

Equal opportunities

General Statement

1. Worcestershire County Council are committed to preventing and eliminating all forms of unjustifiable and unlawful discrimination, both as an employer and a service provider, pursuing equality of opportunity for all. We undertake to ensure that everyone has fair access to employment with us and will take all possible steps to help our staff implement this commitment. Worcestershire County Council will only take into account personal circumstances and characteristics which we can justify as being relevant to access to services or employment.

A Shared Responsibility

2. Each County Councillor is accountable to the electorate for ensuring equality of opportunity in all County Council service areas and in employment.
3. Each Chief Officer is responsible for co-ordinating the operation of and monitoring the Policy on behalf of the County Council.
4. Every manager has a responsibility to ensure that service delivery and employment decisions are always in accordance with this Policy.
5. All employees must be made aware of their responsibility towards the practice of equal opportunities. Employees are responsible for their own behaviour being acceptable within the terms of the Policy and should inform managers if they are concerned that discrimination may be taking place.
6. The Council recognises the important role which Trade Unions and employee representatives can play in pursuing the equality of opportunity.

Equal Opportunities in Employment

7. Worcestershire County Council seek to ensure genuine equality of opportunity in all activities undertaken by the Council as an employer. Employment policies, practices and procedures will be subject to, and consistent with, relevant legislation and Parliamentary approved Codes of Practice.

What is Discrimination?

8. Discrimination is "treating people differently". Examples are treating people differently on the grounds of gender, disability, race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, religious beliefs, culture, age, marital status, care of dependants, sexuality, class, economic status, criminal record, HIV status, trade union or political beliefs.
9. **Justifiable discrimination** is where to treat people differently is permitted by law and acceptable in a given situation. For example, people may only get access to some services if those services are considered appropriate or relevant to their circumstances.

10. **Unjustifiable discrimination** can be:

- **Direct discrimination** is treating a person, without justification, less favourably than another, particularly because of one's feelings, assumptions or prejudices about the characteristics, attributes or circumstances of that person. This can include certain forms of harassment or abuse.
- **Indirect discrimination** is applying, without justification, a request or condition which, on the face of it applies to everyone but which, in practice, form a greater obstacle to a person or group of persons with particular characteristics, attributes or circumstances.

11. It is important to recognise that, whilst discrimination can be obvious and intentional, it is often not intended and happens because of inadequate consideration or insufficient knowledge or awareness.

Our strategy to prevent unjustifiable discrimination

Integration with processes:

12. All reviews of policy, service proposals and examinations of capital projects, whether by members or officers, must include a full appraisal of equal opportunities implications. One way of ensuring that the implications of the policy are considered when making significant decisions would be to use a standard heading "Equal Opportunities Implications" in relevant committee items.

Consultation:

13. Recognising the positive contribution which all members of the community make, structures and processes will be improved or, where necessary, established to enable genuine consultation with local groups, service users and employees. Consultation with trade unions and employee representatives is an important part of this process. The County Council will aim to explain their policies and practices, listen to people's views and consider them fully when planning for the future.

Provision of Information:

14. The County Council will aim to make information about their services and employment available in forms appropriate to all members of the community. They will seek to ensure that everyone is aware of Council services.

15. Specific action might, for example, include publishing key documents in the most common languages and in alternative formats for people with disabilities; outreach work to increase awareness and understanding; wheelchair access, mobility support; interpreters for non-English speaking peoples at meetings; sign language interpreting.

Training:

16. The County Council will develop a programme of staff training which seeks to ensure awareness of and sensitivity to issues of discrimination and equality of opportunity.

Monitoring:

17. The County Council will seek to develop and maintain systems to monitor the effectiveness of the policy and practices developed under it. They would be, in any event, part of the monitoring of the Medium Term Plan and Annual Plans.

Complaints:

18. The County Council's complaints arrangements will be made widely available and the County Council will, whenever possible, seek to address and resolve any complaints from the public about unjustifiable discrimination. This in no way affects any other avenues of redress open to members of the public. Separate grievance procedures exist for employment matters.

Publicity:

19. The County Council will, whenever appropriate, promote themselves as a local authority committed to equality of opportunity in service delivery and employment.