

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy – Central Norfolk Circuit

INTRODUCTION

The Strategy for Justice, Dignity, and Solidarity report to the Conference 2021 was adopted by Conference in 2021. The strategy aims to help the Methodist Church become fully inclusive and to assist the process of embedding Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) throughout the Connexion.

The strategy aims:

- for the rich diversity of people within the Methodist Church to be recognised as a cause for thanksgiving, celebration and praise;
- to eradicate all discrimination and coercive control within the Methodist Church, and for all people to be treated justly and with dignity across the breadth of the Methodist Church

The purpose of this policy is to support the Central Norfolk Circuit in its commitment to the promotion of equality of opportunity and the elimination of unlawful and unfair discrimination. We value and embrace diversity, and we strive to ensure a holistic and inclusive approach in all aspects of our activities.

The Central Norfolk Circuit adheres to the Equality Act 2010, which recognises the following specific protected characteristics: sex, gender reassignment, race (which includes colour, nationality, and ethnic or national origins), disability, age, religion or belief, sexual orientation, marriage & civil partnership, and pregnancy & maternity. It does not discriminate based on any factors irrelevant to the role's requirements. It will reinforce our culture, which values meritocracy, openness, fairness, and transparency on an ongoing basis.

SCOPE

In accordance with this commitment, the Central Norfolk Circuit's lay employees and ministers, as well as volunteers, secondees, consultants, suppliers, contractors and agency workers, whether permanent or temporary, have a duty to comply with this policy to promote and maintain an environment free from discrimination. This policy applies to all processes related to employment and training, as well as to any dealings with customers and clients.

AIM

The purpose of this policy is:

- To ensure equality, diversity and inclusion are fully reflected in the employment practices and procedures of the Central Norfolk Circuit.
- To ensure that it is compliant with the statutory employment duties under the Equality Act 2010.
- To ensure employment policies and procedures are monitored and reviewed so that they do not contradict this Policy.
- To ensure it attracts and retains a diverse workforce through appropriate recruitment and selection methods.

Please note that in cases where a Genuine Occupational Requirement (GOR) is identified in relation to a specific role, under the Equality Act 2010, an employer may be entitled to target candidates with specific protected characteristics.

To be able to defend a potential discrimination claim, an employer must, however, be able to demonstrate that the requirement is a 'proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim'. For example, in light of the Methodist Church's purpose and ethos, employers may have the right to exercise a legal exemption for specific roles where it is considered that the Christian faith is integral to the core requirements of that role.

DEFINITIONS

1. Discrimination:

- (a) **'Direct Discrimination'** is where a person is treated less favourably than another, not on the merits of the case, but on grounds of a protected characteristic.
- (b) **'Discrimination by association'** occurs where a person is directly discriminated against by association with another individual who has a protected characteristic.
- (c) **'Discrimination by perception'** is when a person is directly discriminated against based on a perception that the person has a particular protected characteristic, even if the person does not actually possess that protected characteristic.
- (d) **'Indirect Discrimination'** occurs when a provision, practice or criterion that applies to everyone but particularly disadvantages people who share a protected characteristic. Although equally applicable to all possible applicants, this may nevertheless be discriminatory because:
 - (i) The number of persons of the same personal status who can comply with the requirement is considerably smaller than the number who cannot; and

(ii) The requirement cannot be shown to be justifiable.

2. **'Harassment'** is unwanted conduct related to a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010 that has the purpose of violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that person.

Alternatively, the conduct may amount to harassment if it is reasonably considered by the target of the conduct to have the effect of violating their dignity or of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them. This applies even if this effect was not intended by the person responsible for the conduct.

3. **'Victimisation'** occurs when an individual has suffered a detriment because they have done one of the "protected acts" set out below, or it is believed that they have or may have done one of these acts.

The protected acts, which must not be done in bad faith, are:

- bringing proceedings under the Equality Act 2010;
- giving evidence or information in connection with proceedings under the Act;
- doing any other thing for or in connection with the Act; or
- making allegations that another person has contravened the Act.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

All lay employees and ordained ministers are responsible for promoting equality, diversity and inclusion and conducting themselves in accordance with this policy. Particular responsibility lies with the Line Manager and senior officers within the employing body. All staff should understand that they, as well as their employer, can be held liable for acts of bullying, harassment, victimisation, and unlawful discrimination in the course of their employment against fellow employees, customers, service providers, and members of the community.

The Superintendent within the employing body will:

- Ensure that its commitment is communicated to all employees and ministers fairly and responsibly, including potential employees and ministers, users of its services, and all those working for, or on behalf of, or providing a service to the Central Norfolk Circuit, including consultants, volunteers, interns, agency workers and those on work experience placements.
- Lead by example, encouraging equality, diversity and inclusion internally and externally.
- Be responsible for creating a climate where the differences that individuals bring are valued.
- Embed equality, diversity and inclusion in decision-making processes.

Line Managers / Supervisors will:

- Foster good relations between all employees and ministers, service users/providers.

- Ensure that their direct reports attend equality, diversity and inclusion workshops periodically.
- Be responsible for the selection, management and promotion of employees and ministers and be given information and/or training to enable them to avoid the risk of discrimination.

All employees and ministers will:

- Ensure that equality, diversity and inclusion are taken into account in undertaking their work to serve the Central Norfolk Circuit.
- Be aware of their responsibilities and report inappropriate behaviour/s and raise any incident/s that potentially breach this Policy with their line manager.
- Familiarise themselves with this Policy, ensuring that their practices are consistent with its contents.
- Undertake equality, diversity & inclusion training.

RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

The principles of equality, diversity and inclusion are embedded within the Central Norfolk Circuit's recruitment and selection procedures. Shortlisting, interviewing, and selection will always be carried out without regard to sex, transgender status, sexual orientation, marital or civil partnership status, colour, race, nationality, ethnic or national origin, religion or belief, age, pregnancy, or maternity leave.

Panel members have a duty to declare to the Chair of the Recruitment Panel if they already know a candidate. If they have a close personal or familial relationship with a candidate, they will withdraw from the panel.

All panel members must be able to attend every part of the selection process (shortlisting, presentations, interviews, etc.) for the duration of the recruitment process, to maintain consistency and to ensure fair treatment of all candidates.

The Central Norfolk Circuit will fulfil its legal duties, ensuring that reasonable adjustments, where practicable, are made to prevent individuals with a disability from being disadvantaged during the recruitment and selection process.

BREACHES OF THIS POLICY

If any person believes they have been subject to discrimination under this Policy, they must raise the matter with their line manager, supervisor, or Chair/Superintendent/Minister.

Allegations regarding potential breaches of this Policy will be treated in the strictest confidence and will be investigated in accordance with the Methodist Church's complaints procedure. Lay employees or ministers who make such allegations in good faith will not be victimised or treated less favourably as a result. False allegations which are found to

have been made in bad faith will, however, be dealt with under the Methodist Church's complaints procedure.

Any employee who is found to have committed an act of discrimination may be subject to disciplinary action. Such behaviour may constitute gross misconduct and, as such, may result in formal disciplinary action up to and including summary dismissal. The Central Norfolk Circuit takes a strict approach to serious breaches of this policy.

For ordained ministers serving within the Central Norfolk Circuit, the Complaints and Discipline process as set out in Part 11 of Standing Orders will apply.

This policy will be reviewed on an ongoing basis to reflect changes in the law and internal organisational requirements.

Date last modified: Feb 2026

Date to be reviewed: Spring 2027