Equality and Diversity Policy

1. Introduction

1.1. Lytchett Matravers Parish Council is fully committed to compliance with the requirements of the UK Equality Act 2010 and relevant updates to equality and diversity legislation.

1.2. The Equality Act 2010 came into force in October 2010 and replaces and brings together the previous legislation into one single Act. This act provides a legal framework to protect the rights of individuals and advance equality of opportunity for all. It provides Britain with a discrimination law which protects individuals from unfair treatment and promotes a fair and more equal society.

- The Equal Pay Act 1970
- The Sex Discrimination Act 1975
- The Race Relations Act 1976
- The Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- The Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003
- The Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003
- The Equality Act 2006 Parts 1 and 2
- The Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2007

1.3. The legislation covers a prescribed set of protected characteristics including age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation, experience of mental distress, HIV status, caring responsibility, class, education, employment status, political belief, unrelated criminal conviction or any qualifying non-religious philosophical beliefs. It also covers prohibited conduct including discrimination, adjustments for disabled persons, victimisation and harassment; services and public functions; premises; employment; contracts; and, advancement of equality.

1.4. The latter provision specifies a public sector equality duty, which applies to town and parish councils.

2. Public Sector Equality Duty

2.1. Lytchett Matravers Parish Council has a duty to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
- advance equality of opportunity between different groups; and
- foster good relations between different groups.

3. The Policy

3.1. Lytchett Matravers Parish Council will commit to achieving equality of opportunity, valuing diversity in all aspects of its work, providing an inclusive and supportive environment for all by:

- ensuring that people are treated solely based on their abilities and potential, regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, sex, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion, sexual orientation, socio-economic background, or any other inappropriate distinction.

- promoting diversity and equality and value the contributions made by individuals and groups of people from diverse cultural, ethnic, socio-economic and distinctive backgrounds.
- challenging inequality and less favourable treatment wherever practicable; and
- promoting greater participation of under-represented groups by encouraging positive action to address inequality, promote an environment free of harassment and bullying on any grounds in relation to all staff, councillors, contractors and visitors attending the Council's offices or meetings.

4. Scope

4.1. The Equality Act 2010 introduced the term 'protected characteristics' to refer to groups that are protected under the Act, these are:

Age

- Individuals of any age or apparent age are protected from discrimination. Lytchett Matravers Parish Council will ensure that people of all ages are treated with respect and dignity; ensure that people of working age are given equal access to our employment, training, development and promotion opportunities; and challenge discriminatory assumptions about younger and older people.

Disability

- This is a physical or mental impairment which has (or is likely to have) a substantial effect on a person's ability to carry out day-to-day activities for a period of a year or more. Certain medical conditions, such as cancer, Multiple Sclerosis and HIV are a disability from the outset, whatever their impact on day-to-day activities. Protection from discrimination covers a person who has had a disability in the past. There is no unfavourable treatment if the 'discriminator' did not know or could not reasonably have known the person had a disability. More favourable treatment of disabled persons is not unlawful discrimination against non-disabled people.
- Lytchett Matravers Parish Council has a duty to make 'reasonable adjustments' where a 'provision, criterion or practice' puts a disabled person at a substantial disadvantage compared to non-disabled persons. Then a duty arises on the Council to take such reasonable steps as are necessary to avoid the disadvantage at no charge to the individual.
- Lytchett Matravers Parish Council will challenge discriminatory assumptions about disabled people; and seek to continue to improve access to information by ensuring alternative formatting of written documents are available on request.

Gender reassignment

- Gender reassignment is a protected characteristic that applies to a person who is proposing to undergo, is undergoing or has undergone a process (or part of a process) to change their sex.
- Lytchett Matravers Parish Council will challenge discriminatory assumptions about women and men; take positive action to redress the negative effects of discrimination against women and men; offer equal access for women and men to representation, services, employment, training and pay and encourage other organisations to do the same; and provide support to prevent discrimination against people who have or who are about to undergo gender reassignment.

Marriage and Civil Partnership

- Protection is given to people who have or share the characteristics of being married or being a civil partner.
- Lytchett Matravers Parish Council will ensure that people are treated with respect and dignity and that a positive image is promoted regardless of marriage or civil partnership; challenge discriminatory assumptions about the marriage or civil partnership of individuals; and ensure that no individual is disadvantaged and that we take account of the needs of individuals' marriage or civil partnership.

Pregnancy and Maternity

- This protected characteristic covers the course of a pregnancy and any illness suffered as a result of the pregnancy or because a woman is exercising or is seeking to exercise the right to compulsory, ordinary or additional maternity leave.
- Lytchett Matravers Parish Council will ensure that people are treated with respect and dignity and that a positive image is promoted regardless of pregnancy or maternity; challenge discriminatory assumptions about the pregnancy or maternity of our employees; and ensure that no individual is disadvantaged and that we take account of the needs of our employees' pregnancy or maternity.

Race

- Race includes colour, nationality, ethnic or national origins. Lytchett Matravers Parish Council will challenge racism wherever it occurs; respond swiftly and sensitively to racists incidents; and actively promote race equality in the Parish Council.

Religion or Belief

- Religion means any religion including lack of religion. Belief is defined as any religious or philosophical belief including a lack of belief. Lytchett Matravers Parish Council will ensure that religion or beliefs and related observances of councillors and employees are respected and accommodated wherever possible; and respect people's beliefs where the expression of those beliefs does not impinge on the legitimate rights of others.

Sexual Orientation

The Act protects a person's sexual orientation towards:

- people of the same sex as him or her (i.e. a gay man or a lesbian);
- people of the opposite sex from him or her;
- people of both sexes.
- Lytchett Matravers Parish Council will ensure to consider the needs of all sexual orientations. It is important to note that carers are also protected through association to any of the 'protected characteristics' described above.

4.2. In addition, Lytchett Matravers Parish Council recognises that there is a range of other groups/people that may face additional disadvantage and discrimination and will be considered when making decisions. These are:

- people who are rurally isolated
- people on low incomes/in poverty
- single parents
- people with a military background and their families
- ex-offenders (except where there is a known risk to children or vulnerable adults)
- gender identity
- gender expression

5. Objectives

5.1. To improve delivery, information and access to services Lytchett Matravers Parish Council will:

- Ensure all councillors, employees, contractors and users of our services are informed about our Equality and Diversity Policy.
- Apply equal opportunities principles to work undertaken for the council by external contractors, other organisations in receipt of council funding and in work with our partners.
- Rectify any elements of our work which have the potential for discrimination and prejudice.

5.2. To promote equality and diversity with other partners Lytchett Matravers Parish Council will:

- Promote tolerance and respect between diverse groups and individuals.

- Acknowledge and celebrate, wherever possible, the variety of lifestyles and cultures within the town.
- Challenge all forms of discrimination within the Parish Council and the wider community.
- Support the development of communities and assist them in challenging discrimination, harassment, bullying and violence.

6. Responsibility And Liability

6.1. All members of staff and councillors remain personally responsible for ensuring that they act within the law. The Parish Clerk is responsible for ensuring that staff perform their duties in a lawful manner and that staff and councillors are supported by appropriate equality and diversity training. In certain circumstances, the Parish Council could be vicariously liable for actions carried out by staff purportedly in the Parish Council's name. Any member of staff or councillor may be personally liable if, whilst on Council business and despite guidance and training from the Council, they behave illegally in respect of the Equality Act 2010. Breaches of the Council's Equalities and Diversity Policy will be regarded as serious misconduct and could lead to disciplinary proceedings. Councillors and employees are entitled to complain about discrimination or harassment or victimisation through the Parish Clerk or refer to the Council's Grievance Procedure as detailed in the Employee's Handbook.

7. Recruitment

7.1. Lytchett Matravers Parish Council is an equal opportunities employer and will ensure that within the framework of the law that the council's recruitment process for staff and the co-option of councillors is free from unlawful or unfair discrimination. Any recruitment advertisement will be non-discriminatory and will avoid any gender or culturally specific language and include a statement of commitment to equal opportunities, welcoming applications from all sections of the community. Application forms should ask whether the applicant has been convicted of a criminal offence and if so, to give details. Under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 a conviction can become spent. If so, the applicant is not obliged to disclose it. Job applications should not ask for the applicant's age. During the interview process, candidates will be asked a standard set of agreed questions to avoid potentially discriminatory questions. Personal questions relating to the candidate's age, sex, sexual orientation, race, marital status, nationality, religion or belief, disability, membership or non-membership of a trade union will not be asked.

8. Employment

8.1. All employees whether full-time, part-time, fixed contract, agency workers or temporary staff, will be treated fairly and equally. Selection for employment, promotion, training, remuneration or any other benefit will be based on aptitude and ability. All employees will be helped and encouraged to develop their full potential and the talents and resources of the workforce will be fully utilised to maximise the efficiency of the Council.

9. Retirement

9.1. It is unlawful to terminate employment by retirement unless the employer can justify it, or the employee agrees to it.

10. Review

10.1. This Equality and Diversity Policy was and presented to Full Council held on 20th December 2023, for approval and adoption. Future reviews will be done either bi-annually or when there are changes to current legislation, whichever is the sooner.

11. Contact Details

11.1. For advice and assistance please contact Julie Wigg, Parish Clerk at
Lytchett Matravers Parish Council,
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Vineyard Close,
Lytchett Matravers,
POOLE BH16 6DD

Tel: 07596 885667

Email: lytchettmatravers@dorset-aptc.gov.uk
Website: Lytchett Matravers Parish Council (www.lytchettmatraverspc.org)

11.2. Equality and Human Rights Commission are an independent statutory body with the responsibility to encourage equality and diversity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, and protect and promote the human rights of everyone in Britain. For more information from the Equality and Human Rights Commission please go to https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/

Adopted: 20th December 2023
Reviewed: 26th March 2025 and then two yearly.

Next review date: March 2027