

Equality & Diversity Policy

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Citizens Advice is committed to providing a supportive and inclusive culture for:
- all those who need our services
 - our volunteers
 - our staff and
 - other stakeholders

We recognise the positive value of diversity, promoting equality and fairness, and challenging discrimination.

We welcome our legal duties not to discriminate as a service provider and an employer. We aim to go beyond the narrow scope of legislative compliance and follow best practice, making equality, fairness and diversity a fundamental part of all our activities.

We recognise people with different backgrounds, skills, attitudes and experiences bring fresh ideas and perceptions, and we wish to encourage and harness these differences to make our services more relevant and approachable.

- 1.2 Citizens Advice will not discriminate or tolerate discriminatory behaviour on the grounds of race, colour, sex, gender identity (transgender), disability, nationality, national or ethnic origin, religion or belief, marital / partnership or family status, caring responsibilities, sexual orientation, age, social class, educational background, employment status, working pattern, trade union membership or any other factor.

2. Scope

This policy relates to all aspects of work undertaken by Citizens Advice including employment and recruitment and selection, meeting clients' needs and service delivery, dealing with volunteers, suppliers, supporters and other associated third parties.

3. Legal Obligations

- 3.1 In valuing diversity, Citizens Advice is committed to go beyond the legal minimum regarding equality.

The **Equality Act 2010** harmonises and strengthens and replaces most previous equality legislation. The following legislation is still relevant:

- The Human Rights Act 1998
- The Work and Families Act 2006
- Employment Equal Treatment Framework Directive 2000 (as amended)

- 3.2 The Gender Recognition Act 2004 gives [transsexual](#) people full recognition in their acquired sex in law for all purposes. A person's transgender status cannot lawfully be disclosed without her/his consent. Information about transgender status is sensitive data within the meaning of the Data Protection Act 1998 and therefore can be processed only in limited circumstances. This applies to employment records.

4. Meeting Clients' Needs

- 4.1 We are committed to treating all clients equally and fairly and to not discriminating unlawfully against them. We will also, wherever possible, take steps to promote equal opportunity. We will ensure that clients:
- are able to access the service in ways that suit them
 - are given help that is relevant to their problem and situation
 - are treated fairly, with dignity and respect, and without discrimination
 - have their needs listened to, and met whenever possible.
- 4.2 Citizens Advice is committed to meeting the diverse needs of clients. We will take steps to identify the needs of clients in our community and develop policies and procedures accordingly. We aim to ensure that the services we provide are accessible to all. We will take into account, in particular, the needs of clients with a disability (including mental health problems) and clients who are unable to communicate effectively in English, including those who are deaf, who use BSL and who are hard of hearing. We will consider whether particular groups are predominant within our client base and devise appropriate policies/procedures to meet their needs. Such groups include: men and women; carers; older people; members of religious groups; ethnic groups or nationalities and lesbian, gay or transgender people.

5. Employment (paid staff)

5.1 General Statement

As an employer, Citizens Advice will treat all employees and job applicants equally and fairly and not unlawfully discriminate against them. This will, for example, include arrangements for recruitment and selection, terms and conditions of employment, access to training opportunities, access to promotions and transfers, grievance and disciplinary processes, selections for redundancy, references and any other employment related activities.

5.2 Recruitment and Selection

We recognise the benefits of having a diverse workforce and will take steps to ensure that:

- we endeavour to recruit from the widest pool of qualified candidates practicable
- employment opportunities are open and accessible to all on the basis of their individual qualities and personal merit
- where appropriate, positive action measures are taken to attract applicants from all sections of society and especially from those underrepresented in the workforce
- selection criteria and processes do not unlawfully discriminate

- where appropriate and necessary lawful exemption (genuine occupation requirements) will be used to recruit suitable staff to meet the special needs of particular groups
- any third parties acting for Citizens Advice in respect of employment are made aware of the requirements not to discriminate and to act accordingly.

5.3 Training and Development

We will ensure that all employees are encouraged to achieve their full potential. Selection for all training and career development opportunities will be purely on the basis of merit. Appraisals of performance will be conducted objectively and on time.

5.4 Meeting Individual Needs

Citizens Advice will do its utmost to meet the needs of individuals at work, for example:

- Recognising caring and domestic responsibilities.
- Working patterns – wherever possible training courses and meetings will be planned to allow attendance by staff working non-standard hours/working patterns.
- Disability – reasonable adjustments will be made where necessary to remove barriers and enable disabled staff to carry out their roles.
- Religious practices – time off and suitable facilities for prayer will be provided wherever possible. Requests for annual leave to celebrate religious festivals will be accommodated wherever possible.

6. Volunteers

General Statement

Volunteers contribute significantly to the diversity of the organisation. They can expect to be treated fairly, with dignity and respect, and without discrimination. They are likewise expected to treat others fairly, with dignity and respect, and without discrimination. Due to the restrictions imposed by employment law, volunteers are not entitled to the same rights and protections as employees.

7. Implementing the Policy

7.1 The Chief Officer is responsible for implementing this equality and diversity policy in Citizens Advice.

7.2 Responsibilities

All staff, managers, volunteers and trustees will be given a copy of an equality and diversity policy as part of their induction.

7.2.1 All Staff

At all levels of the organisation staff are expected to have read and understood this policy, to ensure they behave in accordance with its principles and requirements, to encourage the same level of behaviour in

colleagues and to immediately report any breaches witnessed, whenever it is reasonable for them to do so.

7.2.2 All Managers

Managers are responsible for promoting this policy and ensuring it is understood and complied with by all staff in their area, dealing with breaches and complaints (whether reported or not) seriously, speedily, sensitively and confidentially and contributing ideas for the advancement of diversity principles within the organisation. Managers are expected to be proactive in identifying circumstances in which elements of the policy can benefit individual members of staff, and encourage and support staff in making use of such benefits.

7.3 Conduct and General Standards of Behaviour

All staff are expected to conduct themselves in a professional and considerate manner at all times. Citizens Advice will not tolerate behaviour such as:

- making threats
- physical violence
- shouting
- swearing at others
- persistent rudeness
- isolating, ignoring or refusing to work with certain people
- telling offensive jokes or name calling
- displaying offensive material such as pornography or sexist/racist cartoons, or the distribution of such material via email/text message or any other format
- any other forms of harassment or victimisation

The items on the above list of unacceptable behaviours are considered to be disciplinary offences within Citizens Advice and can lead to disciplinary action being taken.

For more details about disciplinary and grievance matters and our model policy, see [Disciplinary and grievances](#).

Citizens Advice does, however, encourage staff to resolve misunderstandings and problems informally wherever possible, depending on the circumstances. However, whether dealt with informally or formally, it is important for staff who may have caused offence to understand that it is no defence to say that they did not intend to do so, or to blame individuals for being over sensitive. It is the impact of the behaviour, rather than the intent, that counts, and that should shape the solution found both to the immediate problem and to preventing further similar problems in the future.

7.5 Complaints of Discrimination

Citizens Advice will treat seriously all complaints of unlawful discrimination on any forbidden grounds made by employees, volunteers, clients or other third parties and will take action where appropriate.

All complaints will be investigated in accordance with the organisation's grievance, complaints or disciplinary procedure, as appropriate and the complainant will be informed of the outcome in line with these procedures.

We will also monitor the number and outcomes of complaints of discrimination made by staff, volunteers, clients and other third parties.

8. Monitoring

- 8.1 Citizens Advice will monitor and record diversity information about staff and volunteers, including trustees, on the basis of age, gender, ethnicity and disability.
- 8.2 Where it is possible to do so, and where doing so will not cause offence or discomfort to those whom it is intended to protect, we will monitor the sexual orientation and religion or belief of staff and volunteers so to ensure that they are not being discriminated against in terms of the opportunities or benefits available to them.

We will store diversity monitoring data as confidential personal data and restrict access to this information. Diversity monitoring information will be used exclusively for the purposes of diversity monitoring and will have no bearing on opportunities or benefits.

At least once a year, we will monitor all elements of:

- recruitment and selection processes (including profiles of successful and unsuccessful job applicants)
- promotion and transfer
- training
- terms and conditions of employment
- take up of benefits (e.g. flexible working requests)
- grievance and disciplinary procedures
- resignations, redundancies and dismissals

9. Review

This policy will be reviewed not less than once a year or more regularly if we identify any non-compliance or problem or in the light of emerging legislation or best practice that could impact on this policy.

A report of the findings of the review, based on the data and other information collected and evaluated, will be presented to the trustee board annually, and appropriate action taken.