

# Equal Opportunities Policy

## 1. Introduction

Path believes that equality of opportunity for all is desirable and is beneficial to society as a whole; that everyone has a role to play in minimising disadvantage and maximising opportunity; and that this will lead to a fairer and more effective society.

One of the ways that Path contributes to this is through working to address inequalities arising from homelessness, poor housing and poverty. Another is by the implementation and enforcement of this policy. The context for this is that Path is committed at all levels to achieving and promoting equality of opportunity, in terms of how we work within our organisation re staff, how we work with people needing services and how we work with others, including partners.

There are also legal aspects to equality of opportunity, now drawn together in the Equality Act 2010. Path, therefore, has legal obligations, as well as moral commitments, in terms of equality. This policy notes key aspects of these.

Path also aims to positively manage diversity, welcoming, recognising and utilising the benefits of our diverse society.

## 2. The Equality Duty

The Equality Duty is a duty on public bodies and others carrying out public functions. It ensures that public bodies consider the needs of all individuals in their day to day work.

This Duty encourages public bodies to understand how different people will be affected by their activities so that policies and services are appropriate and accessible to all and meet different people's needs. By understanding the effect of our activities on different people, and how inclusive services can support and open up people's opportunities, we are better placed to deliver policies and services that are efficient and effective.

The Equality Duty has three aims. It requires public bodies to have **due regard** to the need to:

- **eliminate unlawful discrimination**, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act;
- **advance equality of opportunity** between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it; and
- **foster good relations** between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

Path's approach and service delivery both directly share and adhere to these aims. This affects how Path acts as an employer, develops, evaluates and reviews policy and designs, delivers and evaluates services.

## Equal Opportunities Policy

### 3. Policy

Below are the ‘**protected characteristics**’, as defined in the Equality Act, 2010. It is unlawful, as well as wrong, to discriminate against or harass someone because of any of these characteristics.

- Age
- Disability
- Race (including ethnic origin, colour, citizenship, nationality, and national origin);
- Religion or Belief (or lack of)
- Gender (sex)
- Sexual Orientation
- Gender Reassignment
- Marriage and Civil Partnership (applies only to someone who actually personally has this characteristic)
- Pregnancy and Maternity

For Path it is important to:

- remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics;
- meet the needs of people with protected characteristics; and
- encourage people with protected characteristics to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is low
- manage diversity so as to affirm difference and maximise the positive benefits of having a diverse workforce and / or client group

In practice, this means – for instance – ensuring fair access to services, fair treatment and even ‘exit’, too. For Path, this is part of an approach and culture that promotes fairness, equality and diversity, especially but not only in terms of the protected characteristics.

#### Recruitment

As an equal opportunities employer, Path is fully committed to establishing and maintaining a working environment in which recruitment and promotion is based upon merit. We will ensure that no employee or job applicant is treated less favourably on the grounds of the above protected characteristics.

Path will ensure that selection decisions will be made on ability using objective, job related criteria.

Path will provide terms and conditions, training, promotion and appraisal without regard to any protected characteristic. We state to all employees that any acts of

## Equal Opportunities Policy

discrimination, including harassment will be grounds for serious disciplinary action and complaints will be raised through the grievance procedure.

To this end, within the framework of the law, we are committed, wherever practicable, to achieving and maintaining a workforce representative of the local communities in which we operate. We will monitor the implementation of this policy via a programme of action (implementation plan) which will be regularly reviewed and updated.

Overall responsibility for the application of the policy rests with the Director and nominated service manager. However, all employees of Path have a personal responsibility under the policy, in particular all managers and supervisors.

### Service provision

In terms of clients, services and support shall be offered equally within Path's broad catchment area, targeted only for the purpose of better meeting the needs of those (likely to be) needing Path services. When relevant, we shall endeavour, for instance, to use interpretation or other relevant services, ensuring that clients are not further disadvantaged by language.

We are committed to treating potential and actual clients fairly, including being aware of and respecting the protected characteristics. We shall therefore ensure that Path staff members are made aware of those and of this policy.

### 4. Discrimination

Path will therefore not unfairly discriminate (directly or indirectly, perceived or associative) against anyone in relation to a protected characteristic, which include: trade union activity; membership or non-membership of the Freemasons or other organisations; domestic situation; and whether in or applying for full, part-time, or job share work. (These are examples only. Other forms of discrimination will be tackled).

In terms of racism, Path accepts the Macpherson definition of institutional racism contained in the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry report:

*The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people.*

**So the expression of prejudice or active discrimination by any Path worker, volunteer, contractee or client will not be tolerated.**

## **Equal Opportunities Policy**

The only relevance of such issues is in maximising an individual's input into Path or ensuring the most appropriate support for them. Therefore it is unacceptable for anyone whose beliefs include negative prejudice (such as homophobia) to work within Path.

As noted, the Equality Act 2010 makes it unlawful to discriminate against in relation to a protected characteristic. This means that discriminating against a person because of their race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origins is against the law. Path will not only comply with but promote that law, such as through challenging negative discrimination.

### **5. Equality of Opportunity**

The Equality Act 2010 also notes the duty of local authorities and providers to actively promote race equality, which Path is committed to doing. In terms of recruitment of workers and volunteers, and their supervision and support, individuals are to be evaluated according to their abilities and output, their support needs and Path's needs as an agency. (These are covered in more detail in separate policies, such as on recruitment.)

Path is also aware of and complies with other acts, including Health and Safety, Minimum Wage and others.

### **Recruitment**

Path shall therefore aim to advertise opportunities widely and appoint according to fair, set criteria. Our systems for recruitment reflect an equal opportunities approach (see separate policy), with set, objective criteria for recruitment, front sheets of application forms separated and more to ensure only relevant information is used for short-listing and appointment. As part of our reviewing, we regularly look at workforce profile, potential actions including targeting future recruitment promotion to enhance sufficient representation.

### **6. Implementation**

Other policies and procedures operate similarly, ensuring fair representation and treatment. We also expect and require workers to promote equality of opportunity and to challenge negative discrimination in their work at all times. Training is promoted to workers and is monitored as part of appraisals.

Path will continue to introduce measures to combat negative discrimination in our employment practice and our service delivery. Indeed, equality of opportunity is a theme running through Path policies (recruitment, entitlements, conditions of service, appraisals).

As noted, Path will have an Equal Opportunities Implementation Plan at all times, overseen by the Director, which will note how Path is implementing this policy,

## Equal Opportunities Policy

what specific actions are to be taken to improve our management and practice, by whom and by when. This will be reviewed annually. The Plan will include matters such as training and equality audits, as well as reviews of other policies against Equal Opportunities criteria.

When promoting our services, Path will continue to endeavour to make information appropriate and accessible. Work to further build and maintain relationships with appropriate other services will continue, including to ensure that our services are accessible and relevant to all who need them. (Access to Path's services are mostly by referral.)

Through partnerships, forums and multi-agency meetings we shall continue to promote the rights of our clients and, generally, fair, equal and efficient responses to people in housing need.

### **Third Party Harassment**

The Organisation values all employees and as such we take very seriously the harassment of employees by a third party during the course of employment. (This might be negative attitudes or discrimination from others, experienced by a Path worker as part of doing their job.) We are committed to taking such steps as is reasonably practicable to prevent third party harassment from occurring.

### **7. Responsibilities**

Path will therefore:

- i. Seek to comply with all laws designed to protect the rights of people (Equality Act 2010 and any amendment thereof)
- ii. Keep a close watch on, and constantly review, this Equal Opportunities Policy to ensure that it makes a positive contribution towards the removal of all forms of discrimination.
- iii. Encourage and ensure change in individual behaviour and attitudes within its operations, to achieve the objectives of the Equal Opportunities Policy.

On behalf of the board, the Director of Path has overall responsibility for this policy. The Tenancy Support Manager is the operational lead, working with the Director and others to further develop and implement Path's commitment to equality of opportunity.

**8. Implementation and Monitoring of this policy** shall be carried out through initial induction, supervision and appraisals of all workers and volunteers (with direct reference to this policy), as well as by the management of Path, assessing opportunities and issues as they arise and develop. Copies of the policy shall also be available to clients and the public and shall be made available to further that aim.

## Equal Opportunities Policy

In terms of monitoring accessibility and effectiveness of our services, we shall use our database to monitor and record the needs presented to us and our response. Service managers and the Director will evaluate this on a regular basis, considering the breadth or reach of services and how to ensure or improve fair access.

This policy will be made available to service users in a number of ways. One of these is through key policies being available on request, as promoted in our literature. We shall also continue to discuss the aims and content of this and other policies with clients, not just individually but through our Client Reference Group and other means. Further actions include, as implied above, regular workforce surveys, monitoring the profile of the staff team.

This policy will also be made available on our website, particularly accessible therefore to partner agencies and referrers.

**Breaching of this policy by volunteers or workers** shall be tackled, through supervision/line management and any issues or concerns should therefore be passed to supervisors, who will then consult with the Director or other supervisors, as appropriate. Any behaviour not consistent with this policy will be addressed with the person concerned but any actions judged to be serious or persistent may, after due process, result in a termination of the relationship between Path and the individual(s) working for Path. Anyone felt to be unable to fully support this policy as a whole will not be eligible for appointment at Path in the first place.

**Breaching of this policy by clients** will be addressed by the appropriate manager, who shall address the behaviour in question with the person concerned. Where particular action or persistent behaviour is felt to compromise Path's attempts to comply with and promote this policy, and/or may conflict with the rights and opportunities of other clients, Path may be unable to continue to provide support to the client breaching of the policy. When and if this is the case attempts will be made to identify and secure alternative support for the client concerned.

Where a client feels that Path has breached the policy (such as by feeling that they have been negatively discriminated against), they are encouraged to make a complaint, which can be via our established complaints procedure.