

1 Introduction

Argyll & Bute Women's Aid (ABWA) is a women only feminist organisation which exists to provide services to women, children and young people experiencing or at risk of domestic abuse. The objective justification for the provision of a service provided by women for women is in recognition of the gendered nature of domestic abuse and the need for specialist services which provide safe spaces for women and children to recover from the trauma of abuse.

ABWA recognises that many individuals and communities experience unlawful and unfair discrimination and oppression. The Equality Act 2010 sets out the following "protected characteristics":

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion and belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

Under the Act ABWA is not allowed to discriminate, harass or victimise another person because they have any of the protected characteristics. There is also protection against discrimination where someone is perceived to have one of the protected characteristics or where they are associated with someone who has a protected characteristic.

- Discrimination means treating one person worse than another because of a protected characteristic (known as direct discrimination) or putting in place a rule or policy or way of doing things that has a worse impact on someone with a protected characteristic than someone without one, when this cannot be objectively justified (known as indirect discrimination).
- Harassment includes unwanted conduct related to a protected characteristic which has the purpose or effect of violating someone's dignity or which creates a hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for someone with a protected characteristic.
- Victimisation is treating someone unfavourably because they have taken (or might be taking) action under the Equality Act or supporting somebody who is doing so.

2 Policy Aims

ABWA believe that equality for all is a basic human right and actively opposes all forms of unlawful and unfair discrimination. ABWA celebrates the diversity of society and is striving to promote and reflect that diversity within our organisation. It is ABWA's policy to extend the rights under the Equality Act 2010 in our employment and service delivery to include transgender and intersex identity, HIV/Aids status, caring responsibilities and Trades Union membership.

ABWA will keep under review all of its procedures and practices to ensure that no individual or group is put at a disadvantage either directly or indirectly in any of its activities.

ABWA is committed to making this policy effective and will regularly review and monitor the results of this commitment which will be demonstrated through ABWA Equalities and Diversity action plan.

ABWA is committed to:

- Preventing any form of direct or indirect discrimination in our employment practice, in the governance of our organisation and in the delivery of our services.

Equality and Diversity Policy

- Creating an environment in which individual differences and the contributions of all our staff, service users and trustees are recognised and valued.
- Creating a working environment that promotes dignity and respect to all. No form of intimidation, bullying or harassment will be tolerated.
- Reflecting and respecting diversity in all aspects of our service provision.

3 **Legislative and Regulatory Framework**

ABWA is responsible for complying with all legislation against discrimination and appropriate codes of practice, specifically:

- Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992
- Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974
- Fixed Term Employees Regulations 2002
- Equality Act 2010

SSSC Code of Practice for Employers of Social Service Workers : The Code of Practice sets out the responsibilities of employers in the regulation of social service workers. ABWA fully recognises its responsibilities under the terms of the Code of Practice, which includes implementing and monitoring a policy on equal opportunities.

4 **Responsibilities**

4.1 **Employer's Responsibilities:** ABWA will

- develop, implement and promote this Equalities and Diversity Policy
- ensure that all relevant policies including; dignity at work, recruitment, employment and personnel policies are consistent with this Equalities and Diversity Policy
- ensure the policy is complied with at a practical level in recruitment and selection, service delivery, training and development and general management
- develop and implement an annual equalities action plan
- collect and analyse equal opportunities monitoring information
- ensure that the equality and diversity policy is fully understood by all employees
- ensure that complaints are dealt with efficiently and effectively
- review this Equalities and Diversity Policy

4.2 **Employees Responsibilities: All employees have a responsibility to:**

- comply with this policy and ensure its consistent application on a day to day basis
- attend and participate in training on equalities and diversity
- bring any discriminatory behaviour to the attention of their line manager

5 **Equalities and Diversity Action Plan**

ABWA will develop an action plan to ensure the development of equal opportunities in all areas of our work. The action plan will include governance of the organisation, employment policies and procedures and service provision. The action plan will be reviewed bi-annually by the board of trustees.

6 **Planning**

Equality and diversity development and implementation will be incorporated in ABWA strategic planning process and address the development of equal opportunities within all areas of ABWA work.

7 Equality and Diversity in Employment**7.1 Aims in employment**

ABWA aims to be an equal opportunities employer. Our long term aim is that the composition of our workforce should reflect that of women in the community. We recognise the value of a diverse workforce in which women from differing backgrounds, with different skills and abilities can bring new ideas to enable us to deliver high quality services.

7.2 Recruitment and Selection

ABWA Recruitment and Selection Policy details the non-discriminatory practice in the recruitment and selection process that all employees have a duty to follow. ABWA will conduct an Occupational Requirement assessment for every vacant post to establish if such a requirement is crucial to the post and if it is a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.

7.3 Developing and Retaining Staff

ABWA Support and Supervision and Appraisal Policies provide the framework for ABWA to identify training and development needs on an ongoing basis with all members of staff.

ABWA Appraisal Policy and procedures exist to ensure that resources are allocated in a fair and objective way.

ABWA Learning and Development, Training, and Managing Absence Policies have also been developed to ensure that development opportunities and support are available to all staff and are managed in a fair and transparent manner.

7.4 Dignity at Work

ABWA Dignity at Work Policy has been developed to provide a working environment which is free from harassment, bullying or intimidation. Such behaviour by any member of staff may result in disciplinary action under the terms of ABWA Disciplinary Policy, which could result in dismissal.

8 Equality in Service Provision**8.1 Aims in Service Provision**

ABWA provides accommodation, information and support services to women, children and young people who have been affected by domestic abuse. ABWA recognises that women, children and young people may have differing needs because of their age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and/or civil partnership choices, pregnancy and/or maternity, race, religion and/or belief, sex, sexual orientation, transgender and/or intersex identity, HIV/Aids status, caring responsibilities and/or Trades Union membership. ABWA provides support to any child affected by domestic abuse and to adult women. We recognise that anyone can be a victim of domestic abuse and we will treat anyone not eligible for a service from ABWA with dignity and respect and will support them to access the right service for them.

ABWA will treat all users of our service with dignity and respect and will work to ensure that they are provided without discrimination, harassment or victimisation.

8.2 Partnership

ABWA will work actively and positively in partnership with other agencies to ensure that information, support and accommodation services can be provided equitably to meet the diverse needs of women, children and young people who have experienced domestic abuse.

We will work with colleagues and other organisations who provide safe services to anyone not eligible for a service from ABWA to address gaps in service provision in Argyll & Bute and to promote the accessibility of the widest range of specialist domestic abuse services.

8.3 Consultation

ABWA will consult with service users in the review and development of services, policies and procedures.

8.4 Communication

ABWA will work to communicate effectively using a range of methods and where possible supply appropriate information material in different formats and languages.

8.5 Complaints

ABWA will ensure that our Complaints Policy and Procedure is easily accessible and provides information on organisations providing advice in making a complaint.

9. Equality in Governance

9.1 Aims in Governance

ABWA aims for diversity in the membership of its Board to reflect women in society. ABWA wishes to ensure that a diversity of experience, identity and opinion is represented.

9.2 Information

ABWA Memorandum and Articles of Association detail the non-discriminatory practice in recruitment and election of Board.

9.3 Recruitment

The Board of ABWA will pro-actively encourage women from under represented groups in society to stand for election. The board will address equality and diversity in its membership through its annual review and subsequent action plan.

9.4 Training and support

ABWA will provide support to Trustees to enable them to fulfil their responsibilities as Trustees.

9.5 Meetings

As far as possible, decision making will be made during formal meeting structures to ensure all Trustees have the opportunity to be involved in discussion and decision. Any decisions made outside of normal protocols will be governed by the circumstances outlined in Standing Orders supplement to the Memorandum and Articles of Association. Meetings will be minuted and approved and all decisions correctly recorded. Meetings of the Board will be held virtually or in venues that are accessible to all members. Dates and times of meetings may be agreed annually in advance.

10 Complaints

10.1 Service Delivery

Complaints in relation to a service provided by ABWA will be dealt with under ABWA Complaints Policy.

10.2 Employment

ABWA employees who feel they have been unfairly discriminated against in respect of their employment should raise this in the first instance with their line manager. If an employee does not feel the issue has been dealt with to their satisfaction it can be dealt with formally under ABWA Grievance Procedure.

11 Training and Information

All ABWA staff will receive a copy of the Equalities and Diversity Policy and their role in implementing the policy will be fully explained and any training requirements addressed as part of their induction programme.

12 Monitoring and Review

ABWA recognises that genuine equality of opportunity can only be assessed by monitoring what is actually happening and then using this information to modify and improve our future action plans, policies and procedures.

ABWA support workers are responsible for ensuring that equalities data for women and children using our services is collected and recorded appropriately.

ABWA administrators are responsible for ensuring that equalities data in recruitment is collected and recorded appropriately.

ABWA management team is responsible for reporting on service user and employment equalities data annually to the board of directors.

ABWA board is responsible for monitoring service user and employment equalities data annually.

ABWA will review this policy every three years and when there are relevant changes in legislation or circumstances. Feedback on the workability or otherwise of this policy is welcomed, comments should be made in writing to the Manager, ABWA.