

# Equal Opportunities Policy

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## 2 OUR COMMITMENT

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Suffolk Libraries wholeheartedly believes in creating an inclusive environment which values the principles of treating all people the same and promoting a diverse workforce. We recognise that people from different backgrounds and experiences can bring valuable insights to the workplace and enhance the way we work. This commitment is underpinned by Suffolk Libraries vision which focuses on making life better.

Suffolk Libraries opposes all forms of unfair and unlawful discrimination, therefore, all job applicants, employees, volunteers and individuals that interact with the service will be treated fairly and equally.

This policy is intended to assist Suffolk Libraries in putting this commitment into practice and create an organisation that is diverse, inclusive and provides equality of opportunity to all. Compliance with this policy should also ensure that employees do not commit unlawful acts of discrimination.

## 3 SCOPE

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This policy applies to all members of staff, volunteers and other individuals that provide services delivered by and on behalf of Suffolk Libraries. The organisation has a separate Equality Policy concerning its commitment toward service users and the public.

## 4 THE LAW

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It is unlawful to discriminate directly or indirectly in recruitment or employment because of age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, pregnancy, maternity, race (which includes colour, nationality and ethnic or national origins), sexual orientation, religion or belief, or because someone is married or in a civil partnership. These are known as “protected characteristics”.

Discrimination after employment may also be unlawful, e.g. refusing to give a reference for a reason related to one of the protected characteristics above.

It is also unlawful for an employer not to make reasonable adjustments to its requirements, working practices or the physical features of the workplace where these put a job applicant or employee living with a disability at a substantial disadvantage due to the employer’s unreasonable failure to provide an auxiliary aid or service to an employee or applicant.

Staff should not discriminate against or harass a member of the public in the provision of services, goods or facilities.

## Types of unlawful discrimination

**Direct Discrimination** is where a person is treated less favourable than another because of a protected characteristic. Examples of direct discrimination would be refusing to employ or promote an individual because they could be pregnant, are a different race, are living with a disability, or because of their sexual orientation or over the age of 55.

**Positive Action**, in some circumstances, Suffolk Libraries may provide positive action aimed at reducing the disadvantage or under-representation experienced by those with any of the protected characteristics. For example, offering a leadership development course to women where it has been identified that women have been under represented in senior leadership roles.

**Indirect Discrimination** occurs when there is a practice, policy or rule which applies to everyone in the same way but has a worse effect on some people than others. For example, insisting on an unnecessary physical requirement could discriminate against one sex in favour of another.

**Harassment** is individual or repeated, and unwelcome comments, actions, suggestions or physical contact that are found objectionable by a person from a particular group covered by this policy and would cause them discomfort in their job. It does not matter whether or not this effect was intended by the person responsible for the conduct.

**Associative Discrimination** occurs when someone discriminates against someone because they associate with another person who possesses a protected characteristic. An example of this is when a manager does not give a job-applicant the role, just because the applicant tells the employer they have a disabled partner.

**Perceptive Discrimination** is where an individual is discriminated against based on an incorrect perception that an individual has a protected characteristic. For example, that an individual is disabled when they are not.

**Victimisation** refers to treating someone less favourably because they have complained about direct or indirect discrimination or harassment at work, or they have supported someone else to do this. However, an employee is not protected from victimisation if he/she acted maliciously in making or supporting an untrue complaint. An example, of this is when an employee requests to work flexibly and their manager refuses their request because they supported a colleague in a complaint of discrimination.

**Failure to make reasonable adjustments** is where a physical feature or a provision, criterion or practice puts a disabled person at a substantial disadvantage compared with someone who does not have that disability and the employer has failed to make reasonable adjustments to enable the disabled person to overcome the disadvantage.

## 5 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IN EMPLOYMENT

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Suffolk Libraries is committed to equality of opportunity; therefore, it is our policy that no service user, former, present or future employee; or job applicant receives less favourable treatment (actual or perceived) on the ground of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, maternity and pregnancy, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation.

We will avoid unlawful discrimination in all aspects of employment including recruitment, promotion, opportunities for training, pay and benefits, discipline and selection for redundancy.

Our commitment will ensure that:

- Person and job specifications will be limited to those requirements that are necessary for the effective performance of the job.
- Candidates for employment or promotion will be assessed objectively against the requirements for the job, taking account of any reasonable adjustments that may be required for candidates with a disability.
- Disability and personal or home commitments will not form the basis of employment decisions (except where necessary).
- Where applicants identify that they have a disability, throughout the course of recruitment, they will be guaranteed an interview should they meet the minimum essential criteria set to perform the duties of the role. Further provisions will then extend to considering, exploring and making reasonable adjustments to support individuals with disabilities to attend interview or perform the duties of a role.
- It has a framework of policies which supports work life balance such as the Statutory Right to Request Flexible Working, Flexible Retirement, Special Leave to help with caring responsibilities and domestic emergencies and Career Breaks.
- It will also make reasonable adjustments to its standard working practices to overcome barriers caused by disability.

## 6 DIGNITY AT WORK

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Suffolk Libraries has a separate anti-bullying and harassment policy concerning issues of bullying and harassment on any grounds, and how complaints of this type will be dealt with. This can be found on the following link <https://slintranet.co.uk/policies-procedures/problems-at-work/>

## 7 CUSTOMERS, SUPPLIERS AND OTHER PEOPLE NOT EMPLOYED BY SUFFOLK LIBRARIES

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Employees should report any bullying or harassment by customers, suppliers, visitors or others to their line manager who will take appropriate action.

## 8 TRAINING

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Suffolk Libraries will provide training in equal opportunities to managers and others likely to be involved in recruitment or other decision making where equal opportunities issues are likely to arise.

Suffolk Libraries will also provide training to all existing and new employees and volunteers who work at Suffolk Libraries to help them understand their rights and responsibilities around Equality and Diversity and what they can do to help create a working environment free of bullying and harassment. Suffolk Libraries will provide additional training to managers to enable them to deal more effectively with complaints of bullying and harassment.

## 9 RESPONSIBILITY

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Every employee/volunteer is required to assist Suffolk Libraries to meet its commitment to provide equal opportunity in employment and avoid unlawful discrimination.

Employees/volunteers can be held personally liable as well as, or instead of, the organisation for any act of unlawful discrimination. Employees/volunteers who commit serious acts of harassment may be guilty of a criminal offence.

Acts of discrimination, harassment, bullying or victimisation against employees/volunteers or customers are disciplinary offences and will be dealt with under the organisation's disciplinary procedure. Discrimination, harassment, bullying or victimisation may constitute gross misconduct and could lead to dismissal without notice.

## 10 GRIEVANCES

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If you consider that you may have been unlawfully discriminated against, you may use Suffolk Libraries grievance procedure to make a complaint. If your complaint involves bullying or harassment, the grievance procedure is modified as set out in the anti-bullying and harassment policy.

Suffolk Libraries will take any complaint seriously and will seek to resolve any grievance that it upholds. You will not be penalised for raising a grievance, even if your grievance is not upheld, unless your complaint is both untrue and made in bad faith.

## 11 MONITORING AND REVIEW

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This policy will be monitored periodically by Suffolk Libraries to judge its effectiveness and will be updated in accordance with changes in the law. In particular, Suffolk Libraries will monitor the ethnic and gender composition of the existing workforce and of applicants for jobs (including promotion), and the number of people with disabilities within these groups and will review its equal opportunities policy in accordance with the results shown by the monitoring. If changes are required, Suffolk Libraries will implement them.

Suffolk Libraries treats personal data collected for reviewing equality of opportunity in recruitment and selection in accordance with its data protection policy. Information about how data is used and the basis for processing is provided in the Suffolk Libraries job applicant privacy statement.