

# **CONGLETON TOWN COUNCIL**

## **EQUALITY AND INCLUSION POLICY**

### **OUR EQUALITY AND INCLUSION AMBITION**

We want Congleton to be a place in which everyone's hopes and aspirations can be made real. We want to ensure that no one is held back or excluded and that our Town's success is shared.

This Equality and Inclusion Policy supports that ambition. Our policy sets our vision: recognising the contributions that people from different backgrounds make, actively tackling inequalities and fostering good relationships across our communities.

We want our Town to be a fair, inclusive and safe place for everyone. We want to remove any barriers that arise from inequality, discrimination and lack of opportunity connected to one or more of the characteristics that are protected under the Equality Act 2010. These are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

Our aspirations go even further to include equality of opportunity for people in care, people with caring responsibilities and the inequalities resulting from socio-economic disadvantage. We also recognise that not all disabilities are visible.

This policy states our commitment to tackling inequality on all these grounds, not just because it's our legal duty in some cases but also because doing so helps create a more successful Town.

Our policy sets out the high standards we expect of ourselves. It demonstrates efforts we will undertake to build an inclusive culture within our workforce and organisation. It sets out how we will shape services which actively address inequality and exclusion and address the progressive building of good relations between different communities.

### **DIVERSE CONGLETON**

Congleton is becoming ever more diverse. Securing the benefits of Congleton's diversity by being a more inclusive organisation will help the council to:

- be more creative;
- make decisions that are informed by diverse points of view;
- know our communities well and listen to them more closely;
- design, commission and deliver the most effective possible services; and
- make the best use of our resources.

A wealth of evidence from the public, private and voluntary sectors supports our view that greater equality and inclusion will benefit our citizens, our communities, our colleagues and our partners.

## **INCLUSIVE CONGLETON**

To secure the benefits of diversity we are building an inclusive organisation that actively recognises the contribution that people from different backgrounds make to all aspects of the council's work and the Town's communities.

The values and behaviours set out in our plans and strategies will help us build this inclusivity. Being truly inclusive is not just about welcoming different contributions. Inclusion also means actively tackling inequalities and advancing greater equality, as well as fostering good relations between different people.

Inclusion means removing the barriers – physical, economic or social – that hold people back, so we build a Town in which everyone feels a part. It can also include taking positive action to help those that are disadvantaged to achieve their full potential.

Congleton Town Council is committed to the social model of disability which says that people are disabled by barriers in society not by their impairment or difference, whether that impairment or difference is physical, mental or cognitive. Barriers can be physical, like buildings not having accessible toilets, or they can be caused by people's attitudes, like assuming disabled people are unable to do certain things.

As a public body we are bound by the Public Sector Equality Duty. This policy sets out how we will meet our statutory obligations under this duty, which is defined within the Equality Act as: "A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—

- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it."

Our Equality and Inclusion Policy sets out how we will fulfil these obligations, which apply to all the council's functions.

This Equality and Inclusion Policy applies to the council's roles as a service provider, as an employer, as a leading agency in the Town and in our work with communities.

Creating a successful inclusive Town also means recognising that there are many causes of inequality or exclusion, often inter-connected and mutually reinforcing. We also recognise that some people may require additional support in order that they can engage with and benefit from the opportunities on offer.

In addition to the Equality Act protected characteristics, people can be excluded because they have low income, are socially isolated, live in poor housing or due to poor health. Those with caring responsibilities or who have been in care are more likely to face inequality or exclusion. Some people facing these issues also face inequality because of their Equality Act protected characteristics.

As well as looking at our statutory duties, as set out under the Public Sector Equality Duty, our approach will also consider wider aspirations, such as reducing inequalities of outcome which result from socio-economic disadvantage.

## **MAKING IT HAPPEN**

In the future we want people and organisations, in Congleton and beyond, to look to the council as a model of good practice in addressing equality and inclusion.

We define this as meaning:

- Actively considering equality and inclusion in very practical ways in all that we do so others can readily see the difference it makes
- Leading from the top of the organisation and holding ourselves to account
- Listening to the experiences of people with lived experience of all forms of inequality and exclusion and taking what they tell us into account when we make decisions
- Consider relevant data on equality when making policy and strategic decisions. are made on the basis of the deepest possible understanding of their implications for equality and inclusion
- Showing that we value diversity in how we all speak and behave every day, not just when we're talking about equality
- Being open and transparent about our progress on equality and inclusion, sharing information with our partners and our communities, celebrating successes and learning from experience, including our mistakes
- Having a workforce and council that is diverse in the widest possible sense and in which diversity of background and thought is valued
- Supporting a workplace where colleagues from different backgrounds work together harmoniously and productively and everyone feels valued
- Using policies and practices that demonstrably enable colleagues to fulfil their potential and progress within our organisation
- Delivering and commissioning services that actively promote equality and inclusion
- Working with communities and neighbourhoods to support equality and inclusion at local levels
- Putting equality and inclusion at the heart of our strategic work with partners

Everyone working for Congleton Town Council has a part to play in achieving the goals of this policy. Councillors and senior officers have a particular responsibility because active, visible leadership is essential, and the organisation's leaders commit themselves to this.

Staff representatives have an important role to play and we are committed to enabling them to make an effective contribution. We will also continue to engage and work with voluntary and community organisations in the Town, particularly through the Congleton Partnership.

## **DEALING WITH DISCRIMINATION**

The Council will not tolerate any form of discrimination against anyone within the organisation or its service provision.

Any employee, councillor, partner, supplier or member of the public who feels they have been discriminated against in contravention of this policy should report this to the Chief Officer.

Discrimination and breaches of this policy will be dealt with quickly, sensitively and effectively using the appropriate procedures within employment/personnel or the council's code of conduct. This may include a disciplinary procedure if required.

## WHO COULD SUFFER FROM DISCRIMINATION? – THE PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

The following ‘types of discrimination’ apply to the *protected characteristics* of the Equality Act 2010:

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

and for the *additional characteristics* that we apply here in Congleton:

- people in care, people with caring responsibilities and people of different socio-economic groups.

Together, these make up the *Personal Characteristics* for which this Policy applies.

## TYPES OF DISCRIMINATION

- **Direct Discrimination** is when you’re treated differently and worse than someone else for certain reasons relating to the characteristics. This can be because of who you are, who the person thinks you are, or who you are associated with.
  - For example, if someone is refused a promotion because they are nearing retirement, that would be direct discrimination based on age
- **Indirect Discrimination** is when there’s a policy, practice or rule which applies to everybody in the same way, but it places people who share your characteristic at a disadvantage, and there is not a good reason for it.
  - For example, a job requirement for staff to travel at short notice might be difficult for a woman with young children, and this could be indirect discrimination due to sex because women disproportionately have childcare responsibilities.
- **Harassment** is unwanted behaviour which you find offensive or which makes you feel intimidated or humiliated. It can happen on its own or alongside other forms of discrimination. Harassment on the basis of one of the protected characteristics is illegal, and our Council extends the definition to include harassment on any grounds.
  - Unwanted behaviour could be spoken or written words or abuse, offensive emails, tweets or comments on social networking sites, images, physical gestures, facial expressions or jokes.
- **Bullying** may be defined as the abuse of position or power to coerce others by fear, oppression, persecution or threat. Bullies intend to undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient. While harassment is often conducted in public, bullying is more likely to be behind closed doors.
  - Unlike harassment, bullying itself is not illegal but it is a breach of this policy and will be dealt with in the same way.
- **Pregnancy and Maternity Discrimination** is when you’re treated unfairly because you’re pregnant, breastfeeding or because you’ve recently given birth.
  - For example, if a councillor is asked to resign her seat due to pregnancy, this would be pregnancy and maternity discrimination.

- **Discrimination arising from disability** is when you're treated unfairly because of something connected to your disability.
  - For example, if a member of the public was not allowed to bring their assistance dog to a Council meeting this would be discrimination arising from disability.
- **Failure to make reasonable adjustments for disability** is a type of discrimination that arises when an organisation does not make changes needed to allow you to access their workplace or services
  - These adjustments could be changing the way things are done (e.g. adding toilet breaks to meetings) making physical adjustments (e.g. ramps on stairs for wheelchair users) and adding services (e.g. induction loops for people with hearing aids).
- **Sexual harassment** is defined specifically in the Equality Act 2010 as behaviour that has the effect of violating your dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment due to your sex
  - For example, sexual comments or jokes, physical behaviour, including unwelcome sexual advances, touching and various forms of sexual assault, displaying pictures, photos or drawings of a sexual nature, sending emails with a sexual content
- **Victimisation** is when someone treats you badly or subjects you to a detriment because you complain about discrimination or help someone who has been the victim of discrimination.
  - For example, if an employee complained about harassment due to their gender reassignment and then they were excluded from a pay review, this may be victimisation.

## EQUALITY AND INCLUSION AS AN EMPLOYER

The Council is committed to making full use of the talents and resources of all our employees. We will recruit, reward, develop and promote people based on their skills, qualifications, aptitude and performance and not based on any of the Personal Characteristics.

### Recruitment

We will hire the most suitable person for the job regardless of their Personal Characteristics. We will ensure that:

- All our job opportunities are open to all applicants and everyone is given equal consideration.
- We recognise that some applicants may require reasonable adjustments to complete the recruitment process.
- Job advertisements will never directly discriminate e.g. we will not use language such as 'applicants should be 25-35 years of age'.
- We will positively encourage applications from a diverse set of people and will always state that the Council is an Equal Opportunities employer.
- We will always state that roles are open to those who may require flexible working arrangements.

- We will craft our job advertisements to avoid bias, for example:
  - It has been shown that certain words such as ‘competitive’, ‘driven’ have male bias whilst others, like ‘collaborate’, ‘responsible’, have female bias – ads should include a balanced mix or none of these.
  - Phrases such as ‘young graduate’ or ‘highly experienced manager’ may imply age bias and will be avoided.
- Where possible, we will remove the Personal Characteristics from application processes and forms so that any subconscious bias is minimised.
- We will select only based on the skills, experience and qualifications needed for the job.
- We will ask successful applicants to complete an employment medical questionnaire irrespective of age, disability, maternity or any other protected or additional characteristic.

We will continuously monitor our recruitment and selection process to ensure it is in line with the letter and the spirit of this Equality and Inclusion Policy.

### **Pay and Promotion**

We will promote and develop the careers of all our staff regardless of age, gender, disability or any other characteristic. In addition, we will conduct staff appraisals based on performance and contribution alone regardless of characteristics.

We may offer specific length of service provisions relating to pay and benefits, but only where this is justified in that the arrangement rewards loyalty, encourages motivation or recognises relevant experience. Access to other benefits including the occupational pension and bonuses will apply equally to all.

### **Training and Development**

We are committed to continuing to develop our people so that they can make the maximum contribution to the Council and achieve their potential. Suitable Training and Development will be provided to everyone to ensure they are all able to achieve their full potential regardless of Personal Characteristics.

Opportunities are open to all those they are relevant for and, whilst priority is given to training and development that is linked to the Council’s aims and objectives, we will also support initiatives that go beyond the immediate needs of the job if they will help to grow our breadth of knowledge and experience that will benefit the Council in the longer term.

### **Flexible Working**

The Council provides flexible working practices as a right for all employees. We recognise that people with certain characteristics such as parents, those with caring responsibilities, those with a disability and those undergoing gender reassignment may have a specific need for flexible working and will make all reasonable adjustments to accommodate their needs.

Flexible working encompasses practices such as flexible hours, remote working and job share along with any other practical arrangements that enable the role to be satisfactorily fulfilled.

## **Redundancy and Retirement**

The Council does not have a default age for retirement.

We will never select for redundancy based on maternity leave, gender, disability or any other characteristic (protected or additional). Selection for redundancy will not be based on length of service alone as this is indirectly discriminatory.

Any voluntary redundancy scheme will not be based on age related criteria unless such criteria may be justified and fairly applied.

## **Our Team**

Our Employee Handbook spells out what we expect from our people with regard to equality, inclusion and diversity.

All our team have a responsibility to ensure that this Policy is applied in everything we do. We will train them on this Policy and encourage a culture of awareness and continuous learning about equality, diversity and inclusion.

We will encourage and support our people in implementing the letter and the spirit of this Policy, to identify, disseminate and reward good practice and identify areas for improvement.

## **EQUALITY AND INCLUSION AS A SERVICE PROVIDER**

All the people we serve must have an equal opportunity to receive and participate in our Council services.

We will treat all our clients and partners in a fair, inclusive and non-discriminatory way according to the values set out in this Policy. We will ensure that the Personal Characteristics do not prevent anyone within our remit from fully accessing our services

We will endeavour to reach out to anyone who may be at risk of exclusion and ensure they have full access to the Council and our services. Where they are less able to participate, we will take positive action to ensure they are not excluded.

Where any service is delivered by contractors, partners or volunteers, the Council will ensure they understand and adhere to this Policy.

## **EQUALITY AND INCLUSION IN OUR COMMUNITY**

We recognise that as a Council we have a community leadership role. Our local residents, businesses, community organisations and visitors have the right to expect the highest standards of tolerance, fairness and inclusion in everything we do.

Our councillors and staff are expected to role-model the values set out in this Policy, including celebrating the diversity within our community and seeking the most constructive ways to engage with everyone in it.

We will actively seek out groups, events, activities and information that may help us learn more about those with the Personal Characteristics to help foster improved understanding across our community.

We strive to involve and listen to underrepresented minorities and those with the Personal Characteristics at risk of exclusion and, in doing so, continually learn how to improve our approach to equality, diversity and inclusion.

## **EQUALITY AND INCLUSION IN OUR DEMOCRACY**

We believe that by mirroring the diversity of the community we seek to serve we will serve it better, so we would like our Council to be as diverse as possible.

We will encourage people from underrepresented minorities and with the Personal Characteristics to stand for the Council wherever possible.

When councillors are to be elected, the Council will ensure that local residents are fully aware of the opportunity to stand by making information as widely available as possible.

When the Council seeks a co-opted member, we will advertise the position widely using the same standards as for recruiting members of council staff, to avoid bias and drive diversity and inclusion.

We will do all we can to ensure that councillors who have any of the Personal Characteristics will not be disadvantaged with regard to attending Council meetings, committee meetings or carrying out Council duties.

We will also encourage people from all backgrounds and especially underrepresented minorities and those with the Personal Characteristics to vote in our elections, and ensure they have the opportunity to do so.

## **OUR COMMITMENT**

We commit to fulfilling both the letter and the spirit of this Equality and Inclusion Policy as well as our legal obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and any other subsequent legislation relating to equality. We require our contractors and the organisations that we fund to abide by all the equality legislation that applies to them and to assist the council in upholding its obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

We commit to being a learning organisation about equality and inclusion, always ready to improve our practice and to address new issues as they arise. We will seek to understand and address the root causes of inequality and exclusion in Congleton and to focus our efforts on tackling those root causes. If we make mistakes, we will put things right and learn from our experience.

Wherever it is possible to do so we will promote good equality and inclusion practice amongst our partners in the Town and in our region and seek to learn from their best practice. We will engage with communities and voluntary sector partners, listening to their views and taking them into account when we make decisions.

We commit to continuous improvement, and to deliver this we will:

- Recognise, support and empower those responsible for promoting equality in our organisation
- Listen to and understand the diverse needs of all people to make our information, services and products more accessible and inclusive
- Review the diversity of our workforce in order to identify areas for improvement and set ourselves equality goals
- Ensure that equal opportunities are integral to how we recruit and treat our workforce
- Address all allegations of discrimination, harassment, bullying and victimisation in an effective and timely manner
- Play our part in promoting good relations between people from different backgrounds
- Share good equality practice and improve outcomes for all those living, working, studying in or visiting Congleton
- Measure and share our progress and success.