

Voluntary and Community Action South Bedfordshire

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND DIVERSITY POLICY

1. General Policy Statement

Voluntary and Community Action South Bedfordshire is committed to strengthening the effectiveness of the voluntary and community sector in South Bedfordshire by developing, enabling, promoting and supporting local voluntary and community action. It seeks to achieve this through advocacy; capacity building activities; enhancing the provision of volunteering opportunities; the exchange of information; the provision of training, advice and consultancy; and by working in partnership with others.

Voluntary and Community Action recognises that South Bedfordshire is socially and culturally diverse and believes its work is enriched by the varying qualities and experience brought by people from South Bedfordshire's communities to the voluntary and community sector, their organisations and their work as trustees, employees or volunteers. This diversity is recognised, respected and valued.

Voluntary and Community Action seeks to ensure that its work programme, services and advocacy reflects the perspectives of, and that its staff and trustee composition is representative of, South Bedfordshire's communities. Where under representation is identified every effort will be made to attract, encourage and support participation and application by that sector of the community.

Voluntary and Community Action is aware of individual, institutional and cultural discrimination, which can be direct and indirect, through lack of awareness, stereotyping, prejudice, victimisation, harassment, marginalisation, exclusion or oppression, and of the impact this has on discriminated groups or individuals.

Voluntary and Community Action, and all projects managed by it, is fully committed to social justice, equality of opportunity and the elimination of all forms of discrimination as a fundamental principle of its work. It seeks to prevent discrimination and promote equality of opportunity in the provision of services, in its employment practices, and in its dealings with individuals, members, clients, volunteers, groups and organisations. It is committed to ensuring that no individual or group of people is less favourably treated or denied opportunities because of their background, including:

- Colour, 'race' and ethnic or cultural origin
- nationality (or statelessness)
- religion, faith or belief *
- social or economic background
- locality
- gender
- sexuality
- age
- disability or recovery from mental illness
- employment status
- marital status
- caring responsibilities
- HIV status
- unrelated criminal conviction
- association with others who experience the above

* Voluntary and Community Action will discriminate on the grounds of a person's belief where this is contrary to the values of the organisation, as expressed in this policy.

Voluntary and Community Action will work to achieve policies and practices that ensure both existing and potential employees, trustees and volunteers are positively encouraged and that all individuals have their needs considered and, wherever practically appropriate, support needs provided. It will also work to achieve equality of opportunity for the people and organisations it exists to serve.

Voluntary and Community Action demonstrates its commitment to this policy by adopting a code of practice, which gives guidance on employment practices, service provision and the general work of the organisation.

2. Purpose

This policy applies to staff, volunteers and trustees employed by or working for Voluntary and Community Action. Aspects of this policy also apply to consultants engaged by Voluntary and Community Action, to members and to clients. The purpose of this policy is to enable staff, volunteers, trustees and others to act positively in relation to equal opportunities and diversity and to eliminate and prevent all forms of discrimination.

CODE OF PRACTICE

3. Employment

- 3.1 Within the framework of employment law and this policy Voluntary and Community Action works to ensure equal opportunity in all areas of employment including recruitment and selection, training and development, promotion, conditions and benefits of service, employment procedures, health and safety, and cessation of employment. In particular it aims to ensure there is no unfair discrimination in employment practices.
- 3.2 The role of Voluntary and Community Action is to provide effective services to the voluntary and community sector in South Bedfordshire and therefore recruits and develops staff on the basis of their suitability for this role. All employees and applicants for employment will therefore be treated according to their relevant merits and abilities in delivering these services.
- 3.3 The conditions of service offered to part-time employees will be comparable to those offered to full-time employees.
- 3.4 As far as is practicable within the constraints of providing a service to our members/clients, flexible working arrangements (e.g. part-time work, job share, hours of work, time off work) will be considered across all types of jobs to meet individual requirements.
- 3.5 Employees will have their right to maternity leave, paternity leave, adoption leave, parental leave and to time off for dependants set out in their contracts of employment and the relevant employment policies.
- 3.6 Conditions of service and employment policies and procedures will be reviewed regularly to ensure they are non-discriminatory and that there is consistency of approach.

4. Recruitment and Selection

- 4.1 Job descriptions and person specifications will be produced, provided to potential applicants and used throughout the recruitment and selection process as objective criteria for measuring applicants' relevant aptitudes, potential, skills, knowledge and experience.
- 4.2 Job Descriptions will include the statement: *Supporting the development of Voluntary and Community Action as an organisation that is fully committed to social justice, equality of opportunity and the elimination of all forms of discrimination.*
- 4.3 Person Specifications will include the requirement for applicants to have an *Understanding and commitment to equal opportunity issues and practice.*
- 4.4 Advertisements will contain a statement that *Voluntary and Community Action South Bedfordshire is committed to equal opportunities and welcomes applications from all sectors of society.* They will also be worded in such a way that no in-built prejudice is contained in the wording.
- 4.5 Except where there is a need to re-deploy existing staff or there is a Genuine Occupational

Qualification, all jobs are open to those with the relevant skills, knowledge and experience.

- 4.6 Job advertisements will be displayed internally and employees encouraged to apply, where appropriate. Short listing and interview will depend solely on their suitability for the post.
- 4.7 Non-temporary vacancies will initially be advertised in appropriate national, local and ethnic minority press, dependent upon the nature of the post and the available resources. Where practical, vacancies will also be advertised in our *Action!* newsletter and on our website.
- 4.8 Application forms should not provide the potential to discriminate at the point of application, by revealing details of age, disability, nationality or ethnic origin, gender, marital status, dependants, religion or sexuality.
- 4.9 Recruitment monitoring forms will be used for all vacancies to collect data on the ethnic origin, age, gender and disability status of applicants. Such data will be kept separately and used for monitoring purposes only.
- 4.10 Due regard will be paid to the gender bias of any panel and the effect that it may have on short listing and interview proceedings.
- 4.11 Staff, trustees and others involved in recruitment and selection will be encouraged to undertake training on, and will receive written guidelines covering, equal opportunities in interview preparation, questioning techniques, systematic assessment and decision-making.
- 4.12 Short listing and interview assessment forms based on the Person Specification should be completed by all panel members for all candidates and retained on file. Voluntary and Community Action should be able to justify any decision made through written documentation.
- 4.13 Selection criteria and procedures are regularly reviewed to eliminate references to non-essential experience and qualifications that might discriminate against some candidates.

5. Training and Professional Development

- 5.1 All trustees, staff and volunteers will be given equal opportunity and access to training and professional development to enable them to progress both within and outside the organisation. Voluntary and Community Action will facilitate training and professional development opportunities for/with members and clients.
- 5.2 Equal opportunities and diversity will be an integral part of the training and professional development of all trustees, staff and volunteers.
- 5.3 To assist staff in their own professional development provision will, where possible, be made for staff to receive non-managerial support or supervision from peers of their own gender and/or culture.
- 5.4 Part-time staff participating in training and professional development opportunities that fall outside their contracted hours will be eligible to include these within their working time.
- 5.5 Training and professional development policies and practices will be reviewed regularly to ensure that they are non-discriminatory.

6. Volunteering

- 6.1 Voluntary and Community Action believes that voluntary activity, active community involvement and self help is an option that should be open to everyone irrespective of their background, and that they have the right to volunteer without experiencing discrimination.

- 6.2 Task and person specifications will be produced, provided to potential volunteers and used as the basis for the recruitment and selection of volunteers working within Voluntary and Community Action. The acceptance of individuals will be solely on the person's ability to fulfil the criteria of the role.
- 6.3 Voluntary and Community Action is committed to promoting volunteering to people who are not traditionally seen as being volunteers. It will also promote volunteering to people who face difficulties getting involved or who are from groups underrepresented in organisations working with volunteers.
- 6.4 Volunteers will be offered volunteering opportunities based on an objective assessment of their skills, knowledge, experience, interests and self development needs. They will not be offered opportunities based on stereotypical roles.
- 6.5 Careful attention will be paid to finding volunteering opportunities that match the special needs of volunteers with disabilities. Organisations working with volunteers will be encouraged to adopt imaginative ways of involving volunteers with disabilities, with due consideration being given to volunteer assignments and their working environment.
- 6.6 In encouraging the development of volunteering policies and good practice within organisations working with volunteers, Voluntary and Community Action will seek to ensure that such development reflects equal opportunities. Organisations will be encouraged to develop, adopt and implement an Equal Opportunities and Diversity Policy where these do not exist.
- 6.7 Where discrimination is identified in and/or by organisations working with volunteers Voluntary and Community Action will offer appropriate support and training to trustees, staff and volunteers so that these important issues can be addressed.
- 6.8 Volunteering policies and practices will be reviewed regularly to ensure that they are non-discriminatory.

7. Client and Member Services

- 7.1 Voluntary and Community Action will work towards equality of opportunity and access in matters related to health and social care, housing, social, economic, environmental and other issues associated with people's quality of life, whether in urban or rural localities.
- 7.2 Voluntary and Community Action will seek to raise awareness on cultural diversity, equal opportunities and anti-discrimination policy and practice by undertaking research; publishing material; the provision of information, advice and consultancy; designing, promoting and delivering training opportunities and seminars; and undertaking partnership and multi-agency work with other agencies.
- 7.3 Voluntary and Community Action encourages applications for membership from organisations and groups irrespective of their background or locality and may target those that are under represented in its membership. Organisations applying for membership will be encouraged to develop, adopt and implement their own Equal Opportunities and Diversity Policy.
- 7.4 Voluntary and Community Action will develop and promote services that do not reinforce gender, sexual, disability or racial stereotyping. It will avoid language and illustrations of such stereotypes in its promotional material, publications and communications. Where possible gender non-specific language will be used, along with positive images of people from minority ethnic groups, women, people with disabilities and older people as appropriate.
- 7.5 Voluntary and Community Action will develop and promote services that recognise the particular needs of rural localities and address inequalities arising from isolation, access to resources, higher service delivery costs, false assumptions about the needs of people living in rural areas and traditional expectations.

- 7.6 Material received for publication will be considered on its merits and monitored to ensure that it is non-discriminatory.
- 7.7 Voluntary and Community Action will ensure that its advocacy and work programme activities reflects the perspectives and experiences of different groups within the voluntary and community sector, especially those in rural localities, socially excluded or vulnerable to discrimination.
- 7.8 Voluntary and Community Action will ensure that its research, consultative and delivery methods are sensitive and relevant to the diverse needs of its members and clients.
- 7.9 Resources will be allocated on the basis of need and may, where resources are limited, be prioritised or targeted at particular (types of) groups, organisations or work.
- 7.10 Wherever possible the provision of food, including vegetarian food, at meetings, conferences and training events will reflect the needs and diversity of local communities.
- 7.11 The timing of meetings, conferences and training events will, where possible, take account of carers' responsibilities, volunteers' availability, religious festivals/observance and participants' travel needs.
- 7.12 No one should be deterred from taking a full part in any course, seminar or workshop commissioned, organised or delivered by Voluntary and Community Action. *Ground Rules for Participants, Speakers and Trainers* will be provided prior to each event.
- 7.13 Voluntary and Community Action will seek to ensure that the election of trustees; and the election or appointment of representatives to committees, consultative bodies and other fora; is representative of its membership and the social diversity of South Bedfordshire; and that the processes/procedures used are non-discriminatory.
- 7.14 Client use will be monitored to ensure that services reach all sectors of the community, especially those socially excluded and/or vulnerable to discrimination. Ethnic monitoring data will be collected in line with national census and/or other categories (e.g. of funders).

8. Premises

- 8.1 Voluntary and Community Action is aware that its current premises are not suitable for some people with disabilities or for visitors and users with young children and is committed to finding new premises that meet their needs.
- 8.2 Voluntary and Community Action will deal with, as a priority, the removal of any racist, sexist or other offensive graffiti found in or on premises owned or managed by it.
- 8.3 Voluntary and Community Action will endeavour, as far as possible, to ensure that all premises used by the organisation for meetings, conferences and training events will be accessible by wheelchair users and have adequate facilities for people with disabilities. Where this is not possible in particular circumstances alternative arrangements should be made to ensure that all members/clients who wish to are able to access the premises being used.
- 8.4 Promotional material for conferences, seminars and training events will clearly state whether (or not) the premises are accessible to people with disabilities. Application forms will seek information on participants' access requirements.

9. Behaviour and Professional Conduct

- 9.1 In all its work and all its published material, Voluntary and Community Action and its trustees, staff and volunteers will exercise care to act in a manner which displays respect for all people.

- 9.2 Voluntary and Community Action respects people's right to dress appropriately to their culture and will seek not to set conditions that are discriminatory in this regard.
- 9.3 Voluntary and Community Action will provide a working environment that is free from harassment and inappropriate divisions of labour or responsibility. It is opposed to bullying and harassment in any form and, in particular, on grounds related to a person's ethnic or racial origin, gender, sexuality or disability. The experience of any such behaviour is regarded as valid grounds for grievance and/or disciplinary action.
- 9.4 Voluntary and Community Action expects its members and clients to act in a non-discriminatory way towards its trustees, staff and volunteers. Voluntary and Community Action will challenge discriminatory practices or expressed views, whether within member organisations, other agencies or by potential volunteers. Consultants/trainers will also be expected to challenge any discrimination that occurs during courses, seminars or workshops that they run on behalf of Voluntary and Community Action.

10. Implementation

- 10.1 Responsibility for the overall effectiveness of this policy rests with the Director and Trustees of Voluntary and Community Action. All trustees, staff and volunteers working for Voluntary and Community Action have a personal responsibility for adhering to the policy and the procedures put in place.
- 10.2 Voluntary and Community Action will take account of this policy and code of practice when formulating other organisational policies and procedures.
- 10.3 Voluntary and Community Action aims to ensure that it remains aware of the problems caused by inequality in society, the way in which they affect others and the implications for its work.
- 10.4 All consultants, trainers and authors engaged by Voluntary and Community Action will be made aware of, and asked to ensure that their work reflects, this Policy.
- 10.5 All trustees, staff and volunteers (working in Voluntary and Community Action) will receive a copy of the Equal Opportunities and Diversity Policy, and be expected to read it, as part of their induction.
- 10.6 Voluntary and Community Action will include in its work programme specific actions designed to develop and implement effective equal opportunities practice.

11. Complaints

- 11.1 Voluntary and Community Action will ensure that all alleged incidents of discrimination or harassment are taken seriously, handled sensitively, investigated and resolved through its Complaints, Grievance and/or Disciplinary Procedures, as appropriate.
- 11.2 The Complaints Procedure provides for complaints to be dealt with, in the first instance, by the member of staff directly involved and then, if not satisfactorily resolved, by the Director and, in the final instance, by the Trustee Board. Any serious complaint must be brought to the attention of the Director who will raise the matter with the Chairperson.

12. Monitoring and Review

- 12.1 Voluntary and Community Action recognises that regular monitoring and evaluation is essential for thorough reviews of its Equal Opportunities and Diversity Policy. Appropriate monitoring systems for staff recruitment, volunteering, and the take up of services will be put in place and the results used to review its policies and procedures annually. In the light of

these findings its work programme will be amended so that equal opportunities practice can be further developed.

- 12.2 The purpose of monitoring in employment will be to review the application and employment patterns of men and women, of Black and Minority Ethnic and white applicants and staff, and of applicants and staff with disabilities.
- 12.3 The purpose of monitoring client and member services will be to ensure that services are reaching all sectors of the community, especially those socially excluded and/or vulnerable to discrimination, and to ensure that they meet the needs of our members and clients.
- 12.4 Staff annual appraisals will include specific evaluation of work that demonstrates commitment to this Policy.
- 12.5 The effectiveness of this policy, and its procedures, will be monitored and amended as and when necessary by the Director. Significant changes will require the approval of the Trustee Board. The policy will also be reviewed every three years as part of a continuing review of organisational policies.