

Equality and Diversity Policy

1. The Charity's Commitment

Rutland & Stamford Countryside Charity (The Charity) is committed to providing equality of opportunity and respect for human diversity for its volunteers, staff, membership and contractors. This policy is intended to assist putting this commitment into practice. The Charity is also committed to ensuring that the working and volunteering environment is free of harassment and bullying and that everyone is treated with dignity and respect. To this end The Charity has appointed its Chair to be the accountable reporting officer on all matters relating to this policy.

2. The Law

It is unlawful to discriminate directly or indirectly in recruitment or employment because of a 'protected characteristic'. Equality legislation defines the protected characteristics as being age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy, maternity, race (which includes colour, nationality, and ethnic or national origins), sexual orientation, religion or belief. It is also unlawful to discriminate against or harass a member of the public or service user in the provision of The Charity's services or to fail to make reasonable adjustments where practicable.

2. Types of Unlawful Discrimination

- **Direct discrimination** is where a person is treated less favourably than another because of a protected characteristic. However, discrimination may be lawful if there is an occupational requirement which is core to a job or volunteer role and a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.
- **Indirect discrimination** means putting in place, a rule, or policy, or way of doing things that has a worse impact on someone with a protected characteristic than someone without one, when this cannot be objectively justified.
- **Harassment** is where there is unwanted behaviour which has the purpose or effect of violating someone's dignity or which creates a hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. It does not matter whether or not this effect was intended by the person responsible for the conduct.
- **Third party harassment** occurs where an employee, volunteer or contractor is harassed by third parties such as service users.
- **Victimisation** is treating someone unfavourably because they have taken some form of action relating to the Equality legislation i.e., because they have supported a complaint or raised a grievance, or because they are suspected of doing so. However, an employee, volunteer or contractor is not protected from victimisation if they acted maliciously or made or supported an untrue complaint.

3. Recruitment

The Charity's employee and volunteer recruitment practices aim to attract applicants with the knowledge, skills and experience required for the job or volunteer role, irrespective of an applicant's background. Diversity in the team supports The Charity's understanding of the needs of a diverse range of stakeholders. It may therefore take positive action to improve its diversity amongst its volunteers, contractors and staff.

4. Equality of Opportunity

The Charity will avoid unlawful discrimination in all aspects of its service provision, contracting and employment.

5. Service Users, Suppliers and Others

The Charity will not discriminate unlawfully against service users using, or seeking to use, the services it provides. If a charity member, contractor/employee or volunteer is bullied or harassed by a service user, supplier, contractor, visitor or others, reporting of the incident to the Charity Chair is encouraged.

6. Training

The Charity will provide information and guidance to those involved in recruitment and decision making where equal opportunity and diversity issues are likely to arise to help them understand their responsibilities and to avoid the risk of discrimination.

7. Responsibilities

All members, staff, contractors and volunteers are responsible for supporting the organisation in meeting its commitment and avoiding unlawful discrimination. If anyone experiences a level of discomfort or disagreement with something that happens during The Charity's activities, they are encouraged to bring the matter to the attention of the Chair. It is possible that others are not aware or have not considered the impact of their actions, have not understood our policy, or possibly The Charity's practices need to be updated.

Employees, contractors, volunteers and service users can be held personally liable as well as, or instead of, the organisation for any act of unlawful discrimination. Employees, contractors, volunteers and members who commit serious acts of harassment may be guilty of a criminal offence. Acts of discrimination, harassment, bullying or victimisation against employees, contractors, volunteers or members are disciplinary offences and will be dealt with under The Charity's approved procedures. Discrimination, harassment, bullying or victimisation may constitute gross misconduct and could lead to dismissal from a volunteer or employed role without notice.

8. Monitoring and Review

This policy will be monitored periodically to judge its effectiveness and will be updated in accordance with changes in the law. The Chair will report to the Board of The Charity on any actions or activities undertaken to improve equality of opportunity and diversity. Any information provided by job or volunteer role applicants for monitoring purposes will be used only for these purposes and will be dealt with in accordance with current data protection legislation.