

LINKS: THE CHESTERFIELD AND NORTH EAST DERBYSHIRE COUNCIL FOR VOLUNTARY SERVICE AND ACTION LIMITED

EQUALITY & DIVERSITY POLICY

1. STATEMENT OF INTENT

Links has as its central value a belief in promoting equality and valuing diversity in all its work they provide to groups and organisations and the communities they serve. It recognises that many groups and individuals within society have been and continue to be discriminated against, both directly and indirectly, on the grounds of, for example, their race, nationality, ethnic or cultural origins, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, religious belief, including non-belief, political belief, social class, employment status, low income, mental health, marital status and civil partnership, gender reassignment, HIV/AIDS status, appearance, refugee status, caring responsibilities and unrelated criminal conviction. (This list is not in any order of priority.)

The Equality Act 2010 identifies 9 protected characteristics which are included in the above list they are:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender Reassignment
- Marriage & Civil Partnership
- Pregnancy & Maternity
- Race
- Religion or Belief
- Sex
- Sexual Orientation

Links is opposed to all forms of oppression and discrimination that exists in society and we are fully committed to challenging them both in terms of employment and service provision.

Links recognises and will not tolerate any type of discrimination:

- Direct discrimination: treating someone less favourably than another person because of a protected characteristic.
- Discrimination by association: discriminating against an individual because they associate with another person who possesses a protected characteristic;
- Perception discrimination: discriminating against an individual because others think they possess a particular protected characteristic, even if the person does not possess this characteristic.
- Indirect discrimination: Links will endeavour to not implement any condition, rule, policy or practice which applies to everyone but particularly disadvantages people who share a protected characteristic.
- Harassment: employees can complain of any behaviour that they find offensive even if it is not directed at them or they do not possess the relevant characteristic themselves. Links will not tolerate the harassment of its staff by people who are not employed by Links.

- Victimisation: Links will not treat any member of staff badly who supports or has made a complaint or raised a grievance.

Links will adhere to the requirements and guidance contained in all relevant equality legislation and regulations in all of its work. These include:

- The Equal Pay Act 1970 (Replaced by Equality Act 2010)
- The Equal Pay (Amendment) Act 1983 (Replaced by Equality Act 2010)
- The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974
- The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (Replaced by Equality Act 2010)
- The Gender Reassignment Regulations 1999
- The Race Relation Act 1976
- The Race Relation (Amendment) Act 2000
- The Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- The Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- The Human Rights Acts 1998 and 2001
- The Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003
- The Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2003
- The Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003
- The Equality Act 2010

The above list is by no means exhaustive and our policy includes any other relevant legislation, regulations and codes of practice including any amendments to them, particularly arising from the Equality Act 2010 that would assist Links to fulfil its commitments by recognising expertise, abilities and needs of the diverse voluntary and community (VCS) groups we serve. Links will also acknowledge the right to dignity and respect of every human being that the organisation comes across.

Every possible step will be taken to ensure the active implementation of this policy and that all VCS groups are supported according to their needs with aim of enabling them to better support their service users as part of a total equality service. No one seeking access to services from Links will be disadvantaged by conditions or requirements that cannot be shown to be justifiable.

Every board member and employee of the organisation has a responsibility to implement this policy and equality training will be made available.

Links recognises that passive policies are inadequate as a means of combating discrimination. It therefore commits itself to taking positive action to address barriers experienced by people who are discriminated against.

Links will demonstrate its commitment to equal opportunities by:

- Working in an anti-racist, anti-sexist and any other anti-discriminatory manner;
- Requiring its Board members and employees actively to promote and implement this policy throughout all aspects of the organisation' work and services;
- Requiring its members (both individuals and organisations) to respect and support the principle of this policy;
- Recognising its responsibilities under all relevant anti-discriminatory legislation and regulations;

- Providing relevant information, training, advice and other resources to staff, board members and member organisations on working in an anti-discriminatory way;
- Listening to the voices of service users and marginalised groups within the VCS sector who are experiencing discrimination;
- Encouraging co-operation, networking, consultation, participation and negotiation between voluntary and statutory agencies in a way which promotes equal opportunities to include all sections of society;
- Encouraging good practice on equal opportunities within VCS organisations,
- Monitoring and evaluating this policy on a regular basis;
- Remaining flexible and responding to change;
- Conducting staff recruitment in a way that will ensure that selection is based on merit;
- Seeking to deal swiftly and fairly with any accusation of harassment or discrimination in whatever form it may occur and whether direct or indirect;
- Providing a supportive and welcoming environment that, wherever possible, meets the diverse needs of the groups within the VCS.

2. WHAT THIS POLICY COVERS

This policy aims to cover all aspects of the operation of Links. In particular it covers:

- Employment of paid workers;
- Membership of the organisation and the Board of trustees;
- Service Delivery;
- Access and Premises;
- Publicity.

2.1 Employment of Paid Workers

In addition to abiding by all relevant anti-discriminatory legislation and regulations Links is committed to carrying out the following:

2.1.1. Supported employment programmes

Links will work with those programmes where the employee receives the rate for the job and additional training and support. Links is opposed to all benefits plus schemes.

2.1.2. Job description

Every job will have a clear and concise job description setting out precisely what the worker will be expected to do. The job description should include the requirement on the employee to work in a way that promotes the equal opportunities policy.

2.1.3. Person Specification

Every job will have a person specification outlining the minimum essential skills, abilities, knowledge, experience and qualifications necessary to carry out the tasks set out in the job description. In addition, desirable requirements may be listed where it is genuinely felt that these would assist the undertaking of the duties.

Formal qualifications should not be required unless absolutely essential.

2.1.4. Advertising

All job vacancies will be advertised openly and as widely as possible (e.g. local and national press, via word of mouth and circulars to community organisations) unless there is a redundancy of an existing employee for whom the vacancy is suitable.

Where funding allows, job vacancy adverts will be targeted at members of oppressed groups via specialist press. And existing relevant networks. All advertisements must include an equal opportunities statement. Where appropriate adverts can encourage applications from particular groups within the community. For example, the advert could include a statement saying "Links particularly welcomes applications from people with disabilities for this post, as they are under-represented in the workforce."

2.1.5. Applications

All applicants will be sent an application form, job description, person specification, copy of the equal opportunities policy statement and any other relevant documents.

Applicants should be informed that CVs will not be considered.

2.1.6. Selection and recruitment

Links is committed, wherever practicable and within the framework of the law, to achieving and retaining a workforce which reflects the aims of the organisation.

Links will implement equality practices and procedures in order to ensure that individual workers are treated fairly and that decisions on recruitment and selection are based on objective criteria.

All aspects of recruitment will involve a Links Board member. Senior staff, such as the Chief Executive will provide relevant guidance and support to enable Board members to make objective and informed decisions.

Recruitment methods must avoid informal discussions which may discriminate against certain groups.

Selection procedures should take account of the value of unpaid community and voluntary work and of experience gained in domestic or family work. Throughout the selection procedure the only information about a candidate which should be used should be that contained on the application form, together with information obtained during the interview.

Links will only ask health-related questions to determine the following:

- whether any reasonable adjustments are needed for the candidate to take part in the recruitment process;
- help to decide whether an applicant can carry out a function that is essential to the job;
- to monitor diversity among people making applications for the job;
- enable Links to take positive action to assist disabled people to be selected for interview.

Shortlisting should be carried out by the whole panel on the basis of the essential requirements listed in the person specification.

Prior to the interview the panel should agree questions to be asked, who is to ask which question and how to record notes.

Interviews will always be conducted by recruitment panels consisting of at least three people, including at least one Board member and staff who have been advised in interviewing techniques and in the application of the Equality and Diversity Policy.

All questions asked at interview will relate directly to the person specification and job description. All possible efforts will be made to facilitate the employment of any candidate with a disability or additional needs.

The decision on whom to appoint must be agreed by a majority of the interviewers.

Training and support in equal opportunities recruitment and selection procedures is made available to all Board members and staff. In particular, Links ensures that all those who are involved in the recruitment process have been suitably trained to identify and assess the relevance and circumstances of offences. Links also ensure they have received appropriate guidance and training in the relevant legislation relating to the employment of ex-offenders, e.g. the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act.

At interview, or in a separate discussion, Links will ensure that an open and measured discussion takes place on the subject of any offences or other matter that might be relevant to the position. Failure to reveal information that is directly relevant to the position sought could lead to withdrawal of an offer of employment, or subsequent dismissal.

Links makes every subject of a DBS Check aware of its existing policy and practice on safeguarding vulnerable people and makes a copy available on request.

Links undertakes to discuss any matter revealed in a Disclosure with the person seeking the position before withdrawing a conditional offer of employment.

Having a criminal record will not necessarily bar any job applicant from working for Links. It will depend on the nature of the position, the circumstances and background of the offences committed.

Recruitment and selection will be on merit by open and fair competition and will be conducted to ensure that no job applicant receives less favourable treatment on any of the grounds laid out in the first section of this Policy. Written records will be kept of the shortlisting, interviews and outcomes for a limited period to provide evidence in case of claims of discrimination.

Links is committed to the principle of flexible working arrangements with regard to how and when hours are worked (see also Links Job sharing Policy).

2.1.7. References

References will be used to support or deny the appointment of a candidate, and not to choose between candidates.

2.1.8. Terms and conditions of employment

Conditions of employment will incorporate good practice on equal opportunities issues as well as adhering to employment legislation. This may require operating flexibly and sensitively to take account of any needs of staff members who have domestic or family responsibilities or who have medical or other personal needs.

Written grievance and disciplinary procedures are not part of the terms and conditions of employment, but staff are consulted before changes are made.

2.2.9. Staff Support and supervision

All staff should receive support, supervision and line management, which should be carried out with due regard to equal opportunities.

Adjustments will be made as needed for staff with a physical, sensory, mental health impairment, or learning disability. All reasonable adaptations will be made to: hours, location of work, work stations and financial or other assistance to enable the carrying out of duties relevant to the post. Referrals to appropriate government schemes of assistance will be made in relevant cases.

2.2. Membership of the Organisation

2.2.1. Membership of Links

The membership of Links shall reflect the diversity of the VCS that Links serves. Composition of the membership will be monitored regularly and steps will be taken, if necessary, to encourage under-represented groups to become members.

2.2.2. The Board

The membership of the Board of Links shall reflect the diversity of the VCS that Links serves. Composition of the Board will be monitored annually, and, if necessary, under-represented groups will be encouraged to make nominations.

Support and training will be offered to assist individual Board members to participate fully. Support will be provided in the form of meeting out of pocket expenses, making meetings fully accessible and participatory, providing papers in appropriate formats, and providing translation or signing facilities where necessary.

2.3 Service Delivery

Prioritising service provision

Links aims to provide services to all sections of the community. However, in recognition of the disadvantages and discrimination faced by certain sectors of the community, priority is given to disadvantaged groups. In particular Links prioritises work with groups who experience discrimination by raising awareness of racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination on the grounds of gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, religion, political belief, social class, employment status, low income, mental health, marital status, HIV/AIDS status, appearance, refugee status, caring responsibilities and unrelated criminal conviction.

2.4. Access and Premises

2.4.1 Access to services and information

Links aims to make all areas of its services (advice, training and information) as accessible as possible.

In particular Links aims to ensure the following:

- that accessible premises are used for training and meetings;
- that travel and carers costs are offered to people attending Links meetings;
- that signers, loop systems, other aids and interpreters are available on request;
- that information is made available where necessary on tape, in Braille, in large print or in translation;
- that issues of safety, access to venues and timings of meetings are taken into account to address the needs of the diverse sections of the VCS;

- that particular needs (e.g. religious or cultural) or responsibilities (e.g. childcare and other dependants) of people are taken into account.

2.4.2. Premises

Links current premises are fully accessible and Links will continue to make improvement where necessary to ensure accessibility for all. Links aims to ensure that accessible premises are used for training and meetings.

2.5. Publicity

In all its publicity and information materials, Links tries to:

- avoid jargon and use clear, direct language;
- use positive images of a wide range of groups;
- reach all sections of the VCS by advertising in a wide range of appropriate publications and locations'.
- target particular groups where appropriate;
- produce materials in a variety of formats (e.g. on tape, in Braille, in large print, or in translation), where requested;
- proactively visit disadvantaged groups and offer Links services.
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3. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING AND EVALUATION

3.1 Policy Implementation

Links regards the implementation of its equal opportunities policy as an ongoing process. Responsibility for implementing and monitoring the policy rests with the Board with pro-active support and guidance from the Chief Executive. However, every Board member and employee has a personal responsibility to accept, adhere to and promote this Policy at all times. In Particular, staff are expected to co-operate with measures taken to implement this Policy and take particular care to ensure that enquiries from groups facing disadvantage are dealt with in a way which, those groups find helpful, relevant and appropriate.

3.2. Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation takes place in a variety of ways, including:

- the Board receiving regular reports from its recruitment panels, sub-groups and staff;
- all staff receiving line management which includes monitoring the equal opportunities aspects of their work;
- major projects managed by Links are regularly evaluated by means of questionnaires, surveys and other forms of consultation
- specific surveys are carried out from time to time with communities experiencing disadvantages;
- the results of any monitoring and evaluation exercises are fed into priorities for work and future planning.

4. COMPLAINTS UNDER THIS POLICY

4.1. General Complaints from Staff

Any complaints or concerns relating to the ineffective practice, or non-enforcement of this Policy should be raised either informally with line managers or the Chief Executive or formally, in which case the steps laid out in Links' Grievance Procedure should be followed. Staff and Board members are encouraged to draw to the Chief Executive's attention any improvements, which may be needed to this Policy or its operation.

4.2 Service Provision

Any individual or group wishing to complain about any aspect of service provision by Links should follow the procedures outlined in Links' Complaints Policy.

4.3 Freedom from Victimisation

As far as is reasonably practical, Links will ensure employees or service users who make a complaint under these procedures are free from victimisation.

5. FURTHER INFORMATION

If you have any comments or queries about this policy, or if there is anything in it that you do not understand, or if you would like a copy of it in a different language or format, please contact James Lee, Chief Executive, Links, No. 1 Rose Hill East, Chesterfield, S40 1NU

Tel. 01246 274 844 email james.lee@linkscvs.org.uk

ADOPTED BY THE LINKS BOARD:

April 11th 2017

TO BE REVIEWED NO LATER THAN:

April 2020

Appendix A

Procedures for dealing with breaches of the policy

- a) In the case of paid staff, a serious breach of this policy may be grounds for disciplinary action.
- b) In the case of members (including Board members), a serious breach of this policy may result in termination of membership and removal from the Board, in line with the procedures contained within the Memorandum of Agreement and Articles of Association (which includes calling a Special General Meeting).
- c) In the case of honorary officers, a serious breach of this policy may result in the other Board members voting to remove them from office. But they cannot be removed from the Board other than by calling a Special General Meeting, as above.