



FAMILIES TOGETHER SUFFOLK (FAMILIES TOGETHER)

EQUALITY, FAIRNESS AND DIVERSITY POLICY AND PROCEDURE

1 Policy Statement

Families Together is committed to the 2010 Equality Act and 1998 Human Rights Act by developing an organisational culture that respects equality and human rights and welcomes and values difference in all aspects of its work. A commitment to equal opportunities and the fundamental rights of individuals is at the heart of our work.

To help us achieve this Families Together has in place policies and procedures relating to staff and volunteers that are designed to uphold the rights enshrined in both 2010 Equality Act and 1998 Human Rights Act. Employees, trustees and other volunteers are, therefore required to comply with all policies and procedures designed to ensure respect for equality and human rights. Families Together ensures all its other policies and procedures comply with this policy.

Families Together is committed to offering equality in age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, political opinion, sex and sexual orientation.

The policy reflects Families Together's commitment to the Human Rights Act 1998, the extension of the law on harassment and the Equality and Human Rights Commission's Codes of Practice for Employment, Equal Pay and Services, Public Functions and Associations.

Families Together is committed to a culture that does not tolerate victimisation, harassment or bullying. Families Together will investigate and take action on any reports of practice, which trustees, staff, volunteers or families believe to be unfair or discriminatory.

All staff are made aware that unfair or discriminatory treatment of another individual will result in the consideration of disciplinary proceedings and will normally be treated as serious misconduct warranting dismissal.

2 Definitions and context

2.1 Equal Opportunities - the Organisation aims to ensure that policies, procedures and practices do not unfairly discriminate against our employees, volunteers, stakeholders and service users. The Organisation aims to treat people fairly and equitably regardless of whom they are, their background or their lifestyle.

2.2 Diversity - the Organisation aims to ensure that all people are valued as individuals and are able to maximise their potential and contribution. It recognises that people from

different backgrounds can bring fresh ideas and a different approach that can make the way we work and learn more fun, more creative, more efficient and more innovative.

2.3 Direct Discrimination - as defined in law, occurs when a person is dealt with less favourably than other people because of a 'protected characteristic'. These are defined in the Equality Act 2010 as being:

- **Age** – a person of a particular age group, but does not apply to those under the age of 18.
- **Disability** – a person who has a physical or mental impairment, where the impairment has a substantial and long term effect on the person's ability to carry out day-to-day activities.
- **Gender Reassignment** – a person who is proposing to undergo, is undergoing or has undergone a process, or part of a process, for the purpose of reassigning the person's gender by changing physiological or other attributes of gender.
- **Marriage or Civil Partnership** – Marriage or Civil Partnership – A person has the protected characteristic of marriage and civil partnership if the person is married or is a civil partner.
- **Pregnancy and Maternity** – a woman who is pregnant has a protected characteristic for the whole pregnancy and for a period of 26 weeks from the day she gives birth (in the case of a still born child the 26 week period exists if the birth takes place after the 24th week of pregnancy). A woman who has given birth and is breast-feeding has a protective characteristic when accessing premises, services and public functions.
- **Race** – a person or group of people defined by their race, colour, nationality, including citizenship, and ethnic or national origins. A racial group can include more than two distinct racial groups; e.g. Black Britons would comprise of those people who are both black and who are British citizens.
- **Religion or Belief** - a person's religion, religious or philosophical belief, lack of religion or lack of religious or philosophical belief. A belief will affect a person's choices or the way they live for it to be considered a protected characteristic.
- **Sex** – a person who is a man or a woman.
- **Sexual Orientation** – a person's sexual attraction towards a person of the same sex, another sex, or people of both sexes.
- This Policy uses a wider definition of characteristics and includes caste, caring responsibility, mental health, class, HIV status, employment status, unrelated criminal convictions, and union activities.

2.4 Associated Discrimination is direct discrimination against a person because they associate with another person who possesses a protected characteristic.

E.g. a person is refused entry to the library because the person they are with has limited mobility and uses crutches to help them move around.

2.5 Discrimination by Perception is direct discrimination against a person because it is perceived that they possess a particular protective characteristic.

E.g. a man who is perceived to be a woman because they have a high voice on the phone is refused access to a men only service. This would be sex discrimination because the man has wrongly been perceived to be a woman.

2.6 Indirect Discrimination occurs when an apparently neutral practice, provision or criterion puts people with a particular protected characteristic at a disadvantage compared with others who do not share that characteristic, and when applying the practice, provision or criterion cannot be objectively justified.

E.g. an organisation has a policy of reminding people of forthcoming appointments by phone. This would indirectly discriminate against deaf people as they would not receive a reminder of their appointment.

2.7 Victimisation means subjecting a person to detrimental treatment because they are or are believed to be bringing proceedings under the Equality Act; giving evidence or information in connection with proceedings under the Equality Act; doing any other thing for the purposes or in connection with the Equality Act or making an allegation that a person has contravened the Equality Act.

A person must be able to act against unlawful discrimination without fear of reprisals or being subjected to a detrimental effect.

E.g. a patient makes a complaint to a service provider where they were obtaining treatment because they felt they were discriminated against for being gay. The complaint is resolved, but if the person who provides the treatment refuses to treat the gay client this would be victimisation.

2.8 Harassment means unwanted behaviour that has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity or creates a degrading, humiliating, hostile, intimidating or offensive environment.

Sexual harassment is any conduct of a sexual nature that is unwanted by the recipient, including verbal, non-verbal and physical behaviours, and which violates the victim's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading or offensive environment for them. Harassment can be sexual, racial, ageist, directed against people with disabilities or indeed related to any protected or other characteristic exhibited by the individual.

E.g. A male employee is disabled and is claiming harassment against his line manager after she frequently teased and humiliated him about his disability. A female employee shares an office with the male employee and she too is claiming harassment, even though she is not disabled, as the manager's behaviour has also created an offensive environment for her.

2.9 Harassment by a third party means unwanted, repeated conduct by a third party based on a protected characteristic, which has the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for a person and where the employer does nothing to prevent it from reoccurring. A third party is defined in law as not being the employer or employees of the employer, such as customers or clients.

E.g. A manager of a Benefits Office hears from one of his staff, who is gay, that he is feeling unhappy after a claimant made homophobic remarks in his hearing. The manager is concerned and monitors the situation. Within a few days the claimant makes further offensive remarks.

The manager reacts by having a word with the claimant, pointing out that this behaviour is unacceptable. He considers following it up with a letter to him pointing out that he will ban him if this happens again. The manager keeps the gay employee in the picture with the

actions he is taking and believes he is taking reasonable steps to protect the employee from third party harassment.

2.10 **Positive Action** can be taken when it is clear that a group of people who share a protected characteristic and who are, or could become, employees, volunteers or service users, suffer a disadvantage linked to that characteristic, have disproportionately low levels of participation, or have different needs from a service as compared to other groups.

The positive action must be proportionate and aim to increase participation, meet different needs or overcome disadvantage. The positive action must be appropriate to its aim and other actions would be less effective in achieving this aim or likely to cause greater disadvantage to other groups.

Positive action could take the form of additional training or providing a job application form in other languages to encourage applicants from these communities. 'Positive discrimination' at the point of selection for employment is not permissible. As an employer and service provider Families Together is required to comply with anti-discrimination legislation. It is also firmly within our ethos and values as an organisation to ensure that all staff, volunteers, families, funders and other stakeholders are confident that we will treat everyone with fairness, dignity and respect.

3 Policy implementation

Trustees

- Trustees are responsible for ensuring that Families Together meets its' legal responsibilities, including those relating to Equalities legislation. All trustees accept and work to the Equality, Fairness & Diversity Policy and monitor its implementation in the day to day work by receiving and analysing regular reports.
- Membership of the Families Together Trustee Board represents a wide cross-section of the community.
- Opportunities are offered to volunteers to be represented on Families Together's trustee board.
- Opportunities are offered to families to be represented on Families Together's Trustee Board.
- Trustees endeavour to ensure that the time, place and conduct of meetings enable all trustees and potential members to have an equal opportunity to be involved.

Recruitment and Selection

- The Safer Recruitment Policy and the Recruitment, Supervision and Management of Volunteers Policy must be adopted.
- All job advertisements and job descriptions state that Families Together is committed to equality of opportunity.
- Job descriptions and person specifications are reviewed as each vacancy arises to ensure they are directly relevant to the post. Consideration is given as to whether the job can be shared and whether working hours can be flexible.
- The person specification indicates which requirements are essential and which are desirable. Only essential criteria are considered in the first round of short-listing.
- All vacant posts are advertised as widely as appropriate for the job. Application forms ask only for information relevant to the post including an Equality, Fairness and Diversity statement and monitoring form. Health questionnaires are not used until after a conditional offer of employment is made.
- Monitoring forms are separated from the application before short-listing and used only after the selection process for monitoring purposes.
- Reasonable travel expenses are offered to all applicants attending interviews.
- Acceptance of the Families Together Equality, Fairness & Diversity Policy is a condition of employment and all employees must work to this policy.
- All staff should be informed of the routes of access to the Trustee Board, the Quality Assurance standards and of the Grievance and Disciplinary Procedure.
- Appropriate consideration will be given to the individual circumstances of a member of staff within the scope of the Equality Act, providing the needs of the local Families Together are met. This may include actions such as reasonable adjustment to the employee's working environment or flexible working patterns.

- Families Together is committed to ensuring that all employees have a workplace free from victimization, bullying and harassment, are made aware of the relevant policies and procedures and know how to report incidents.

Service Provision

- Families Together keeps up to date information about the population in the community/area in which it works, including hard to reach and disadvantaged groups. It works to ensure that it builds appropriate relationships in order to offer accessible support, resources and involvement to every family that falls within its remit.
- Families Together endeavours to meet the individual needs of each family.
- All families are given an equal opportunity to attend social events.
- Toys and other equipment/material reflect as far as possible the diversity of our society.
- The involvement of volunteers and families is encouraged and their views on the services offered are considered when drafting strategic and operational plans and making policy decisions.
- Families Together reviews and analyses its monitoring information in order to fulfil its aim of ensuring that employees, trustees and volunteers reflect the population in the community.

Access to Services

- The range of referrals or self-referrals accepted is only limited where Families Together does not have the resources available to meet the number or complexity of cases.
- Families Together establishes positive links with a wide range of referring agencies in the area including those supporting hard to reach/disadvantaged groups and accepts appropriate referrals, the permission of the family having been obtained first.
- Families Together seeks to publicise the availability of its services to all sections of the community, including providing information about its services in user-friendly language and in appropriate languages other than English.
- All publicity or information materials include positive images of people.
- Families Together is sensitive to the communication needs of individuals and families, and aims to meet them wherever possible.
- Every effort is made to select office and other premises which are accessible and do not restrict the participation of anyone in the activities of the local Families Together.
- Consideration is given to the needs of individuals who may use the premises. Families Together activities should be as accessible and inclusive as possible.

Working with Volunteers

- Within the scope of the Equality Act volunteers do not have the same rights as employees, but Families Together will always treat its' volunteers with equality and fairness and welcome diversity.

- All volunteers are expected to accept and follow the Equality, Fairness & Diversity policy, a copy of which will be provided as part of the induction process.
- Volunteers are recruited from a wide range of backgrounds, considering the composition of the catchment area.
- Where appropriate, former users of the service may be enabled to become volunteers.
- The individuality and differences of volunteers are respected and selection of volunteers will be based on the experience and skills of each individual.
- Volunteers' expenses are paid promptly on receipt of relevant documentation.
- Regular support and supervision is provided to all volunteers.

Training

- Equality and Diversity is part of the volunteer course of preparation.
- Trustees encourage all staff to participate in training to meet their development needs.
- All training offered by the local Families Together reflects this policy at all times.
- All outside speakers are made aware of the Equality, Fairness and Diversity Policy Statement.
- Where possible Families Together offers all volunteers the opportunity for ongoing training within the organisation or externally.

Monitoring

- Performance in relation to this policy is monitored through the Families Together Quality Assurance self assessments and reviews.
- Monitoring of current local Families Together data against relevant demographics takes place to inform planning and targets.

Signed by Chair:	C. Read
Date:	December 2024
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