

Equal Opportunity Policy

Introduction

The Board of Medway Foodbank believes that all people are created equal in the sight of God, and seeks to promote all the foodbank's activities in ways which recognise and encourage that principle.

Medway Foodbank is committed to ensuring that, as far as practicable, all employees, workers, casual workers, volunteers, job applicants, service users and trustees and other people with whom we deal are treated fairly and are not subjected to unfair or unlawful discrimination.

This policy is not contractual but sets out the way in which Medway Foodbank aims to manage equal opportunity although we may vary, replace, or terminate it at any stage.

This policy applies to all employees and workers, including casual workers, volunteers and agency staff (referred to collectively as "workers" for the purposes of this policy, where relevant).

Aims of this policy

A key aim of our Equal Opportunity Policy is that we provide a working environment in which current and potential workers feel comfortable and confident that they will be treated fairly and equally, irrespective of their age, disability, trans-gender status, marital or civil partner status, pregnancy or maternity, race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation ("protected characteristics" as per the Equality Act 2010) or indeed any other characteristic unrelated to the performance of the job.

The principles of non-discrimination and equality of opportunity also apply to the way in which we treat trustees, visitors, service users, suppliers, partners, stakeholders, and former colleagues.

We seek to ensure that no one suffers, either directly or indirectly, as a result of unlawful discrimination. This extends beyond the individual's own characteristics, to cover discrimination by association and by perception.

We recognise that an effective Equal Opportunity Policy will help all employees/volunteers to develop to their full potential, which is clearly in the best interests of both employees/volunteers and our organisation. We aim to ensure that we not only observe the relevant legislation but also do whatever is necessary to provide genuine equality of opportunity.

We expect everyone who works/volunteers for us to be treated with, and to treat others, with respect. Our aim is to provide a working environment free from harassment, intimidation or discrimination in any form that may affect the dignity of the individual.

Discrimination

Discrimination may be direct or indirect, and can take different forms, for example:

- treating any individual less favourably than others on grounds of a protected characteristic
- expecting a person, solely on the grounds of a protected characteristic, to comply with requirements that are different to the requirements for others
- imposing requirements on an individual that are in effect more onerous than they are on others. This would include applying a condition (which is not warranted by the requirements of the position) which makes it more difficult for members of a particular group to comply than others not of that group
- harassment i.e. unwanted conduct which has "the purpose, intentionally or unintentionally, of violating dignity, or which creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment" for the individual
- victimisation - i.e. treating a person less favourably because he or she has committed a "protected act". "Protected acts" include previous legal proceedings brought against the employer or the perpetrator, or the giving of evidence at a disciplinary or grievance hearing or at tribunal, or making complaints about the perpetrator or the employer or their alleged discriminatory practices
- discrimination by association, i.e. someone is discriminated against because they associate with someone who possesses a protected characteristic
- discrimination by perception, i.e. discrimination on the grounds that the person is perceived as belonging to a particular group, e.g. sexual orientation, religion or belief, irrespective of whether or not this is correct
- any other act or omission of an act, which has the effect of disadvantaging one person against another, purely on the above grounds.

On all occasions where those with managerial responsibility for workers are required to make decisions between them, for example disciplinary matters, selection for training, promotion, pay increases, awards etc. it is essential that merit, experience, skills and temperament are considered as objectively as possible.

Responsibility for this policy

The overall responsibility for implementing and monitoring the effectiveness of this policy rests with the senior management of Medway Foodbank.

As an employer we are liable for the actions of our workers and therefore all managers have a crucial role to play in promoting equality of opportunity in their own areas of responsibility on a day to day basis.

All workers irrespective of their role or seniority, should familiarise themselves with this policy, and be aware of their responsibility for promoting equality of opportunity and not discriminating unfairly or harassing colleagues or job applicants, nor encouraging others to do so or tolerating such behaviour. Any worker who witnesses behaviour or decisions that seem contrary to this policy, or experience it directly, are encouraged to challenge these or raise the issues with their Line Manager.

Disciplinary action, including dismissal, may be taken against any employee found guilty of unfair discrimination or harassment.

Employment practice

Medway Foodbank will support equal opportunity practice across all elements of employment/volunteer recruitment, as follows:

- Recruitment and selection will, as far as possible, be conducted on an objective basis and will focus on the applicants' suitability for the job and their ability to fulfil the job requirements. Our interest is in the skills, abilities, qualifications, experience, aptitude and the potential of individuals to do the job.
- Job opportunities and training will be communicated and made available to everyone on a fair and equal basis.
- We will ensure that all of our policies including compensation, benefits and any other relevant issues associated with terms and conditions of employment, are formulated and applied without regard to a protected characteristic or indeed any other characteristic unrelated to the performance of the job. These will be reviewed regularly to ensure there is no discrimination.
- Employees will not be subjected to any detriment if they wish to join our pension scheme, nor offered any inducement not to join our scheme.
- We will consider any requests for flexible working in a way which aims to balance the needs of the individual and Medway Foodbank.
- We will make reasonable adjustments to the workplace and/or working arrangements for people with disabilities where they cause disadvantage to the person.
- Harassment or bullying will not be tolerated, and any individual who feels they have been subjected to harassment or bullying should report this to their manager or an appropriate senior member of staff. Equally, anyone who witnesses incidents of harassment or bullying should report this.
- When dealing with disciplinary matters, care will be taken that employees/volunteers who have, are perceived to have, or are associated with someone who has, a protected characteristic are not dismissed or disciplined for performance or behaviour which could be overlooked or condoned in others.
- We will not discriminate against individuals who have left our organisation by providing references that are not based on facts nor fail to provide one based on a protected characteristic.
- We have no fixed retirement age and anyone who wishes to work beyond state pension age may choose to do so.

Service delivery

We aim to make our services as accessible and responsive as possible to all existing and potential service users and to provide a service to them which recognises and respects their differences.

We undertake to listen to our service users and involve them in the development of services which respect and value their diversity.

We reserve the right to withdraw our services to any service user if that individual behaves in a discriminatory, disruptive or abusive manner to any worker, trustee or other person.

Breach of this policy

Employees/volunteers who believe they have been treated in a way which is contrary to this policy and have not been able to resolve this informally are advised to raise this in line with our grievance process. An employee/volunteer who brings a complaint of discrimination must not be less favourably treated.

Any breach of this policy by employees/volunteers will be fully investigated and may lead to disciplinary action.

Communication of this policy

All job applicants, workers and volunteers will be made aware of this policy. In addition, employees/volunteers will be reminded of this policy from time to time through such means as emails, training events etc.

Data Protection

Relevant data will be collected to support this policy, and retained in accordance with our data retention protocols. Medway Foodbank treats personal data collected by workers or applicants for the purposes of equal opportunity monitoring, in accordance with our Data Protection Policy. Information about how data is used and the basis for processing personal data is provided in our privacy statement. The Data Protection Policy and Privacy Policy can be found in the 'Policies' section in the blue footer of the home page of our website.

Inappropriate access or disclosure of personal data constitutes a data breach and should be reported in accordance with our Data Protection Policy immediately. It may also constitute a disciplinary offence, which will be dealt with under our disciplinary procedure.

Implementation, monitoring and review of this policy

This policy will take effect from date of review by the trustees. The trustees and Project Manager have overall responsibility for implementing and monitoring this policy, which will be reviewed on a regular basis following its implementation and may be changed from time to time.

Approved by trustees: February 2024

Review Date: February 2025