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caring with commitment

EQUAL OPPORTUNITES POLICY

1. Statement of Policy

The Company is committed to the principle that no employee or job applicant shall receive unfavourable treatment on grounds of race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status or disability.

2. Reasons for the Policy

The Company wishes to employ the most suitable and appropriately qualified people for the work to be undertaken. Consequently, sound business reasons support the promotion by the Company of equal opportunities in employment. Over a period of time, legislation has been introduced to encourage equal opportunities and to render discrimination unlawful. The Equality and Human Rights Commission have been established to work towards the elimination of discriminatory practices and have devised Codes of Practice in their respective areas. The Codes contain practical advice on ways to avoid discrimination and on the management of an equal opportunities policy.

3. Equality of Treatment

The Policy aims to ensure that members of staff adhere to the principle of equality of treatment. It prohibits acts of discrimination whereby one individual is treated less favourably than another on grounds of race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, disability or perception about them possessing those characteristics

Examples of such discrimination by an employer include:

- (i) Deliberately refusing or omitting to make an offer of employment;
- (ii) Restricting or denying access to promotion, transfer, training or other benefits or facilities;
- (iii) Dismissing an individual;
- (iv) Subjecting him/her to some other detriment (for example, racial or sexual harassment);or
- (v) Discriminating in the arrangements made for deciding who should be offered a job.

Discrimination may be 'direct', as in the cases described above, or 'indirect', which can occur when there is no intention to discriminate. For example, an advertisement specifying an upper age limit of 28 years could be regarded as indirect discrimination against women

because such a condition would have the effect of excluding many women temporarily unavailable for work for reasons connected with motherhood.

Discrimination by 'victimisation' occurs where a person is treated unfavourably because, for example, he/she has brought proceedings or given evidence or information in a case involving sex or race discrimination.

A manager or employee who contravenes (or knowingly aids another person to contravene) the Company's policy may be held personally liable for committing an act of lawful discrimination and may, together with the Company, be subject to legal proceedings

4. Responsibilities

Each manager is responsible for communicating the policy to all employees and providing operational procedures and training and monitoring the application of the policy. Managers and supervisors are responsible for ensuring that they and all staff under their control understand the policy and observe the correct procedures.

All employees have an important part to play in the application of the policy by ensuring that their attitudes and actions are consistent at all times with both the spirit and the letter of the policy.

5. Recruitment, Selection and Promotion

The Company's intention in respect of recruitment, selection and promotion is to appoint the most able candidate for each job regardless of that person's race, religious beliefs, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, age or disability.

In order to ensure that this intention is realised, the requirements of each job are identified and all candidates assessed against the same criteria at each stage of the selection process to ensure that fairness and consistency are achieved throughout. Similarly, all candidates for promotion possessing appropriate skills, knowledge and experience are given the same degree of consideration. Employee appraisals are concerned only with the assessment of actual performance in the job. Assumptions about individuals in relation to their race, religious beliefs, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, age or disability are unacceptable.

6. Training

Educational and vocational courses leading to relevant qualifications are available to employees regardless of race, religious beliefs, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, age or disability and members of under-represented groups are encouraged to apply.

Training in matters relating, directly or indirectly, to equal opportunities is regarded as a vital component in the training programmes for managers and supervisors, both as a means to maintaining the level of awareness of the policy and as a means of ensuring that the policy is operating as the Company intends.

7. Conditions of Employment and Provision of Benefits and Services

All conditions of employment, employee benefits and services apply irrespective of race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, age or disability. Accommodation and facilities are provided, as far as it is practicable to do so, having proper regard for the needs of the disabled.

8. Observing the Policy

The overall aim of the policy is to promote a harmonious working environment for all members of staff. Therefore, the appropriate supervisor or manager should be informed if an occasion arises or is suspected to have arisen where an individual experiences unfavourable treatment on grounds of race, religious beliefs, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, age or disability. An employee who feels they are unable to discuss the matter with their supervisor or manager may contact The Company Nurse.

A member of staff with a grievance concerning the application of the policy should follow the grievance procedure.

It is a disciplinary offence to discriminate intentionally against a fellow employee or job applicant in contravention of the policy.

9. Monitoring

The Company will monitor and continuously review the operation of the policy and expects all employees to co-operate by providing relevant information, where necessary. All such information will be treated as strictly confidential and used solely for this purpose.

10. Sexual or Racial Harassment

Sexual or racial harassment is a form of discrimination. It is unlawful behaviour and in direct contravention of the Company's Equal Opportunities Policy.

Sexual or racial harassment is unwanted conduct of a sexual or racial nature, which is either personally offensive or fails to respect the rights of others. It includes making gestures, comments or 'jokes', the display of offensive material and physical contact or assault.

Managers and supervisors have a responsibility to eliminate any sexual or racial harassment or intimidation of which they are aware.

An employee who believes that he or she is or has been the subject of sexual or racial harassment should, initially, raise the matter with their immediate supervisor.

Formal investigations of complaints will be dealt with in accordance with the Company's grievance and disciplinary procedures and will be handled sensitively and confidentially, with due respect for the rights of those concerned. If the outcome of the investigation reveals that a complaint is justified, appropriate action, including disciplinary action, will be taken. Retaliation or victimisation of an employee who has complained about harassment will also be treated as a disciplinary offence.