



MARCH TOWN COUNCIL

EQUALITY POLICY

March Town Council ("the Council") aspires to be an Equal Opportunities employer, service provider, community leader and role model. Its aim is to ensure that all employees and service users are not subject to any form of discrimination, harassment and/or victimisation (Appendix 1) at any time on the basis of age, gender, gender reassignment, ethnic origin, disability, illness (such as HIV or AIDS), marital status or being in a civil partnership, nationality, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity. These are known as "protected characteristic" (Appendix 2) under the law.

The Equality Act 2010 revised and amalgamated a number of existing laws into a single piece of legislation. This made the law easier to understand, use and comply with. It gave additional protection to people under the law and the gives greater clarity to behaviour that is unlawful.

Simplifying legislation and harmonising protection for all of the characteristics covered will help both the council to improve public service delivery and businesses perform well.

POSITIVE ABOUT EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The Council is committed to providing the highest quality of governance and service and recognises that the implementation of an effective Equality Policy is an integral part of this. It is not a coincidence that an organisation that is able to provide services to meet the diverse needs of its users, usually carries out its core business efficiently. Equally, a workforce that has a supportive environment is more productive.

March Town Council as a corporate body has responsibilities as an employer, a service provider and a public authority, in which both members and employees as individuals also have responsibilities as well as rights.

The Council is committed to ensuring that its services and employment practices are fair, accessible, responsive and appropriate for all residents, clients and service users, voluntary and business organisations, visitors in the community that the council serves, as well as the dedicated staff it employs and the volunteers and partners with which it works.

To achieve this, March Town Council is working on eliminating all forms of discrimination in accordance with this Policy and ensuring that human rights (dignity and respect) are central to the way in which the council delivers services.

The Council will strive to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; and to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

POSITIVE AS AN EMPLOYER

March Town Council is committed to making full use of the talents and resources of all its employees. It will recruit, reward, develop, promote and transfer employees on the basis of the skills, relevant qualifications, experience, aptitude and ability they can bring to the job.

The Council will encourage and develop all employees to support and carry out the requirements of this Equality Policy. All employees will be encouraged to identify and disseminate good practice.

Recruitment

The Council's recruitment process must result in the selection of the most suitable person for the job, in respect of experience and qualifications. It will not discriminate either directly or indirectly on the grounds of any characteristic listed in its Equality Policy, at any stage of the recruitment process.

The Council will ensure that:

- [wherever possible] all job opportunities are open to all applicants;
- no prejudgement or assumptions are made by recruiters or managers;
- all applications are given equal consideration;
- no decision is made in advance regarding the outcome of recruitment;
- all applicants and staff are made aware of this Policy

All recruitment publicity must positively encourage applications from all suitably qualified and experienced people and should avoid any stereotyping of roles. All publicity should state that March Town Council is committed to equality of opportunity.

The selection process must be carried out consistently at all levels. It must be fair and non-discriminatory. Applications forms will state that the Council is an Equal Opportunities employer. The only criteria to be used in the selection process are those based on the skills, experience and qualifications essential for the job.

All aspects of the council's recruitment and selection process will be monitored by the Clerk to the Council to ensure that the Council meets its obligations as an Equal Opportunities and quality employer.

Training and Development

Training and development opportunities will be made available to all employees and any form of discrimination whether direct or indirect will not be tolerated. Priority will be given to training or development activity which is linked to the achievement of the council's aims and objectives. Where resources permit, the Council will support training and development beyond the needs of the job which can be returned as a benefit to the Council, i.e. increased flexibility, breadth of experience and commitment.

Terms and Conditions

All employees will be treated equitably with respect to pay and other conditions of their contracts of employment.

Breaches of this Policy

Employees who feel that they have been subject to discrimination should attempt to resolve the issue by talking to the individual whom they feel has acted inappropriately. If this does not resolve the issue, the employee may approach his or her manager or, if necessary, the Clerk to the Council.

Harassment

The Council will not tolerate or accept any form of harassment of its employees. All employees have the right to be treated with dignity and any contravention of this right may be subject to the appropriate grievance or disciplinary procedure.

Discrimination against People with Disabilities

The Council will make reasonable changes to the physical features of its premises or to its method of undertaking business where this can enable an employee to properly undertake their job role. March Town Council will think positively about disabled staff, as it does with disabled service users.

Religious Discrimination

Discriminatory behaviour which fails to acknowledge the rights and needs of people with different beliefs or practices will be treated as a disciplinary offence.

Bullying

Workplace bullying is a separate issue from sexual and racial harassment but the effects can be the same. Within the working environment bullying can be described as the use of a position or power to coerce others by fear, oppression or threat.

The Council will not tolerate bullying behaviour at any level and it is the responsibility of all managers to eliminate any form of bullying which they become aware of.

Allegations of bullying will be dealt with under the grievance or disciplinary procedures or Councillors' Code of Conduct. Any employee who feels that he or she is being bullied should consult the Clerk to the Council or the Mayor.

Victimisation

The Council will ensure that no employee is treated less favourably than other people because, for example they have brought proceedings, given evidence, or complained about the behaviour of someone who has been harassing or discriminating against them.

Age

Recruitment is based entirely upon relevant criteria; these criteria will be specific to the post and will not include age related criteria. Person specifications for jobs with the council will focus upon job needs only.

Promotion, training and career development opportunities will be provided equally for all staff irrespective of age.

The Council does not have a default age for retirement.

Responsibilities

All members and employees of March Town Council have a responsibility to ensure that the Council's Equality Policy is communicated and there is adherence with its requirements.

All council staff will receive training and development in equal opportunities issues and councillors will be offered this training. The Council's policies on equality form part of any employees' induction process.

POSITIVE ABOUT SERVICE DELIVERY

The Council's service users have the right to expect fair and non-discriminatory treatment whilst participating in or receiving any of the council's services. Provision of services to the community will be based upon principles of fairness and accessibility for all sections of the community.

All aspects of the Council's Equality Policy impact upon the manner in which it directly delivers services to and for its customers. The council will, therefore, comply with the guidelines set out in the Code of Practice in force from time-to-time under the Equality Act 2010 in relation to the provision of goods, facilities or services to the community.

Adherence to the principles and practices contained within this policy will be monitored on a regular basis. The Council will look for ways that it can make its services accessible to all.

The Council will seek to ensure that all its services are publicised widely and that, as far as reasonably possible, the timing of events and access to facilities and buildings are designed to ensure that minority groups are not discriminated against.

The Council expects all organisations and people working on its behalf directly or indirectly by contractors, partners or volunteers, to both understand and adhere to its Equality Policy.

Breaches of this Policy by staff will be subject to the grievance and discipline procedures.

POSITIVE ABOUT COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

March Town Council has a local governance and community leadership role. Local residents, members of local organisations, businesses and visitors have the right to expect fair and non-discriminatory treatment when engaging with the council. The Council recognises the diversity within the community and seeks to reflect this in the work it undertakes within that community. All aspects of the Council's Equality Policy impact upon the manner in which it engages with the community.

POSITIVE ABOUT DISABILITY

Inclusive

March Town Council believes that, as far as possible, disabled customers should be able to obtain services in the same way as customers who are not disabled. However, given the constraints of operating from existing buildings, there may be some situations where the same treatment is not possible. In such cases, the council will devise a solution as to how best to service its disabled customer, which demonstrates respect for his or her dignity.

Finding Out

The Council will periodically undertake an audit of its premises and operations to assess, as far as possible, what customers with different disabilities may need to be able to access its services. This will be based on good practice guidance and, where appropriate, council members and officers will talk with individual customers about any particular problems they encounter. As necessary, expert advice would be sought in terms of identifying solutions.

Existing Premises

March Town Council will focus particularly upon making reasonable adjustments to the physical features of its premises. Where a physical feature makes it impossible or unreasonably difficult for disabled customers to make use of a service, the council will take reasonable measures to: remove the features, or alter the features, or provide a reasonable means of avoiding it, or provide a reasonable alternative method of making the service available.

Getting Better

March Town Council will plan the development of its business with disabled people in mind. The council will ensure that its staff are aware of disability issues and are trained to meet the needs of disabled customers.

POSITIVE ABOUT DEMOCRACY

Where councillors are to be elected, the Council will make information available as widely as possible about the election and help people who are interested in standing for election, with the objective of reflecting the diversity of the town.

When the Council seeks a co-opted member, it will advertise widely and ensure that every applicant has an equal opportunity. Selection will be made against objective criteria.

The Council will always promote democracy, encourage all people to engage with it and to vote at elections. It will make special efforts to engage with “hard to reach” groups.

Commitment

Adherence to the principles and practices contained within this Policy will be monitored on a regular basis. The Council will look for ways that it can make it easier for everyone to engage with it.

The impact of this policy

March Town Council will strive to make this policy effective in that it underpins the work of the Council.

Complaints Procedure

Internal or external job applicants who think that they have been unfairly treated during the recruitment and selection process should direct their complaints to the Clerk to the Council, who will initiate and monitor appropriate action.

Any member of the community who has a complaint about a service which has been provided or about an employee of March Town Council may complain to the Council under the provisions of its Complaints Procedure.

Monitoring

Monitoring systems will be developed and maintained by the Clerk to the Council.

Dealing with abuses/breaches of the Policy

Employees or others associate or working on behalf, representing or undertaking volunteering for the Council who attempt to abuse this policy may face disciplinary action.

Appendix 1

Definitions of Discrimination

There are different types of discrimination – associative, direct, indirect, perceptive, harassment, third party harassment, victimisation and institutional. The definitions of discrimination used within this policy are detailed below.

These are;

- Direct discrimination - where someone is treated less favourably than another person because of a protected characteristic.
- Associative discrimination - this is direct discrimination against someone because he or she is associated with another person who possesses a protected characteristic.
- Discrimination by perception - this is direct discrimination against someone because others think that he or she possesses a particular protected characteristic. The person does not necessarily need to possess the characteristic, just be perceived to.
- Indirect discrimination - this can occur when there is a rule or policy that applies to everyone but disadvantages a person with a particular protected characteristic.
- Harassment - this is behaviour that is deemed offensive by the recipient. Employees can now complain of the behaviour they find offensive even if it is not directed at them.
- Harassment by a third party - employers are potentially liable for the harassment of their staff or customers by people they don't themselves employ, i.e. a contractor.
- Victimisation - this occurs when someone is treated badly because he or she had made or supported a complaint or grievance under this legislation.

Appendix 2

Protected Characteristics

- Age

Where this is referred to, it refers to a person belonging to a particular age (e.g. 32 year olds) or range of ages (e.g. 18 - 30 year olds).

- Disability

A person has a disability if he or she has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect upon that person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

- Gender reassignment

The process of transitioning from one gender to another.

- Marriage and civil partnership

In England and Wales marriage is no longer restricted to a union between a man and a woman but now includes a marriage between same-sex couples.

Same-sex couples can also have their relationships legally recognised as 'civil partnerships'. Civil partners must not be treated less favourably than married couples (except where permitted by the Equality Act).

- Pregnancy and maternity

Pregnancy is the condition of being pregnant or expecting a baby. Maternity refers to the period after the birth and is linked to maternity leave in the employment context.

In the non-work context, protection against maternity discrimination is for 26 weeks after giving birth; this includes treating a woman unfavourably because she is breastfeeding.

- Race

Refers to the protected characteristic of Race. It refers to a group of people defined by their race, colour, and nationality (including citizenship) ethnic or national origins.

- Religion and belief

Religion has the meaning usually given to it but belief includes religious and philosophical beliefs including lack of belief (e.g. Atheism). Generally, a belief should affect your life choices or the way you live for it to be included in the definition.

- Sexual orientation

Whether a person's sexual attraction is towards their own sex or any other sex (biological or otherwise).

**This Policy was adopted by March Town Council on
6 October 2025**

This Policy will be reviewed annually.