

Equalities policy



WCVA recognises that discrimination, prejudice and disadvantage exist in our Society. We are committed to making our contribution to help eliminate this by working positively to promote a more inclusive Society. It is our aim and commitment to provide all our services and employment opportunities on a fair and equitable basis. WCVA has been fully committed to the implementation of equal opportunities for many years and recognises the importance of regular review to further strengthen our policy, making it a reality in all that we do.

The aim of the policy is to ensure no job applicant, employee or worker is discriminated against either directly or indirectly on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation.

The ethos and principles of our Equalities policy are that:

- WCVA is fully committed to equality of opportunity
- We will provide all our services on a fair and equitable basis
- We will adopt recruitment and selection procedures which provide fair and equitable opportunities for all and will similarly promote and train our staff in a fair and equitable manner
- We will treat people with dignity and respect and acknowledge people's individual needs and requirements
- We will ensure that the ethos and principles of our Equalities policy underpin and permeate everything that we do in our business
- We will implement the appropriate legislation and codes of practice and ensure that they are incorporated into all our policies, procedures and working practices
- We will expect our staff to adopt and implement our Equalities policy when carrying out their duties and conducting business on behalf of WCVA and we will provide training and support to staff to enable them to achieve this
- We will expect those to whom we distribute grants and those who carry out work on behalf of WCVA, to similarly adopt and implement their own Equalities policy or adopt ours
- We will challenge unacceptable behavior and actively support victims of harassment
- And finally, we will develop a comprehensive Equalities Strategy and Action Plan with targets to help us achieve our aim and this will be monitored and reviewed regularly to monitor performance and progress and take any remedial action that is required. The Equalities Strategy will be supplemented and supported by other complementary strategies.

Equalities Strategy

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1. Introduction

WCVA recognises the diversity of groups, cultures and needs of the wide variety of communities and individuals that live within our area of operation. We also recognise that some groups face discrimination and disadvantage within our Society. WCVA is committed to making its contribution to eliminating discrimination by ensuring that our Equalities policy is promoted at every level throughout the whole organisation. It is our overall aim to provide all of our services and employment opportunities on a fair and equitable basis.

WCVA has been fully committed to the implementation of equal opportunities for many years and recognises the importance of regular review to further strengthen our policy helping to make it a reality. This Strategy supports that approach and identifies some of the equal opportunities work that is ongoing at the present time in addition to identifying how we think we can build on this work by further developing and strengthening our commitment to equal opportunities and its implementation.

For the purposes of this Strategy and all our work WCVA will not discriminate directly or indirectly or treat anyone less favourably on the grounds of:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

This Strategy document has been developed to help us further achieve our overall aim. It provides a framework through which we will implement our Equalities policy. It is supplemented by an Action Plan and complementary Strategies and Action Plans, and should be read in conjunction with these.

Although the primary objective of the Strategy is to ensure that the particular groups identified above are treated on a fair and equitable basis, it is intended that the benefits arising from the implementation of this Strategy will benefit everyone associated with WCVA, partner organisations, suppliers, consultants and staff alike. However, we recognise that to achieve our overall aim we will need to take action which is targeted at specific groups such as women, Minority Ethnic (ME) people and people with disabilities. The focus of this Strategy therefore particularly targets these groups.

Although the overall responsibility for the implementation of the Strategy lies with the WCVA Board, managerial responsibility will lie with the Chief Executive.

2. Overview

WCVA is fully committed to tackling all aspects of social exclusion and endeavours to promote equal opportunities throughout its business activities and with all its service users and partner organisations.

WCVA recognises that the groups of people identified may have particular needs and we must be able to demonstrate both openness and fairness in meeting those needs.

In order to achieve our overall aim, of providing services and employment opportunities on a fair and equitable basis, it is imperative that the principles and ethos of our Equalities policy and Strategy continue to be reflected in all that we do through our policies, procedures and working practices.

This Strategy document explains what WCVA is seeking to achieve in terms of equal opportunities in employment, and how it expects to achieve its goals. The Strategy is intended to be flexible and adaptable in response to the changing needs of the organisation. The Equalities action plan supports the Strategy by outlining the actions to be taken to achieve the Strategy. Both documents require a continuous process of development, promotion, implementation, monitoring, review and evaluation.

This Equalities Strategy and action plan has been drawn up having full regard for legislation and codes of good practice.

By undertaking this process, WCVA expects to:

- Provide a framework for tackling discrimination, disadvantage and exclusion.
- Provide clarity to WCVA Board Members, staff, service users, suppliers, consultants and partner organisations about what it is seeking to achieve in the field of equal opportunities and social inclusion.
- Demonstrate to our stakeholders and the public WCVA's commitment to equal opportunities by setting out measurable objectives and performance targets that can be monitored in order to determine how far progress has been made.
- Promote awareness amongst staff, service users and partner organisations of equal opportunity issues.
- Use the lessons learnt by focussing attention on methods of consultation, research and service provision for women, ME people and people with disabilities to improve services for all users.

3. Aim and objectives

The aim and objectives of our Equalities Strategy are:

- To provide all services and employment opportunities on a fair and equitable basis
- To eliminate all discrimination and disadvantage whether unlawful or unintended
- To promote equal opportunities for all groups
- To deliver a high standard of service to all groups of people within a framework of empowerment and Best Value
- To provide services that are sensitive to the different needs of different groups
- To recognise the diversity of local communities, to support those differences and foster good relations between different groups and communities

4. Implementation

In order to implement this Equalities Strategy effectively, an Action Plan has been drawn up that identifies responsibilities and establishes a timetable for achieving objectives and for review.

Although responsibility for implementation and overview of parts of the Strategy has been designated to specific individuals within the organisation, it is stressed that this is intended to be a mainstream activity. Every person within WCVA has a responsibility to support and assist in ensuring the Strategy is delivered effectively. In addition, the Chief Executive, will have overall responsibility for ensuring the continued implementation of the Strategy through the Action Plan.

5. Equalities for service delivery

Access to services

WCVA recognises that, in order to make informed choices, people need to receive information in a manner that can be understood. We will provide information about our services, which is clear, comprehensive, accessible and easily understood. We will provide it in a variety of formats suited to the needs of our customers and service users for example, through translation, audio tape, Braille, large print and in the language of choice *etc.*

We will continue to actively publicise our services, adopting a variety of appropriate approaches, both directly to our customers and service users and to the wider general public, and to other agencies and organisations who support and assist individuals to access relevant services. We will continue to offer advice and assistance to those who want to access our services and ensure that we are reaching all sections of the community. For those people we are unable to assist we will advise which other agencies they should contact.

Our policy and procedure seeks to be fair, equitable and accountable. We monitor and review our policy regularly and will continue to do so to ensure that it is fully accessible and operates in a non-discriminatory way.

Service delivery

We will ensure that services are delivered to our customers in a fair, equitable and non-discriminatory way.

We have a rolling programme to review all our policies and procedures to ensure that equal opportunities considerations are addressed within the policy and procedure under scrutiny and that they become mainstreamed.

As part of this programme we will further identify the key service areas to be monitored, set targets and regularly review these to monitor progress and assess how they could be further improved.

Harassment

WCVA will not tolerate any harassment or victimisation of any of its staff, or service users and treats such complaints very seriously. We have developed specific policies and procedures to deal with harassment both for our staff and service users and keep these under constant review to ascertain whether any other policies or procedures are impacted upon and need to be reviewed and amended accordingly.

Our procedures for dealing with harassment are clearly outlined in our Harassment policy and anyone found to be harassing another individual will be subject to disciplinary action.

We adopt a victim-centred approach to racial harassment and the McPherson definition of racial harassment, *ie* that a racist incident is any incident, which is perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person. We will continue to provide specific training for our staff in dealing with such cases.

Contractors and consultants

WCVA is conscious that many of our services are delivered by contractors and other organisations. Before accepting contractors, consultants or suppliers onto any of our approved lists we will ensure that they comply with the principles and ethos of our Equalities policy.

Grants, loans and contracts

A condition of grant award will be that the recipient organisation complies with the principles and ethos of our Equalities policy before being awarded funding.

We require all recipients of grants, loan and contract funding provided by WCVA to ensure that they apply a policy of equal opportunities as employers, as users of volunteers, and as providers of services, regardless of ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation, religion and disability. We require organisations to provide a written equal opportunities statement or (for small and new groups) evidence that they are working towards one.

Consultation and participation

WCVA is committed to consulting and working in partnership with other organisations, community and interest groups and individuals to improve services and meet the needs of all its customers. We will continue to seek to establish working relationships with organisations to further the interests of minority groups in the delivery of our services.

We will require all associations, community and interest groups and individuals to adopt an equal opportunities statement, and to practice the principles of non-discrimination before being awarded funding by WCVA. Organisations will be required to have their own written Equalities policy. All Organisations will need to ensure that their staff deliver the service in the spirit of the policy with fairness and equity.

6. Equality in the workplace

Recruitment and selection

WCVA aims to ensure that its employment opportunities and working practices are accessed on a fair and equitable basis and that staff employed throughout the organisation reflect the communities we serve.

We regularly review our employment procedures and working practices to ensure that we do not discriminate unfairly against any section of the community and comply with Regulatory Requirements, relevant legislation and codes of practice. We advertise our posts widely to ensure as wide an audience as possible and circulate information to community groups and other organisations in touch with specific groups of people.

We have developed recruitment and selection procedures and working practices which select on the basis of an individual's skills, abilities, qualifications and experience to do the job and not on any other criteria. A job description and person specification is drawn up for every job within the organisation. Selection for posts is made against criteria identified in the person specification.

Disciplinary and grievance procedures

We have developed disciplinary and grievance procedures to ensure that there are formal procedures to deal with any inappropriate behaviour or actions by staff or managers which cannot be dealt with and resolved satisfactorily by informal means. Monitoring systems will be established to ensure that certain groups are not being disproportionately disciplined or bringing grievances. If this is found to be the case the matter will be investigated further to ascertain whether any further action is required.

Equal pay and benefits

WCVA aims to reward equal work with equal pay. Each post within the organisation has been assessed against a number of competencies, similar criteria including the level of responsibility, skills, abilities and experience required for the post, and then graded accordingly on the appropriate pay grading scale. Individuals appointed to the post receive the appropriate salary for the post.

We will adopt a similar approach with any benefits awarded and afford our part time workers the same proportionate equal pay and benefits as our full time members of staff enjoy.

Parental responsibilities

WCVA aims to be a family friendly organisation and recognises that parents and guardians have family commitments and responsibilities as well as work ones. We will be reasonable and try to accommodate, by mutual agreement, any difficulties parents or guardians might face from time to time in combining the two sets of commitments and responsibilities.

Flexible working

WCVA recognises that some individuals have care responsibilities outside their working lives and that sometimes these responsibilities conflict with "normal" working hours. We will accommodate staff wherever possible within the parameters of ensuring the delivery of the service whether through reduced hours or different working hours. We have instituted a formal flexible working system throughout the organisation and have policies in place to cover job-sharing and home working.

Genuine occupational qualifications

We are aware that there may be some posts where a genuine occupation qualification may apply. Where such requirements exist we will ensure that we observe the advice given in the codes of practice with respect to the implementation of genuine occupational qualifications.

Training and development

We have developed a training and development strategy to support and assist our staff in achieving the organisations aims and objectives. All staff will have a training and development plan and training opportunities will be awarded on the basis of need and the requirements to undertake the job and not on any discriminatory criteria.

All staff will receive a Staff Handbook which explains the behaviour required of people when conducting business on behalf of the WCVA. Our Equalities policy is also explained at Induction as are the behavioural expectations from the new members of staff. All staff will attend a Diversity Course.

Performance review

Staff training and development plans are drawn up following the outcome of the appraisal meeting held between each member of staff and their line manager each year.

Monitoring

We will monitor our employment and training practices against those who are women, ME or disabled people in relation to the areas above and will take any remedial action if any group is under-represented.

7. Governance

WCVA aims to ensure that its Board and Advisory Panels reflect the communities we serve and contain the right mix of individuals with the appropriate skills, abilities and experience to run the business. We will monitor and review the composition of the Board and Panels annually to ensure that they reflect the communities that we serve.

8. Monitoring, review and evaluation

WCVA has developed an Action Plan to assist in the delivery and implementation of this Strategy. The Action Plan identifies where specific responsibility lies for oversight of the Strategy and sets a clear timetable for implementation.

The WCVA Board will have overall responsibility for supervision and monitoring the Strategy. The officers identified in the Action Plan will have the responsibility to ensure that performance is reported to WCVA Audit Committee at least annually.

All staff and Board Members have a responsibility to assist in the implementation, monitoring and review of this Strategy. The Chief Executive will be responsible for the co-ordination of the Strategy.

Review

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