

Equality and Diversity Policy

Equality

Suffolk Libraries is committed to the principles of the Equality Act 2010 and specifically to providing services that are fair and accessible for everyone.

In line with the Equality Act's (specific duties) Regulations 2011, Suffolk Libraries supports the equality objectives of Suffolk County Council. These aim to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- Advance equality between everybody
- Foster good relations between communities, tackling prejudice and promoting understanding

The Act further explains that having **due regard** for advancing equality involves:

- Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics.
- Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people.
- Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.

Suffolk Libraries will actively promote the above equality objectives.

Note:

The Equality Act 2010 defines disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership, and pregnancy and maternity as 'protected characteristics'.

Diversity

Diversity is about valuing individual difference. Diversity challenges us to recognise and value all sorts of differences that exist when people work together in order to build stronger communities and harmonious environments for the benefit of all. People come from a wide variety of backgrounds and we can be different from one another in many ways. These can include differences that are highlighted in the current equality legislation such as race, religion and sex, but also include things like personality, personal interests and lifestyle choices, such as being a vegetarian or a smoker. Equality and diversity are becoming more important in all aspects of our lives for a number of reasons:

- We live in an increasingly diverse society and need to be able to understand and respect diversity and respond appropriately and sensitively to difference in others.
- Volunteers and the people who benefit from their work will reflect this diversity in many ways including ethnic and community background, gender, religion, political disability, sexuality and age.
- The successful implementation of equality and diversity standards, in all aspects of volunteering, will help to provide a good and harmonious environment for all. It will also ensure that volunteers, employees and service users are all valued, respected, motivated and treated fairly.
- We all have a right to be protected from discrimination and harassment. We also have a responsibility not to discriminate against others.

Our commitment to our volunteers

Suffolk Libraries is committed to providing equality of opportunity to all persons when developing, coordinating and supporting volunteering. Although, there is no statutory obligation under equality legislation, we recognise a clear, moral obligation to promote fairness and equality in volunteering and value all individuals and their diverse and unique identity and backgrounds. These include (but are not exclusive to) the established protected characteristics.

What you can expect from us

We believe that all volunteers should reflect the diversity of the communities they work in and have the right to work in an environment which is free from discrimination.

If you experience any form of discrimination or harassment while volunteering with us, you have the right to raise a complaint through our grievance procedure. All complaints will be dealt with seriously, promptly and confidentially.

What we can expect from you

When representing Suffolk Libraries as a volunteer, we expect you to support our commitment to promoting equality. You must treat others with dignity and respect and not seek to discriminate against others.

You are expected to discourage discrimination by making it clear that you find such behaviour unacceptable and should alert a member of staff or management if an incident occurs to enable it to be dealt with.

The steps we will take to prevent discrimination

Suffolk Libraries will make every effort to ensure that discrimination and harassment does not occur. To do this, we will:

- Ensure that all volunteers, employees and service users are given access to our statement on Suffolk Libraries' commitment to equality.
- Explain the statement to all volunteers, employees and service users.
- Ensure that all complaints about discrimination are dealt with promptly.
- Set a good example by treating all volunteers with fairness, dignity and respect.
- Be alert to unacceptable behaviour and take appropriate proactive action where necessary.
- Seek to meet the recommended best practice standards for promoting equality of opportunity.