

Citizens Advice Reigate and Banstead equality and diversity policy for volunteers

1. Introduction

1.1 Citizens Advice Reigate and Banstead is committed to providing a supportive and inclusive culture for:

- all those who need our services
- our volunteers
- our staff and
- other stakeholders.

We recognise the positive value of diversity, promoting equality and fairness, and challenging discrimination.

We welcome our legal duties not to discriminate as a service provider and an employer. We aim to go beyond the narrow scope of legislative compliance and follow best practice, making equality, fairness and diversity a fundamental part of all our activities.

We recognise people with different backgrounds, skills, attitudes and experiences bring fresh ideas and perceptions, and we wish to encourage and harness these differences to make our services more relevant and approachable.

1.2 Citizens Advice Reigate and Banstead will not discriminate or tolerate discriminatory behaviour on the grounds of race, colour, sex, gender identity (transgender), disability, nationality, national or ethnic origin, religion or belief, marital / partnership or family status, caring responsibilities, sexual orientation, age, social class, educational background, employment status, working pattern, trade union membership or any other factor.

2. Scope

2.1 This policy relates to the work undertaken by Citizens Advice Reigate and Banstead involving volunteers, including: meeting clients' needs, service delivery, dealing with other volunteers and staff, suppliers, supporters and other associated third parties.

3. Legal obligations

3.1 Volunteers do not fall within the scope of the legislation listed below. However, this list serves to illustrate to volunteers the framework within which the local Citizens Advice operates and that we are committed to providing our services in way which is non-discriminatory and which values diversity.

3.2 The Equality Act 2010 harmonises and strengthens and replaces most previous equality legislation. The following legislation is still relevant:

- The Human Rights Act 1998.
- The Work and Families Act 2006.
- Employment Equal Treatment Framework Directive 2000 (as amended).

3.3 The Gender Recognition Act 2004 gives people who have changed their gender from the one they were assigned at birth, full recognition in their acquired sex in law for all purposes. A person's transgender status cannot lawfully be disclosed without her / his consent. Information about transgender status is sensitive data within the meaning of the Data Protection Act 1998 and therefore can be processed only in limited circumstances. This applies to our volunteer records.

4. Meeting clients' needs

4.1 We are committed to treating all clients equally and fairly and to not discriminating unlawfully against them. We will also, wherever possible, take steps to promote equal opportunity. We will ensure that clients:

- are able to access the service in ways that suit them
- are given help that is relevant to their problem and situation
- are treated fairly, with dignity and respect, and without discrimination
- have their needs listened to, and met whenever possible.

4.2 Citizens Advice Reigate and Banstead is committed to meeting the diverse needs of clients. We will take steps to identify the needs of clients in our community and develop policies and procedures accordingly. We aim to ensure that the services we provide are accessible to all. We will take into account, in particular, the needs of clients with a disability (including mental health problems) and clients who are unable to communicate effectively in English, including those who are deaf, who use BSL and who are hard of hearing. We will consider whether particular groups are predominant within our client base and devise appropriate policies / procedures to meet their needs. Such groups include: men and women; carers; older people; members of religious groups; ethnic groups or nationalities and lesbian, gay or transgender people.

5. Volunteers

5.1 General statement

Volunteers contribute significantly to the diversity of the organisation. They can expect to be treated fairly, with dignity and respect, and without discrimination. They are likewise expected to treat others fairly, with dignity and respect, and without discrimination. Due to the restrictions imposed by employment law, volunteers are not entitled to the same rights and protections as employees.

6. Implementing the policy

6.1 Responsibilities

6.1.1 All staff, managers, volunteers and trustees will be given a copy of an equality and diversity policy as part of their induction.

6.1.2 All volunteers

At all levels of the organisation, including trustees, volunteers are expected to have read and understood this policy, to ensure that they behave in accordance with its principles and requirements, to encourage the same level of behaviour in colleagues and to immediately report any breaches witnessed, whenever it is reasonable for them to do so.

6.1.3 All managers

Managers are responsible for promoting this policy and ensuring it is understood and complied with by all volunteers, dealing with breaches and complaints (whether reported or not) seriously, speedily, sensitively and confidentially and contributing ideas for the advancement of diversity principles within the organisation. Managers are expected to be proactive in identifying circumstances in which elements of the policy can benefit individual volunteers, and encourage and support volunteers in making use of such benefits.

6.2 Conduct and general standards of behaviour

All volunteers are expected to conduct themselves in a professional and considerate manner at all times. Citizens Advice Reigate and Banstead will not tolerate behaviour such as:

- making threats
- physical violence
- shouting
- swearing at others
- rudeness
- isolating, ignoring or refusing to work with certain people
- telling offensive jokes or name calling
- displaying offensive material such as pornography or sexist / racist cartoons, or the distribution of such material via email / text message or any other format
- any other forms of harassment and victimisation.

Citizens Advice Reigate and Banstead encourages volunteers to resolve misunderstandings and problems informally wherever possible, depending on the circumstances. However, whether dealt with informally or formally, it is important for a volunteer who may have caused offence to understand that it is no defence to say that they did not intend to do so, or to blame individuals for being over sensitive. It is the impact of the behaviour, rather than the intent, that counts, and that should shape the solution found both to the immediate problem and to preventing further similar problems in the future.

6.3 Complaints of discrimination

Citizens Advice Reigate and Banstead will treat seriously all complaints of discrimination made by volunteers, and will take action where appropriate.

All complaints by volunteers will be investigated in accordance with Citizens Advice Reigate and Banstead's volunteer complaints procedure and the complainant will be informed of the outcome in line with these procedures.

We will also monitor the number and outcomes of complaints of discrimination made by volunteers.

7. Monitoring

7.1. Citizens Advice Reigate and Banstead will monitor and record diversity information about staff and volunteers, including trustees, on the basis of age, gender, ethnicity and disability.

7.2 Where it is possible to do so, and where doing so will not cause offence or discomfort to those whom it is intended to protect, we will monitor the sexual orientation and religion or belief of staff and volunteers so to ensure that they are not being discriminated against in terms of the opportunities or benefits available to them.

We will store diversity monitoring data as confidential personal data and restrict access to this information. Diversity monitoring information will be used exclusively for the purposes of diversity monitoring and will have no bearing on opportunities or benefits.

We will monitor all elements relevant to volunteers of the following:

- recruitment and selection processes
- training
- complaints and performance management procedures.

8. Review

8.1 The Trustee Board will have oversight of this policy and will receive regular reports based on the monitoring detailed in 7.2 above. Where under-representation of particular groups is identified, the Board will consider appropriate remedial action such as the setting of targets and/or positive action measures provided for in the Equality Act 2010. The Trustee Board should undertake annual reviews of this policy, especially where there are changes in legislation or significant developments in the area of equality, diversity, inclusion or Human Rights.