

Healthwatch Reading Equal Opportunities Policy

Introduction

This policy aims to outline Healthwatch Reading's commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity and equal treatment for staff, Trustees, and service users in terms of employment and access to services; and to provide guidance on anti-discriminatory practice. This policy is non-contractual.

Scope

The policy applies to employees directly employed by Healthwatch Reading, to workers employed via agencies, contractors in terms of employment, Trustees, and service users 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:

- Age
- Disability
- Race
- Sex
- Religion or cultural beliefs
- Gender reassignment
- Marital status and civil partnership
- Sexual orientation
- Pregnancy and maternity

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

Responsibilities

Healthwatch Reading values its staff, volunteers, contractors, Trustees and service users, and expects them to be treated in a respectful manner. Accordingly, all have a responsibility to treat others with dignity and respect. The Chief Executive is responsible for providing advice and guidance on equality and diversity issues, and to ensure the policy document is kept up to date.

Aims

Healthwatch Reading is committed to valuing diversity and working with equality as a core value, Healthwatch Reading aims to:

- Promote equality of opportunity
- Celebrate and value diversity
- Eliminate unlawful direct and indirect discrimination

Healthwatch Reading will provide equality of opportunity and equal treatment as an integral part of good practice. The organisation is committed to a working environment in which the contribution and needs of everyone are fully valued and recognised. We will

support our staff, workers, Trustees and contractors in not tolerating any inappropriate, violent or abusive behaviour from colleagues, other organisations or service users.

General purpose

Healthwatch Reading's practices will ensure that staff, volunteers, Directors, and service users will not be discriminated against on any grounds including age, disability, race, sex, religion or cultural beliefs, gender reassignment, marital status and civil partnership, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity.

Healthwatch Reading's commitment to anti-discriminatory practice relates to all kinds of discrimination, as set out below:

- Direct discrimination - where someone is treated less favourably than another because they have a protected characteristic
- Indirect discrimination - when a requirement or a condition is applied which has a detrimental effect on a particular group or individual. This applies even if there was not a deliberate intention to discriminate.
- Associative discrimination - direct discrimination against someone because they associate with another person who has a protected characteristic.
- Perceptive discrimination - direct discrimination against someone because others think they have a protected characteristic even if they do not possess that characteristic.
- Harassment - unwanted conduct related to a protected characteristic, which violates a person's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them. This applies even if the conduct is not directed at the individual or if they do not have the protected characteristic.
- Third party harassment - potential liability for the harassment of staff by others such as contractors or service users.
- Victimisation - when someone is treated badly because they have made or supported a complaint under the Equalities Act or it is thought that they have done so.

Employment Practices

Healthwatch Reading aims to promote equality and diversity as an employer and to ensure that no job applicant 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 Equal Opportunities Policy. All training opportunities will be published widely to all appropriate employees and not in such a way so as to exclude particular groups. Healthwatch Reading regards discrimination, abuse, harassment, victimisation or bullying of staff, service users or others in the course of work as disciplinary offences that could be regarded as gross misconduct.

Healthwatch Reading as Service Provider

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

Data Collection

Healthwatch Reading complies with the requirement of the Data Protection Act. Any data, either qualitative and or quantitative, required in order to monitor the requirements or the impact of the Equalities Act 2010, will be collected where it is reasonable, proportionate and practical to do so. Any such requirements will be notified to Healthwatch Reading service users and will follow a common data format.

This policy will be reviewed on an ongoing basis and amended in line with new developments in Equality and Diversity best practice.