment process campaign to ensure advertising, application forms and assessments, arrangements for interviews, job descriptions and employee specifications, and selection criteria are as inclusive as possible.

We will ask applicants whether they need any reasonable adjustments to be made to the recruitment process. These may include offering easy access to the premises for an interview, an alternative to a telephone interview for a deaf candidate, providing a suitable chair for an interview with a candidate suffering from back problems etc.

If you take part in the interview process, you must **not** ask job applicants about their health or disability except with prior approval from the HR team. In extreme cases approval may be given where there are specific legal grounds for doing so.

Talking about disability

We recognise that disability can be invisible and difficult to address.

Disability inclusion requires psychological safety, where people feel able to talk freely about their experiences without fear of repercussions.

We must treat individuals with dignity, trust, and respect. However, this is only possible if we treat people with dignity, trust and respect and we expect everyone to follow for this to be achievable.

We do not tolerate ableist language in our organisation. Ableist language is any word or phrase that devalues people who have a disability. It is used intentionally to insult, or it can take the form of the use of negative stereotypes, phrases, assumptions about disabled people. Using ableist language may result in disciplinary action.

Reasonable adjustments

We encourage all employees to tell us if they have a disability so we can support you, for example, by making reasonable adjustments to our premises or to aspects of your role, or to our working practices.

If you are experiencing difficulties at work because of your disability, please contact the HR team to discuss potential reasonable adjustments that may alleviate or minimise such difficulties. We may need to discuss your needs with you and your medical adviser to help us get the right support in place.

For colleagues who are returning from long-term disability-related absence, we have a return-to-work support programme in place. For further information, please contact the HR team. Support

If you have a disability, or you care for someone with a disability, and need emotional support or help with practical issues, please contact our employee assistance programme (EAP) for free, confidential advice. Details of how to access this service are on our intranet.

Also, you may wish to seek a review of your workstation, workplace etc. In these instances, our people told to contact Access to Work (DWP). They are the experts. They will conduct a first survey of the workplace/workstation and provide a report having details of the equipment needed to support a person in the workplace. For further details contact HR.

Training

If you are involved with making decisions about a person's employment, you must attend equality, diversity, and inclusion training.

All new starters must complete equality, diversity, and inclusion training as part of their induction programme.

Every current employee must attend regular equality, diversity, and inclusion training on at least an annual basis.

We want all our people to proactively support our equality, diversity, and inclusion initiatives by attending events and workshops organised by the HR team to educate themselves on the challenges faced by others and how to help alleviate these in the workplace or complete the online training modules.

Monitoring and Review

We analyse diversity and inclusion data (in compliance with our data protection obligations) on an ongoing basis to assess the impact of this policy.

Our people are asked to update their personal details on the Unit 4 system on an annual basis.

The HR analytics are reviewed monthly and presented in a dashboard to SLT for consideration.

Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed periodically to ensure its ongoing relevance and effectiveness.

Any concerns or queries regarding this policy should be discussed with a Senior HR Representative.