

Version	Title	Author	Changes (Summary of changes made)	Authorised	Review Date
4	Equality & Diversity	SD/AC	Reviewed and updated	Board Mtg 1.3.17	28.2.20

## **EQUALITY & DIVERSITY POLICY**

### **Purpose of this document**

This policy aims to outline Healthwatch West Sussex’s commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity and equal treatment for all staff, volunteers and board members in terms of employment and access to services and to provide guidance on anti- discriminatory practice. This policy is non-contractual. This policy will be reviewed on an on-going basis and amended in line with new developments in Equality and Diversity best practice.

Healthwatch West Sussex’s commitment to anti-discriminatory practice relates to any type of discrimination, as set out in the glossary at the end of this document.

### **Scope**

This policy applies to employees directly employed by Healthwatch West Sussex to workers employed via agencies, contractors in terms of employment, directors, volunteers, service users and the general public in terms of service provision. The policy applies specifically to discrimination and equality of opportunity in respect of ‘protected characteristics’ as defined in the Equalities Act 2010 (as amended)

- (a) Age
- (b) Disability
- (c) Race
- (d) Sex
- (e) Religion or cultural beliefs
- (f) Gender reassignment
- (g) Marital status and civil partnership
- (h) Sexual orientation
- (i) Pregnancy and maternity

The policy applies across the range of employment policies and practice, including those relating to Discipline, Grievance, Code of Conduct and Complaints.

## **Responsibilities**

Healthwatch West Sussex values its staff and volunteers and expects them to be treated in a respectful manner. Accordingly, everyone has a responsibility to treat others with dignity and respect. The Chief Officer is responsible for providing advice and guidance on equality and diversity issues, and to ensure this Policy document is kept up to date.

## **Employment Practices**

Healthwatch West Sussex aims to promote equality and diversity as an employer and to ensure that no job applicant, volunteer or employee receives less favourable treatment or is disadvantaged by conditions or requirements that cannot be shown to be justifiable in the context of the policy. Selection, recruitment, training, promotion and employment practices will be subject to regular review to ensure that they comply with the Diversity and Equalities Policy. Healthwatch West Sussex regards discrimination, abuse, harassment, victimisation or bullying of staff, volunteers, clients or others in the course of work as disciplinary offences that could be regarded as gross misconduct.

## **Healthwatch West Sussex as a Service Provider**

In developing its services and support and publicity materials, Healthwatch West Sussex will seek to ensure that access is equitable for all. This will include, wherever practicable, making specific access arrangements for clients with disabilities or learning difficulties, or any other protected characteristic which may apply, such as religion and belief. Healthwatch West Sussex will attempt to ensure that none of its policies discriminate directly or indirectly against any group or individual.

## **Our aims**

Healthwatch West Sussex fully supports the principle of equality and diversity. We aim to encourage, value and manage diversity and we recognise that talent and potential are distributed across the population. Not only are there moral and social reasons for promoting equality of opportunity, it is in the best interest of this organisation to recruit and develop the best people for our jobs from as wide and diverse a pool of talent as possible.

Healthwatch West Sussex recognises that certain groups and individuals in society are oppressed and disadvantaged due to discrimination directed against them. In all its work Healthwatch West Sussex will work to remove any barriers, bias or discrimination that prevents individuals or groups from realising their potential and contributing fully to our organisation's performance and to develop an organisational culture that positively values diversity. When listening to communities and individuals Healthwatch West Sussex will make every effort to understand the context in which people live their lives. Where understanding is more difficult Healthwatch West Sussex staff and volunteers will be supported in respectfully seeking information.

Those people experiencing discrimination may experience particular issues when accessing health and social care services. When working with partner organisations Healthwatch West Sussex will be aware of discriminatory practice and how this may manifest itself. Staff and volunteers will be supported in bringing any issues to the attention of partner organisations. Whenever practical and possible Healthwatch West Sussex will support public sector organisations in undertaking Equality Impact Assessment.

Discrimination operates through commonly held assumptions and prejudices, which are reinforced by laws, rules and customs. This makes discrimination appear normal and inevitable. Discrimination works by stereotyping people into different roles, by treating some people worse than others, or simply by ignoring them.

All forms of discrimination are unacceptable, regardless of whether there was any intention to discriminate or not. Staff and volunteers have a duty to co-operate with Healthwatch West Sussex to ensure that this policy is effective in ensuring equal opportunities and in preventing discrimination. Employees and volunteers should draw the attention of their line manager to suspected discriminatory acts or practices or cases of bullying or harassment.

Healthwatch West Sussex recognises that the promotion of equal opportunities requires more than passive opposition to discrimination; we are therefore committed to taking positive action towards equality of opportunity, recognising that the limited resources and the operational needs of the organisation may impose justifiable restrictions upon our ability to take such action

## **Complaints**

Healthwatch West Sussex will treat seriously any complaints of unlawful discrimination on any of the stated grounds made by employees, volunteers, clients or third parties and will take action where appropriate.

All complaints made by external parties will be investigated in accordance with Healthwatch West Sussex's Complaints Procedure and the complainant will be informed of the outcome.

In the event of an investigation concerning a complaint against an employee, Healthwatch West Sussex's Grievance Policy and Procedures will be followed and any action necessary dealt with under Healthwatch West Sussex's Disciplinary Procedure.

The Board will review complaints annually.

This policy should be read in conjunction with all Healthwatch West Sussex policies, but particularly, Code of Conduct, Complaints Policy, Grievance Procedure and Disciplinary Procedure