

## EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY POLICY

### Equal Opportunities Statement

Forum is committed to promoting equality and diversity in all its activities to promote inclusive processes, practices and culture. It is the aim of Forum to ensure that no individual receives less favourable facilities or treatment (either directly or indirectly) on grounds of age, disability, gender/gender reassignment, marriage/civil partnership, pregnancy/maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation (the protected characteristics).

Our aim is that:

- Our workforce will reflect the communities we serve and that each employee feels respected and able to give of their best.
- Our stakeholders; service-users, customers, volunteers and others that Forum comes into contact with are respected at all times.

We oppose all forms of unlawful and unfair discrimination or victimisation. To that end our policy is to provide equality and fairness for all. We will:

- Strive to work to eliminate any unlawful or unfair discrimination including direct or indirect discrimination, discrimination by association, discrimination linked to a perceived characteristic, harassment and victimisation.
- Remain proactive in taking steps to ensure inclusion and engagement for all the people who work for and with us.
- Strive towards a culture that is diverse and inclusive that recognises and develops the potential of all staff and those we support.
- Recognise the benefits and opportunities of having a diverse community of staff who value one another and realise the contribution they can make to achieving Forums vision - *'people, communities and the voluntary sector have the opportunities, support and services they need to thrive'*.

This statement applies to all staff, service users, trustees, volunteers and those whom we work with in partnership.

Our Equality and Diversity Policy goes on to further describe our approach.

## Definitions

Equality can be described as breaking down barriers, eliminating discrimination and ensuring equal opportunity and access for all groups in the workplace, and in the provision of goods and services, amongst others; the basis of which is supported and protected by legislation.

Diversity can be described as celebrating differences and valuing everyone. Each person is an individual with visible and non-visible differences and by respecting this everyone can feel valued for their contributions which is beneficial not only for the individual but for Forum as a whole.

Equality and Diversity are not inter-changeable but inter-dependent. There can be no equality of opportunity if difference is not valued and harnessed and taken account of.

## Types of Discrimination

Direct Discrimination – Direct discrimination is when an individual is treated differently and worse than someone else for certain reasons. The Equality Act says the individual has been treated less favourably.

Indirect Discrimination - is when there's a practice, policy or rule which applies to everyone in the same way, but it has a worse effect on some people than others. The Equality Act says it puts the individual at a particular disadvantage.

Discrimination by association - This is direct discrimination against someone because they associate with another person who possesses a protected characteristic.

Perception discrimination - This is direct discrimination against an individual because others think they possess a particular protected characteristic. It applies even if the person does not actually possess that characteristic.

Harassment - is “unwanted conduct related to a relevant protected characteristic, which has the purpose or effect of violating an individual’s dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that individual”. Harassment applies to all protected characteristics except for pregnancy and maternity and marriage and civil partnership.

Victimisation - occurs when an employee is treated badly because they have made or supported a complaint or raised a grievance under the Equality Act; or because they are suspected of doing so.

## Our commitment

- To fulfil the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and any subsequent changes to legislation, were applicable to Forum
- To create an environment in which individual differences and the contributions of all our staff are recognised and valued.
- All employees, whether part-time, full-time or temporary, will be treated fairly and with respect and dignity.

- Every employee is entitled to a working environment that promotes dignity and respect to all. No form of intimidation, bullying or harassment will be tolerated.
- Training, development and progression opportunities are available to all staff
- All employees will be helped and encouraged to develop their full potential
- To promote equality in the workplace which we believe is good management practice and makes sound business sense.
- Decisions concerning staff being based on merit (apart from in any necessary and limited exemptions and exceptions allowed under the Equality Act)
- We will review all our employment practices and procedures regularly to ensure fairness.
- Staff breaches of our equality policy will be regarded as misconduct and could lead to disciplinary proceedings.
- To equal pay and 'equality of terms' between women and men for equal work
- This policy is fully supported by senior management and Trustees.
- This policy will be monitored and reviewed regularly.
- Staff will be provided with Equality and Diversity update training on a three yearly basis
- Equality and diversity will be an integral part of our induction of new staff

## **Equality in recruitment**

Forum is a Disability Confident employer (registration number DCS008835) and adheres to these principles in recruitment.

All candidates will be treated fairly and equitably, with respect and courtesy, aiming to ensure that the candidate experience is positive, irrespective of the outcome.

Forum aims to seek to attract the best candidate for the job based on merit; aptitude and ability and ensure the identification of the person best suited for the job and Forum.

Forum undertakes equal opportunities monitoring and analyses the outcomes to support recruitment – we may therefore undertake 'positive action in recruitment'.

We will consider equality and diversity throughout our recruitment process:

- Job descriptions
- Job adverts
- Application forms

They will all be written in plain English and easy to understand – we will provide alternative formats whenever it is appropriate and reasonably practicable to do so.

- Shortlisting – equality forms are not made available to those shortlisting, fair and equitable methods of shortlisting will be used
- Interviews and tests – we check accessibility requirements for shortlisted candidates and will make reasonable adjustments to the interview format as necessary.
- Induction – all new staff will be inducted into Forum this includes an introduction to Equality and Diversity and to our policies and procedures.

## **Equal pay and equality of terms**

The Equality Act gives a right to equal pay between women and men for equal work. This covers individuals in the same employment, and includes equality in pay and all other contractual terms. It applies to all employees (including apprentices), whether on full-time, part-time, casual or temporary contracts, regardless of length of service and other workers (e.g. self-employed) whose contracts require personal performance of the work.

Forum will ensure that staff pay and terms are equitable as outlined in the Equality Act.

## **Accessibility**

Forum has a responsibility to make sure that individuals can access our services and our workplaces – we routinely use an accessibility checklist to inform our decision making when selecting work or event premises.

Forum will where reasonably practicable ensure that disabled employees can access our workplace. We will also where reasonably practicable ensure our services are as accessible to disabled people as non-disabled people. This is known as our 'duty to make reasonable adjustments'.

Employees should discuss with their line manager any personal accessibility requirements and report any service access issues immediately to their line manager.

## **Responsibilities of management**

Responsibility for ensuring the effective implementation and operation of the arrangements will rest with the Chief Officer. Managers will ensure that they and their staff operate within this policy and arrangements, and that all reasonable and practical steps are taken to avoid discrimination.

Each manager will ensure that:

- All their staff are aware of the policy and the arrangements, and the reasons for the policy
- Grievances concerning discrimination are dealt with properly, fairly and as quickly as possible
- Proper records are maintained.
- Additional training for staff is undertaken when required and with the agreement of the Chief Officer

The Chief Officer will be responsible for monitoring the operation of the policy in respect of third parties who engage with Forum, employees and job applicants. Lessons learned will be part of our continuous improvement cycle.

The Chief Officer will be responsible for the review of Equality and Diversity training requirements and will oversee subsequent training implementation along with other senior managers.

## **Responsibilities of all staff and volunteers**

Responsibility for ensuring no unlawful discrimination rests with all staff and the attitudes of staff are crucial to the successful operation of fair employment practices. In particular, all members of staff should:

- Comply with the policy and arrangements
- Treat every individual with dignity and respect
- Promote a working environment that respects to all
- Not discriminate in their day to day activities or induce others to do so
- Not victimise, harass or intimidate other staff or groups who have, or are perceived to have one of the protected characteristics.
- Ensure no individual is discriminated against or harassed because of their association with another individual who has a protected characteristic.
- Not accept behaviour that may be offensive to you or to others, and take positive action when it is safe to do so to make sure that we speak up about unacceptable behaviour or report it
- Be supportive of colleagues who may be subject to bullying, harassment or abuse
- Inform their manager if they become aware of any discriminatory practice.
- Undertake Equality and Diversity training as instructed by Forum

## **Third parties**

Third-party harassment occurs where a Forum employee is harassed, and the harassment is related to a protected characteristic, by third parties such as clients, customers, staff of partner organisations or in settings where Forum activities take place. Forum will not tolerate such actions against its staff, and the employee concerned should inform their manager / supervisor at once that this has occurred. This will be reported to the Chief Officer who will ensure that Forum fully investigate and take all reasonable steps to ensure such harassment does not happen again.

Partner and sub-contracted organisations/individuals are expected to comply with the Equality Act 2010 and subsequent changes to legislation. If it is reported to Forum that they are not fulfilling their duties, then Forum will investigate and consider the findings. This may result in terminating the relationship – the final decision will be taken by the Chief Officer and/or Board of Trustees.

## **Grievance and discipline**

Forum will take seriously complaints of bullying, harassment, victimisation and unlawful discrimination by fellow employees, customers, suppliers, visitors, the public and any others in the course of the organisation's work activities.

Employees have a right to pursue a complaint concerning bullying, harassment, discrimination or victimisation via Forum's grievance procedures. Discrimination and victimisation will be treated as disciplinary offences and they will be dealt with under the Forum's disciplinary procedures.

Further, sexual harassment may amount to both an employment rights matter and a criminal matter, such as in sexual assault allegations. In addition, harassment under the Protection from

Harassment Act 1997 – which is not limited to circumstances where harassment relates to a protected characteristic – is a criminal offence.

## **Monitoring**

Forum deems it appropriate to state its intention not to discriminate and assumes that this will be translated into practice consistently across the organisation as a whole. Accordingly, a monitoring system will be introduced to measure the effectiveness of the policy and arrangements.

The system will involve the routine collection and analysis of information on employees by gender, marital status, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, religion/beliefs, grade and length of service in current grade. Information regarding the number of staff who declare themselves as disabled will also be maintained. The information collected for monitoring purposes will be treated as confidential and it will not be used for any other purpose.

## **Related policies and arrangements**

This policy and the associated arrangements shall operate in accordance with statutory requirements. In addition, full account will be taken of any guidance or Codes of Practice issued by the Equality and Human Rights Commission, any Government Departments, and any other statutory bodies.

All employment policies and arrangements have a bearing on equality of opportunity. Forum policies will be reviewed regularly, and any identified discriminatory elements removed. Other policies that may be read in conjunction include:

- Customer Charter and Complaints
- Disciplinary
- Grievance
- Code of Conduct

## **Review**

The effectiveness of this policy and associated arrangements will be regularly reviewed by the Chief Officer and Trustees.

Policy review date: November 2019

Next review due: 3yrs from review date or as legislation is updated