Forces Online CIO

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Forces Online

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy

Note: This policy is a 'living document' and as such it can be reviewed, revised and amended at any time to meet any changes or amendments deemed necessary to facilitate any legislative or environmental changes, however, such changes will only take place following consultation with and authorisation by the Forces Online CIO, Scotland and Northern Ireland Senior Management team.

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1. Introduction and Purpose

1.1 Our Commitment

Forces Online is committed to promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion in all aspects of our work. As a charity supporting Armed Forces veterans, their families and dependents across the UK, we recognise that our community is diverse, and we are dedicated to ensuring that everyone we serve, work with, or engage has equal access to opportunities and is treated with dignity and respect.

We believe that our strength lies in our diversity and that the varied experiences, perspectives, and backgrounds of our team, volunteers, and beneficiaries enhance our ability to serve the Armed Forces community effectively.

1.2 Policy Scope

This policy applies to all activities and relationships involving:
- All trustees, staff, and volunteers (including prospective candidates)
- Service users and beneficiaries
- Partner organisations and contractors
- Suppliers and service providers
- All activities, services, and programmes delivered by Forces Online
- All premises, events, and digital platforms operated by Forces Online

1.3 Legal Framework Across the UK

This policy ensures compliance with equality legislation across all four nations of the United Kingdom:

England

- Equality Act 2010 (including Public Sector Equality Duty)
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Employment law and best practice guidance
- Charity Commission guidance CC85 - Charities and Public Benefit

Wales

- Equality Act 2010 (including Public Sector Equality Duty and Wales-specific equality duties)
- Welsh Language Act 1993
- Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 (establishing Welsh Language Standards)
- Government of Wales Act 2006 (bilingual legislation principle)
- Legislation (Wales) Act 2019 (equal status of Welsh and English texts)
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Charity Commission guidance and Welsh Government equality guidance

Scotland

- Equality Act 2010 (including Public Sector Equality Duty and Scotland-specific equality duties)
- Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 (establishing equal respect for Gaelic)
- Scottish Languages Act 2025 (official status for Gaelic and Scots)
- British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015
- Education (Scotland) Act 2016 (Gaelic education rights)
- Human Rights Act 1998
- OSCR (Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator) guidance

Northern Ireland

- Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998
- Northern Ireland Act 1998 Section 75 (Statutory Equality Duty)
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as it applies in Northern Ireland)
- Sex Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 1976
- Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997
- Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003
- Employment Equality (Age) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Charity Commission for Northern Ireland guidance

   UK-Wide Provisions

- Armed Forces Covenant principles
- Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR
- European Convention on Human Rights (incorporated via Human Rights Act 1998)
- European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (covering Welsh, Gaelic, Irish, Ulster Scots, and Cornish)

1.4 Policy Objectives

This policy aims to:

- Challenge and eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, and victimisation
- Advance equality of opportunity between different groups
- Foster good relations between people with different characteristics
- Promote and create an inclusive culture that values diversity
- Ensure our services are accessible and responsive to all veterans
- Build a workforce that reflects the diversity of the communities we serve

2. Our Equality Statement

Forces Online believes that diversity strengthens our organisation and enhances our ability to serve the Armed Forces community effectively. We are committed to creating an inclusive environment where everyone can thrive, regardless of their background, identity, or circumstances.

We will not tolerate discrimination, harassment, or victimisation in any form and will take prompt, fair, and effective action to address any such behaviour. We recognise that equality is not just about treating everyone the same, but about recognising differences and taking steps to address disadvantage and barriers that prevent full participation.

2.1 Our Values in Action

- **Respect:** We value each person's unique contribution and treat everyone with dignity
- **Inclusion:** We actively create environments where everyone feels welcomed and valued
- **Fairness:** We ensure equitable treatment and opportunity for all
- **Understanding:** We seek to understand different perspectives and experiences
- **Action:** We take proactive steps to address inequality and promote inclusion

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3. Protected Characteristics and Broader Inclusion

3.1 Legal Protected Characteristics

We are committed to eliminating discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity in relation to all protected characteristics:

Age

- Supporting veterans across all age groups, from recent service leavers in their teens to elderly veterans
- Recognising different generational experiences of military service
- Ensuring age-appropriate service delivery and communication methods
- Addressing specific challenges faced by young veterans transitioning to civilian life
- Supporting older veterans with changing health and care needs
- Preventing age discrimination in employment and volunteer opportunities

Disability

- Including physical disabilities, sensory impairments, mental health conditions, learning difficulties, and service-related injuries
- Supporting veterans with PTSD, depression, anxiety, and other mental health challenges
- Accommodating those with combat-related injuries, amputations, and long-term health conditions
- Addressing invisible disabilities and chronic conditions
- Providing reasonable adjustments and accessible services
- Challenging disability-related stigma and promoting independence

Gender Reassignment

- Recognising all forms of legal partnerships and Supporting transgender veterans and their families through transition processes
- Ensuring respectful and appropriate service delivery

- Providing safe spaces and confidential support
- Understanding unique challenges faced during military service and transition to civilian life
- Respecting chosen names and pronouns
- Addressing discrimination and harassment

Marriage and Civil Partnership

- Supporting military spouses and partners, including those who have served
- Understanding the impact of military life on relationships and families
- Providing family-centred support services
- Recognising non-traditional family structures

Pregnancy and Maternity

- Supporting pregnant veterans and new parents
- Understanding unique challenges for women who served during or after pregnancy
- Providing flexible service delivery for parents with young children
- Supporting partners of service personnel during pregnancy and early parenthood
- Addressing career impacts and transition challenges

Race

- Including ethnicity, nationality, cultural background, and migration status
- Supporting Commonwealth veterans and those from overseas
- Understanding cultural differences in help-seeking behaviour
- Providing culturally appropriate services and communication
- Addressing barriers faced by minority ethnic veterans
- Challenging racial discrimination and promoting cultural competence

Religion or Belief

- Respecting all faiths, philosophical beliefs, and those with no religious belief
- Understanding the role of faith in military service and veteran identity
- Providing appropriate spiritual support and chaplaincy services
- Accommodating religious observances and dietary requirements
- Creating inclusive environments that respect diverse beliefs

Sex

- Ensuring equal treatment regardless of gender
- Addressing specific challenges faced by women veterans
- Supporting male veterans who may face barriers to help-seeking
- Understanding gendered experiences of military service
- Promoting gender equality in all aspects of our work

Sexual Orientation

- Supporting LGBQ+ veterans and their families
- Understanding historical and ongoing challenges faced by LGBQ+ service personnel
- Providing inclusive services and safe spaces
- Addressing discrimination and promoting acceptance
- Supporting partners and families of LGBQ+ veterans

3.2 Additional Commitment Areas

We also recognise the importance of addressing barriers and promoting inclusion for:

Military Service Characteristics

- Veterans from different service branches (Army, Navy, RAF, Marines)
- Different ranks, roles, and specialisations
- Varying lengths and types of service (regular, reserve, national service)
- Different eras of service and operational experiences
- Those medically discharged vs. planned transitions
- Combat veterans vs. non-combat roles

Geographic and Social Factors

- Rural vs urban communities and access challenges
- Regional differences in service availability
- Socio-economic background and financial circumstances
- Educational background and literacy levels
- Housing status and homelessness
- Digital exclusion and technology barriers

Family and Personal Circumstances

- Single veterans vs. those with families
- Veteran families with children
- Adult children of veterans
- Bereaved families and war widows/widowers
- Carers and those being cared for
- Veterans with complex needs requiring multiple services

Health and Wellbeing

- Physical health conditions and disabilities
- Mental health and psychological wellbeing
- Addiction and substance misuse issues
- Cognitive impairments and acquired brain injuries
- Chronic conditions and degenerative diseases
- End-of-life care needs

4. Detailed Equality Objectives

4.1 Service Delivery Excellence

Accessibility and Inclusion

- Ensure all veterans and their families have equal access to our support services regardless of their background or circumstances
- Remove physical, financial, cultural, and systemic barriers that prevent access to help
- Develop multiple channels for service delivery (face-to-face, telephone, digital, outreach)
- Provide services at times and locations convenient to diverse communities
- Ensure our services are advertised and promoted in ways that reach all veteran communities

Cultural Competence

- Develop culturally appropriate and sensitive service delivery methods
- Train staff and volunteers to understand diverse backgrounds and experiences
- Work with community leaders and organisations to build trust and engagement
- Adapt our communication styles and approaches to meet different cultural preferences
- Regular review and adaptation of services based on community feedback and needs analysis

Service Quality and Outcomes

- Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of our services for different groups
- Ensure consistent quality of service regardless of who delivers or receives it
- Track satisfaction rates and outcomes across different demographic groups
- Use feedback to continuously improve our service offering
- Benchmark our performance against sector best practices

4.2 Employment and Volunteering Excellence

Recruitment and Selection

- Attract, recruit, and retain a diverse workforce and volunteer base that reflects our community
- Use inclusive recruitment practices and diverse advertising channels
- Ensure job descriptions and person specifications focus on essential requirements
- Provide unconscious bias training for all involved in recruitment processes
- Monitor recruitment data to identify and address any patterns of underrepresentation

Career Development and Progression

- Provide equal opportunities for career development, training, and progression
- Offer mentoring and development programmes accessible to all

- Ensure performance management processes are fair and transparent
- Support flexible working arrangements where operationally possible
- Address any barriers that prevent certain groups from progressing

Workplace Culture

- Create an inclusive workplace culture where everyone feels valued and can contribute fully
- Promote open dialogue about equality and diversity issues
- Celebrate diversity through awareness events and recognition programmes
- Provide safe spaces for people to raise concerns or seek support
- Regularly assess workplace culture through surveys and feedback mechanisms

Support and Wellbeing

- Provide appropriate support for staff and volunteers facing personal challenges
- Offer employee assistance programmes and wellbeing initiatives
- Make reasonable adjustments to support people with disabilities or health conditions
- Provide guidance and support for line managers on equality issues
- Ensure work-life balance and prevent discrimination on grounds of personal circumstances

4.3 Governance and Leadership Excellence

Board Composition and Skills

- Promote diversity within our trustee board while maintaining focus on skills and experience
- Actively seek trustees from underrepresented communities
- Provide equality and diversity training for all trustees
- Ensure trustee recruitment processes are inclusive and accessible
- Regular skills audit to identify gaps plus any training and development needs

Decision-Making Processes

- Ensure any decisions also consider equality and diversity implications
- Conduct equality impact assessments for new policies and service changes
- Include diverse perspectives in strategic planning and service development
- Make decision-making processes transparent and accountable
- Regular review of governance arrangements to ensure they promote equality

Leadership Development

- Develop diverse leaders within our organisation at all levels
- Provide leadership training that includes equality and diversity competencies
- Create pathways for progression from different backgrounds
- Support emerging leaders through mentoring and development opportunities
- Promote role models and champions from diverse backgrounds

4.4 Partnership and Procurement Excellence

Supplier and Partner Standards

- Work with suppliers and partners who share our commitment to equality
- Include equality criteria in procurement and partnership decisions
- Monitor partner organisations' commitment to equality and diversity
- Provide guidance and support to partners on inclusive practices
- Regular review of partnerships to ensure alignment with our values

Collaborative Working

- Build partnerships that enhance our ability to serve diverse communities
- Work with specialist organisations serving particular communities
- Share resources and best practices with other veteran charities
- Collaborate on research and service development initiatives
- Participate in sector-wide equality and diversity initiatives

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5. Positive Action and Targeted Recruitment

5.1 Legal Framework for Positive Action

Under the Equality Act 2010, we may take positive action measures when we have reasonable suspicion that any individual with any protected characteristics faces any disadvantage or have different needs, or where their participation is disproportionately low.

5.2 Armed Forces Community Recruitment and Northern Ireland Considerations

We reserve the right to encourage and positively welcome volunteers from the Armed Forces community who have knowledge of veterans' issues. This targeted approach is justified because they may have:

Lived Experience Value

- Veterans and military families have direct, lived experience of military culture and transition challenges
- This experiential knowledge enhances our ability to provide empathetic and effective support
- Peer support models have proven highly effective in the veteran community
- Veterans can provide credible role models and inspiration for service users

Cultural Competence

- Understanding of military hierarchy, terminology, and values systems
- Awareness of service-specific cultures and traditions
- Knowledge of military life impacts on families and relationships
- Familiarity with transition challenges from military to civilian life

Trust and Rapport

- Veterans may feel more comfortable seeking help from those who understand their experiences

- Shared military identity can help overcome stigma and barriers to help-seeking
- Common understanding facilitates more effective communication and support
- Reduces need for extensive explanation of military background and circumstances

Nation-Specific Understanding and Service Delivery

England-Specific Considerations

Regional Diversity

- Understanding of different regional cultures and identities across England
- Recognition of varying economic circumstances across English regions
- Awareness of urban vs. rural service accessibility challenges
- Understanding of different veteran concentrations (e.g., military towns, ports)

Service Infrastructure

- Coordination with NHS England services and veterans' mental health provision
- Links with local authorities under different governance structures
- Understanding of regional variations in housing and employment markets
- Connection with region-specific veteran support networks

Wales-Specific Considerations

Welsh Identity and Culture

- Deep respect for Welsh identity alongside British military service
- Understanding of Welsh-language veteran communities and their needs
- Recognition of the role of Welsh regiments and their traditions
- Appreciation of Welsh valleys communities and military service heritage

Bilingual Service Delivery

- Services delivered in accordance with the principle that Welsh and English languages should be treated equally in public business in Wales
- Welsh-speaking staff and volunteers to provide culturally appropriate support
- Documents and communications available simultaneously in both Welsh and English
- Understanding of Welsh language preferences in different parts of Wales

Rural and Geographic Challenges

- Addressing service delivery challenges in rural and remote Welsh communities
- Understanding of transport limitations and geographic barriers
- Mobile and outreach services to reach isolated veteran communities

- Partnership with local Welsh community organizations

Scotland-Specific Considerations

Scottish Identity and Military Heritage

- Deep understanding of Scottish military traditions and regimental pride
- Recognition of Highland and Lowland cultural differences
- Appreciation of Clan connections and Scottish military identity
- Understanding of Scottish independence debates and military service

Gaelic and Language Considerations

- Recognition of Gaelic as an official language "commanding equal respect to the English language" under the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005
- Understanding of both Gaelic and Scots having "official status" under the Scottish Languages Act 2025
- Services available in Gaelic where appropriate and requested
- Cultural sensitivity to Highland and Islands communities

Geographic and Social Factors

- Understanding of unique challenges in Scottish islands and remote areas
- Recognition of different veteran experiences in urban Central Belt vs. rural Scotland
- Awareness of economic variations between different Scottish regions
- Partnership with specifically Scottish veteran organizations and networks

Northern Ireland-Specific Considerations

Complex Political and Cultural Context

- Understanding of the complex history of military operations in Northern Ireland
- Recognition of different community perspectives on military service and The Troubles
- Sensitivity to ongoing political divisions and their impact on veteran experiences
- Awareness of cross-community sensitivities regarding military service

Section 75 Statutory Obligations

- Full compliance with Section 75 equality duties including political opinion protection
- Cross-community recruitment ensuring representation from all backgrounds
- Services accessible regardless of political opinion or community identity
- Regular equality impact assessments specific to Northern Ireland context

Language and Cultural Identity

- Recognition of Ulster Scots language and culture where relevant
- Respect for Irish language and cultural identity where appropriate

- Understanding of different cultural traditions and their relationship to military service
- Bilingual service provision where requested and appropriate

Peace Process and Reconciliation

- Understanding of post-conflict society dynamics
- Recognition of veterans' role in peace process and community relations
- Support for veterans from all community backgrounds
- Promotion of shared experiences and mutual understanding through military service

Cross-Border and UK-Wide Coordination

Inter-Nation Cooperation

- Coordination of services for veterans who move between UK nations
- Sharing of best practices across different legal and cultural contexts
- Joint working on UK-wide veteran issues while respecting local differences
- Standardized quality while allowing for nation-specific approaches

Consistent Standards with Local Adaptation

- Core equality principles applied consistently across all four nations
- Local adaptation to meet specific legal, cultural, and linguistic requirements
- Regular review of nation-specific needs and service adaptations
- Benchmarking and learning across different UK contexts

5.3 Implementation of Positive Action

When implementing positive action measures, we will use:

Transparent Communication

- Clearly explain the rationale for any positive action measures
- Ensure all candidates understand the selection criteria and process
- Communicate our commitment to merit-based selection
- Provide constructive feedback, guidance and advice to unsuccessful candidates where appropriate

Proportionate Measures

- Ensure positive action measures are proportionate to the identified need
- Regularly review the effectiveness and continued necessity of such measures
- Maintain focus on skills, competence, and suitability for roles
- Apply positive action only where legally permitted and operationally justified

Monitoring and Evaluation

- Monitor the impact of positive action measures on diversity and service quality
- Track whether targeted recruitment improves outcomes for service users
- Assess whether measures help address identified disadvantages or underrepresentation
- Regular review to ensure continued legal compliance and effectiveness

5.4 Other Positive Action Measures

We may also implement positive action in:

Service Delivery

- Targeted outreach of underrepresented veteran communities
- Culturally specific services or support groups where needed
- Additional support for groups facing particular barriers
- Awareness campaigns focused on specific communities

Training and Development

- Mentoring programmes for underrepresented groups
- Leadership development opportunities for diverse candidates
- Specific training to address skills gaps in particular communities
- Support for career progression where underrepresentation is identified

6. Comprehensive Implementation Framework

6.1 Leadership and Accountability Structure

Board of Trustees

- Overall strategic responsibility for equality and diversity policy
- Annual review of equality objectives and performance
- Approval of significant policy changes and new initiatives
- Championing equality throughout the organisation
- Ensuring adequate resources for equality initiatives
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Chief Executive Officer

- Day-to-day responsibility for policy implementation across all activities
- Integration of equality considerations into strategic planning
- Reporting to trustees on equality performance and challenges
- Leadership of organisational culture change
- External representation on equality issues

Senior Management Team

- Implementation of equality measures within their areas of responsibility
- Ensuring team members understand and apply equality principles
- Identifying and addressing equality issues proactively
- Resource allocation for equality initiatives

- Performance management of equality objectives

Equality Champion

- Designated trustee or senior staff member to lead equality initiatives
- Point of contact for equality concerns and suggestions
- Coordination of equality training and awareness activities
- Liaison with external equality organisations and networks
- Regular reporting on equality progress and challenges

All Staff and Volunteers

- Individual responsibility for upholding policy principles in daily work
- Treating colleagues, service users, and partners with respect and dignity
- Challenging inappropriate behaviour and discrimination when encountered
- Participating in equality training and development opportunities
- Contributing to inclusive workplace culture

6.2 Training and Development Programme

Mandatory Foundation Training

Ensuring all new trustees, staff, and volunteers receive:

- Comprehensive equality and diversity awareness training
- Understanding of legal requirements and associated organisational policies
- Recognition of unconscious bias and its impacts
- Practical guidance on inclusive behaviour and language
- Information on support available and how to raise concerns

Specialist Training Programmes

Service Delivery Staff

- Cultural competence and sensitivity training
- Understanding diverse veteran experiences and needs
- Trauma-informed approaches to service delivery
- Communication skills for working with diverse communities
- Recognising and addressing barriers to access

Managers and Leaders

- Inclusive leadership skills development
- Managing diverse teams effectively
- Equality impact assessment techniques
- Performance management and equality considerations
- Creating inclusive workplace cultures

Recruitment Panels

- Fair recruitment and selection practices
- Unconscious bias in recruitment processes
- Interview techniques that promote equality
- Legal requirements and best practices

- Positive action measures and their implementation

Ongoing Development
- Regular refresher training and updates on best practices
- Specialist workshops on emerging equality issues
- Peer learning and sharing of best practices
- External training opportunities and conferences
- Self-directed learning resources and materials

6.3 Reasonable Adjustments Framework

We are committed to making reasonable adjustments to ensure equal access and participation:

Physical Accessibility
- Wheelchair accessible venues and facilities
- Hearing loops and audio-visual equipment
- Good lighting and clear signage
- Appropriate seating
- Accessible parking and transport links
- Quiet spaces for those with sensory sensitivities

Communication Adjustments
- Documents in large print, Braille, or audio formats
- Sign language interpreters and lip speakers
- Easy-read versions of key documents
- Translation services for non-English speakers
- Digital formats compatible with assistive technologies

Service Delivery Adjustments
- Flexible appointment times and locations
- Home visits or telephone support where needed
- Extended appointment times for complex needs
- Support with transportation or childcare costs
- Advocacy support for those who need it

Employment and Volunteering Adjustments
- Flexible working hours and arrangements
- Modified equipment or workspace adaptations
- Additional training or support as needed
- Adjusted duties or responsibilities where appropriate
- Regular review and updating of adjustments

Assessment and Implementation Process
1. **Initial Discussion:** Open conversation about needs and potential solutions
2. **Assessment:** Evaluation of what adjustments would be reasonable and effective

3. **Planning:** Development of implementation plan with timescales and responsibilities
4. **Implementation:** Making agreed adjustments with appropriate support
5. **Review:** Regular monitoring and adjustment as needs change

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7. Data Collection and Monitoring Systems

7.1 Comprehensive Equality Monitoring

We collect and analyse equality monitoring data to understand our impact and identify areas for improvement:

Service User Data

- Demographic characteristics of people using our services
- Geographic distribution and accessibility patterns
- Service usage patterns across different groups
- Satisfaction levels and outcomes by demographic group
- Barriers to access identified by different communities

Workforce Data

- Diversity profile of trustees, staff, and volunteers
- Recruitment, retention, and progression patterns
- Training participation and development opportunities
- Workplace satisfaction and experience surveys
- Pay and benefits analysis by protected characteristics

Organisational Performance Data

- Progress against equality objectives and action plans
- Complaint and grievance patterns and outcomes
- Partnership and procurement equality performance
- Resource allocation for equality initiatives
- External recognition and benchmarking results

7.2 Data Protection and Privacy

All equality monitoring data collection and use complies with:

Legal Requirements

- UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018 compliance
- Charity Commission guidance on data handling
- Information Commissioner's Office best practices
- Sector-specific guidance and requirements

Ethical Data Handling

- Voluntary participation in equality monitoring with clear opt-out options
- Transparent explanation of how data will be used and stored
- Secure storage with appropriate access controls

- Regular review and deletion of outdated information
- Respect for individuals' rights to access and correct their data

Data Use Principles

- Data used only for equality monitoring and service improvement purposes
- Aggregate reporting that protects individual privacy
- Analysis that leads to actionable insights and improvements
- Sharing limited to legitimate organisational purposes
- Regular auditing of data handling practices

7.3 Reporting and Analysis

Internal Reporting

- Quarterly monitoring reports for senior management
- Annual equality report for trustees and stakeholders
- Regular analysis of trends and patterns
- Benchmarking against sector standards and best practices
- Action planning based on data insights

External Reporting

- Annual charity reporting requirements
- Regulatory compliance reporting as required
- Public reporting on equality performance and progress
- Participation in sector-wide data collection initiatives
- Sharing of anonymised best practices with other organisations

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8. Addressing Discrimination and Complaints

8.1 Prevention-First Approach

We believe prevention is better than cure and pro-actively work to prevent discrimination through:

Culture and Leadership

- Clear communication of values and expectations from senior leadership
- Visible commitment to equality at all levels of the organisation
- Regular reinforcement of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour
- Recognition and celebration of inclusive practices
- Swift action when problems are identified

Education and Awareness

- Regular training and awareness-raising activities
- Open dialogue about equality issues and challenges
- Sharing of best practices and learning opportunities
- Guest speakers and awareness events
- Resource libraries and information sharing

Environmental Factors

- Creating safe and welcoming physical and virtual spaces
- Inclusive imagery, language, and communication materials
- Diverse representation in leadership and public-facing roles
- Clear policies and procedures that promote equality
- Regular assessment of organisational culture and climate

8.2 Comprehensive Complaint Procedures

We provide a variety of avenues for raising concerns about discrimination or inequality including:

Informal Resolution

- Direct conversation with the person involved where appropriate and safe
- Discussion with line manager, supervisor, or trustee
- Seeking advice from our designated equality champion
- Mediation services to resolve interpersonal conflicts
- Support and guidance to find mutually acceptable solutions

Formal Complaint Process

- Written complaint to senior management or board chair
- Clear timescales for acknowledgment and investigation
- Independent investigation by appropriately trained personnel
- Right to be accompanied by a friend, colleague, or representative
- Written outcome with clear reasoning and any actions to be taken

External Support Options
- Signposting to external organisations and support services
- Information about legal rights and options available
- Support to access independent advocacy services
- Liaison with regulatory bodies where appropriate
- Referral to specialist support organisations

We reserve the right to escalate any incident where we consider that one of the above courses of action would be inappropriate and/or ineffective

8.3 Investigation and Response Framework

All complaints and concerns are handled according to our principles:

Fair and Thorough Investigation

- Prompt response and acknowledgment within 5 working days
- Thorough investigation by trained and impartial investigators
- Opportunity for all parties to present their perspective
- Consideration of all relevant evidence and circumstances
- Clear documentation of process and findings

Appropriate Remedial Action

- Individual remedies such as apologies, training, or changed practices
- Organisational changes to prevent recurrence
- Disciplinary action where policy breaches are substantiated
- Support for those who have experienced discrimination
- System improvements based on lessons learned

Learning and Improvement

- Regular analysis of complaint patterns and themes
- Policy and practice improvements based on complaint outcomes
- Sharing of learning across the organisation (while respecting confidentiality)
- External consultation where significant issues are identified
- Preventive action to address root causes

8.4 Support for those Involved

For complainants

- Emotional support and practical assistance through the process
- Protection from victimisation or retaliation
- Information about external support services available
- Regular updates on investigation progress
- Follow-up support after resolution

For those subject of complaints

- Fair treatment and presumption of innocence during investigation
- Right to representation and support through the process
- Clear information about allegations and investigation process
- Opportunity to respond fully to concerns raised
- Support for improvement and development where needed

9. Specific Commitments to the Armed Forces Community

9.1 Deep Understanding of Military Culture

Service Identity and Values

- Recognition of the pride and identity associated with military service
- Understanding of service values such as loyalty, integrity, and service before self
- Appreciation of regimental and service traditions and their importance
- Respect for the chain of command and military hierarchy
- Understanding of military ethos and its impact on civilian transition

Military Family Dynamics

- Recognition of the unique stresses placed on military families
- Understanding of deployment impacts on relationships and family life
- Appreciation of the role of military spouses and children
- Knowledge of postings, movements, and their effects on family stability

- Support for families dealing with service-related separation and loss

Transition Challenges

- Understanding of the complexity of transition from military to civilian life
- Recognition of identity changes and loss of military community
- Knowledge of practical challenges such as housing, employment, and benefits
- Awareness of mental health impacts of service and transition
- Understanding of generational differences in military experience

9.2 Supporting Diverse Veteran Communities

We are committed to understanding and addressing the specific needs of different veteran communities:

Women Veterans

- **Unique Service Experiences:** Recognition that women's military experiences may differ from men's
- **Healthcare Needs:** Understanding of gender-specific health and mental health needs
- **Transition Challenges:** Addressing unique barriers to accessing veteran services
- **Family Responsibilities:** Support for women veterans balancing caring responsibilities
- **Recognition:** Ensuring women veterans receive appropriate recognition for their service
- **Safety:** Creating safe spaces for women to access support and share experiences

LGBTQ+ Veterans

- **Historical Context:** Understanding of historical discrimination and its ongoing impacts
- **Safe Environments:** Creating affirming and inclusive service environments
- **Specialist Support:** Providing or connecting to specialist LGBTQ+ support services
- **Partner Recognition:** Ensuring partners and families receive appropriate support
- **Confidentiality:** Respecting privacy and confidentiality concerns
- **Advocacy:** Challenging discrimination and promoting acceptance within veteran communities

Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Veterans

- **Cultural Competence:** Understanding diverse cultural backgrounds and needs
- **Accessible Services:** Ensuring services are culturally appropriate and accessible
- **Language Support:** Providing interpretation and translation services where needed

- **Community Engagement:** Working with diverse community leaders and organisations
- **Discrimination:** Addressing racism and cultural discrimination within and beyond our services
- **Representation:** Ensuring diverse representation in our workforce and leadership

Veterans with Disabilities

- **Service-Related Conditions:** Specialist understanding of military-related injuries and illnesses
- **Mental Health:** Comprehensive support for PTSD, depression, anxiety, and other conditions
- **Physical Disabilities:** Support for combat injuries, amputations, and chronic conditions
- **Invisible Disabilities:** Recognition and support for hidden disabilities and chronic conditions
- **Independence:** Promoting autonomy and self-determination
- **Advocacy:** Supporting veterans to access appropriate benefits and services

Young Veterans

- **Early Transition:** Support for those leaving service in their teens and twenties
- **Career Development:** Help with education, training, and career progression
- **Social Integration:** Support with developing civilian friendships and relationships
- **Financial Management:** Guidance on managing finances and accessing support
- **Housing:** Assistance with finding appropriate accommodation
- **Identity Development:** Support with developing civilian identity alongside military experience

Older Veterans

- **Changing Needs:** Recognition that support needs change with aging
- **Health Conditions:** Support for age-related health conditions and disabilities
- **Social Isolation:** Addressing loneliness and social isolation in older veterans
- **Care Needs:** Support with accessing appropriate care and support services
- **Recognition:** Ensuring older veterans receive recognition for their service
- **Digital Inclusion:** Helping older veterans access digital services and support

Commonwealth and International Veterans

- **Legal Status:** Understanding of immigration status and entitlements
- **Cultural Differences:** Respecting diverse cultural backgrounds and practices
- **Language Barriers:** Providing interpretation and translated materials
- **Family Connections:** Understanding of family separation and international connections
- **Service Recognition:** Ensuring Commonwealth service is appropriately recognised

- **Navigation Support:** Help with understanding UK systems and services

9.3 Service-Specific Understanding

Army Veterans

- Understanding of regimental system and cap badge loyalty
- Knowledge of different corps and their specialties
- Appreciation of Army values and traditions
- Understanding of deployment patterns and operational experience

Royal Navy Veterans (including Royal Marines)

- Understanding of ship-based community and naval traditions
- Knowledge of different branches and specialisations
- Appreciation of maritime culture and values
- Understanding of deployment patterns and family separation

Royal Air Force Veterans

- Understanding of squadron culture and traditions
- Knowledge of different trades and specialisations
- Appreciation of technical and operational roles
- Understanding of station life and RAF community

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10. Partnership and Collaboration Strategy

10.1 Strategic Partnerships for Equality

We actively seek partnerships that enhance our equality and diversity work:

Veteran-Specific Organisations

- **Major Military Charities:** Collaboration with Royal British Legion, SSAFA, Help for Heroes, and Combat Stress
- **Specialist Organisations:** Partnership with organisations serving specific veteran communities
- **Regional Groups:** Working with local veteran associations and support groups
- **Peer Support Networks:** Supporting and participating in veteran peer support initiatives
- **Research Organisations:** Collaborating on research into veteran experiences and needs

Equality and Rights Organisations

- **Equality and Human Rights Commission:** Engaging with guidance and best practice development
- **Stonewall:** Partnership on LGBTQ+ inclusion and support
- **Age UK:** Collaboration on supporting older veterans
- **Disability Rights Organisations:** Working with specialist disability advocacy groups

- **Race Equality Organisations:** Partnership with organisations promoting racial equality

Community and Faith Organisations

- **Local Community Groups:** Engagement with diverse community organisations
- **Faith Communities:** Working with different religious and faith organisations
- **Cultural Organisations:** Partnership with organisations serving specific cultural communities
- **Women's Organisations:** Collaboration with groups supporting women veterans
- **Youth Organisations:** Working with groups supporting young veterans

10.2 Sector Leadership and Advocacy

Best Practice Development

- Leading by example in equality and diversity practices
- Sharing our experience and learning with other organisations
- Contributing to sector-wide guidance and standards
- Participating in research and evaluation activities
- Mentoring smaller organisations in equality development

Policy Advocacy

- Advocating for equality within the broader veteran community
- Influencing government policy on veteran support and equality
- Challenging discrimination when we encounter it in the sector
- Promoting positive images of diverse veterans
- Supporting legislative and policy changes that promote equality

Public Awareness

- Raising awareness of diversity within the veteran community
- Challenging stereotypes and misconceptions about veterans
- Promoting understanding of different veteran experiences
- Celebrating the contributions of all veterans to society
- Educating the public about veteran equality issues

10.3 Collaborative Service Development

Joint Programming

- Developing joint services with partner organisations
- Sharing resources and expertise for better outcomes
- Creating referral pathways between organisations
- Coordinating support to avoid duplication and gaps
- Evaluating collaborative approaches for effectiveness

Knowledge Sharing

- Regular forums for sharing best practices and challenges
- Joint training and development opportunities
- Shared research and evaluation activities
- Cross-organisation secondments and exchanges
- Collaborative policy development and review

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11. Review and Continuous Improvement Framework

11.1 Comprehensive Annual Review Process

Our annual review ensures this policy remains effective and relevant:

Performance Assessment

- Detailed analysis of progress against equality objectives
- Review of equality monitoring data and trends
- Assessment of complaint patterns and resolution outcomes
- Evaluation of training effectiveness and participation rates
- Stakeholder feedback collection and analysis

Legal and Policy Updates

- Review of changes in equality legislation and guidance
- Assessment of new charity law requirements
- Update of best practice guidance and recommendations
- Consideration of sector developments and innovations
- Alignment with other organisational policies and procedures

Stakeholder Engagement

- Consultation with service users and beneficiaries
- Feedback from staff, volunteers, and trustees
- Input from partner organisations and stakeholders
- Engagement with equality and community organisations
- External evaluation and peer review opportunities

Action Planning

- Development of annual equality action plans
- Setting of specific, measurable equality objectives
- Resource allocation for equality initiatives
- Timeline development for implementation activities
- Responsibility assignment and accountability measures

11.2 Continuous Monitoring and Improvement

Quarterly Monitoring

- Regular review of equality data and performance indicators
- Tracking of progress against annual action plans
- Assessment of emerging issues and challenges
- Review of resource allocation and utilisation
- Stakeholder feedback collection and analysis

Responsive Adaptation

- Prompt response to changing needs and circumstances
- Adaptation of services based on user feedback
- Policy updates in response to legal or guidance changes
- Service improvements based on equality impact assessments
- Proactive addressing of identified gaps or issues

Innovation and Development

- Piloting of new approaches to equality and inclusion
- Research into emerging best practices and innovations
- Collaboration with academic and research organisations
- Participation in sector development initiatives
- Investment in staff development and capability building

11.3 Reporting and Accountability

Internal Reporting

We maintain transparency and accountability through:

Trustee Reporting

- Quarterly equality performance reports to the board
- Annual comprehensive equality review and planning
- Special reports on significant equality issues or incidents
- Regular discussion of equality implications in board decisions
- Trustee training and development on equality issues

Staff and Volunteer Communication

- Regular team meetings including equality updates
- Annual staff equality survey and feedback sessions
- Equality performance included in organisational newsletters
- Recognition and celebration of equality achievements
- Open forums for discussion of equality challenges and solutions

External Reporting

Public Accountability

- Annual equality report published on our website
- Inclusion of equality performance in annual charity reports

- Public meetings and presentations on equality progress
- Media engagement on equality issues and achievements
- Social media communication of equality commitments and progress

Regulatory Reporting

- Compliance reporting to Charity Commission and OSCR as required
- Equality data submission to relevant government departments
- Participation in sector-wide equality monitoring initiatives
- Response to regulatory enquiries and investigations
- Proactive engagement with regulators on equality matters

Sector Engagement

- Sharing of best practices with other veteran charities
- Participation in sector networks and forums
- Contribution to research and evaluation studies
- Peer review and benchmarking activities
- Conference presentations and publication of case studies

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12. Resources and Support Networks

12.1 Internal Resources and Tools

We provide comprehensive resources to support equality implementation:

Policy and Guidance Documents

- **Detailed Implementation Guides:** Step-by-step guidance for applying equality principles
- **Quick Reference Cards:** Summary guidance for frontline staff and volunteers
- **Case Study Library:** Examples of good practice and lessons learned
- **Template Documents:** Standard forms and templates incorporating equality considerations
- **Training Materials:** Comprehensive training resources and presentation materials

Support Systems

- **Equality Champion Network:** Named contacts for advice and support
- **Peer Support Groups:** Staff networks for sharing experiences and best practices
- **Mentoring Programmes:** Support for career development and progression
- **Counselling Services:** Access to professional support for those facing challenges
- **Resource Libraries:** Books, reports, and research materials on equality topics

Communication Tools

- **Internal Website:** Dedicated equality section with resources and information
- **Newsletter Content:** Regular equality updates and awareness articles
- **Notice Boards:** Visual displays promoting equality and celebrating diversity
- **Email Updates:** Regular communication on equality matters
- **Meeting Templates:** Standard agenda items and discussion prompts for equality

12.2 External Support Organisations

We maintain relationships with key external organisations for specialist support:

Legal and Rights Support

- **Equality and Human Rights Commission:** Guidance, training, and complaint support
- **ACAS (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service):** Employment relations guidance
- **Citizens Advice:** General advice and advocacy support
- **Law Centres:** Legal advice and representation for complex cases
- **Trade Union Support:** Specialist employment advice and representation

Mental Health and Wellbeing

- **Combat Stress:** Specialist mental health support for veterans
- **Mind:** Mental health information, support, and advocacy
- **Samaritans:** 24/7 emotional support and crisis intervention
- **PTSD Resolution:** Specialist support for trauma-related conditions
- **Military Mental Health Specialists:** Professional therapeutic services

Specialist Equality Support

- **Stonewall:** LGBTQ+ inclusion guidance and support programmes
- **Age UK:** Support and advocacy for older people
- **Scope:** Disability equality and rights organisation
- **Runnymede Trust:** Race equality research and advocacy
- **Fawcett Society:** Gender equality campaigning and research
- **Muslim Council of Britain:** Faith community liaison and support

Veteran-Specific Support

- **Veterans UK:** Government support and benefits information
- **Op COURAGE:** NHS mental health services for veterans
- **Forces Employment Charity:** Career support and employment services
- **Haig Housing:** Specialist accommodation for veterans
- **SSAFA and Royal British Legion:** Comprehensive welfare support

12.3 Training and Development Resources

External Training Providers

- **Equality Challenge Unit:** Specialist equality training programmes
- **Diversity and Ability:** Disability awareness and inclusion training
- **Military cultural competence trainers:** Specialist veteran community training
- **Local universities and colleges:** Academic courses and professional development
- **Professional development organisations:** Leadership and management training

Online Resources and Tools

- **Government equality guidance:** Latest legal requirements and best practices
- **Charity Commission guidance:** Sector-specific equality requirements
- **Research databases:** Academic research on equality and veteran issues
- **Best practice networks:** Sector forums and knowledge sharing platforms
- **Professional associations:** Membership organisations for equality professionals

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13. Policy Communication and Accessibility

13.1 Making This Policy Widely Available

This policy is communicated through multiple channels to ensure maximum accessibility:

Digital Accessibility

- **Website Publication:** Prominently featured on our main website with easy navigation
- **Mobile Compatibility:** Optimised for mobile devices and tablets
- **Search Functionality:** Easily searchable with relevant keywords
- **Download Options:** Available in multiple digital formats (PDF, Word, HTML)
- **Screen Reader Compatibility:** Formatted for assistive technologies

Physical Availability

- **Reception Areas:** Copies available in all office locations and service delivery points
- **Notice Boards:** Summary versions displayed in prominent locations
- **Meeting Rooms:** Available during all formal meetings and consultations
- **Community Venues:** Distributed through partner organisations and venues
- **Postal Requests:** Available by post for those without digital access

Proactive Distribution

- **Induction Materials:** Included in all staff, volunteer, and trustee induction packs
- **Service User Information:** Provided as part of service registration and ongoing support
- **Partner Organisations:** Shared with all partner organisations and contractors
- **Community Events:** Distributed at conferences, meetings, and public events
- **Annual Distribution:** Regular redistribution to ensure currency and awareness

13.2 Alternative Formats and Languages Across the UK

We are committed to making this policy accessible to everyone across all four nations of the UK:

Alternative Formats Available on Request

- **Large Print:** 14pt, 16pt, and 18pt font sizes available
- **Braille:** Grade 1 and Grade 2 Braille versions
- **Audio Format:** Professional recordings in MP3 and CD format
- **Easy Read:** Simplified language versions with visual aids
- **Digital Text:** Compatible with screen reading software and text-to-speech

Language Accessibility by Nation

England

- **English:** Standard provision in accessible formats
- **Community Languages:** Translation available in languages commonly spoken by veteran communities
- **Sign Language:** British Sign Language interpretation for meetings and consultations

Wales

- **Welsh Language:** Available in Welsh in compliance with Welsh Language Standards and the principle of equal treatment established by the Welsh Language Act 1993 and Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011
- **English:** Full provision alongside Welsh versions
- **Community Languages:** Translation available as needed
- **Sign Language:** British Sign Language interpretation available

Scotland

- **English:** Standard provision in accessible formats
- **Scottish Gaelic:** Available in Scottish Gaelic in recognition of its official status under the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 and Scottish Languages Act 2025, ensuring "equal respect" with English
- **Scots:** Recognition of Scots language under the Scottish Languages Act 2025
- **Community Languages:** Translation available as needed
- **Sign Language:** British Sign Language and Scottish Sign Language interpretation available

Northern Ireland

- **English:** Standard provision in accessible formats
- **Ulster Scots:** Available in Ulster Scots where requested, recognizing its status under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages
- **Irish Language/Gaelic:** Available in Irish where requested, recognizing its official status and cultural importance
- **Community Languages:** Translation available as needed
- **Sign Language:** British Sign Language and Irish Sign Language interpretation available

Comprehensive Community Language Support

Translation available in languages commonly spoken by veteran communities across the UK, including:

- **Urdu and Hindi** (supporting South Asian veterans)
- **Polish** (supporting Eastern European veterans)
- **Arabic** (supporting Middle Eastern veterans)
- **Nepali** (supporting Gurkha veterans and families)
- **Portuguese** (supporting Portuguese-speaking veterans)
- **Punjabi** (supporting Punjabi-speaking veterans and families)
- **Bengali** (supporting Bengali-speaking communities)
- **Somali** (supporting Somali veteran communities)

Professional Translation and Interpretation

- Access to certified translators for complex discussions across all UK nations
- Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) services available
- Telephone interpretation services
- Document translation services for official correspondence
- Cultural mediation support where language and cultural barriers intersect

Accessibility Support

- **Reading Support:** Assistance available for those with literacy challenges
- **Technology Support:** Help with accessing digital versions
- **Explanation Services:** Staff available to explain policy content and implications
- **Advocacy Support:** Connection to independent advocates where needed

13.3 Communication Strategy

Regular Promotion and Awareness

- **Annual Awareness Campaigns:** Dedicated campaigns to promote policy awareness
- **Newsletter Articles:** Regular features in organisational communications
- **Social media:** Ongoing promotion through social media channels

- **Training Integration:** Policy discussion integrated into all training programmes
- **Event Integration:** Policy awareness included in all community events and activities

Feedback and Engagement

- **Regular Surveys:** Annual surveys on policy awareness and understanding
- **Focus Groups:** Regular discussion groups with different stakeholder communities
- **Open Forums:** Public meetings to discuss policy implementation and effectiveness
- **Digital Engagement:** Online forums and feedback mechanisms
- **Community Consultation:** Regular consultation with served communities and stakeholders

14. Detailed Contact Information and Support

14.1 Primary Contacts

For questions about this policy, reporting concerns, or requesting support:
Senior Leadership Team

Chief Executive Officer

- Email: len.chappell@forcesonline.org.uk
- Direct Line: 07826163001
- Available: Monday-Friday, 10:00 AM - 4:00 PM

Chair of Trustees

- Email: George.dryburgh@forcesonline.org.uk
- Contact via main office: 0300 300 2288
- Available for formal complaints and governance matters

Designated Equality Contacts

Equality Champion (Trustee Level)

- Name: Keith Shields
- Email: keith.shields@forcesonline.org.uk
- Direct Line: 07806672223
- Specialisation: Policy oversight and strategic development

Equality Officer (Operational Level)

- Name: Len Chappell
- Email: len.chappell@forcesonline.org.uk
- Direct Line: 0300 300 2288
- Specialisation: Day-to-day implementation and support

14.2 Organisational Contact Details

Head Office Address: Forces Online CIO:

Unit 5 Workshed Carriage Works, London Street, Wiltshire, SN1 5DG

General Enquiries:
- Main Switchboard: 0300 300 2288
- Email: len.chappell@forcesonline.org.uk
- Website: https://www.forcesonline.org.uk

Service Delivery Contacts:
- Veteran Support Line: 0300 300 2288
- Family Support: 0300 300 2288
- Emergency Support: call 999/ Samaritans on 116123

14.3 External Support and Complaint Organisations

Nation-Specific Equality Bodies and Support

England

Equality and Human Rights Commission (England)
- Phone: 0808 800 0082
- Website: www.equalityhumanrights.com
- For discrimination complaints and equality guidance

ACAS (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service)
- Helpline: 0300 123 1100
- Website: www.acas.org.uk
- For employment-related equality issues

Wales

Equality and Human Rights Commission (Wales)
- Phone: 0845 604 8810
- Website: www.equalityhumanrights.com/wales
- For discrimination complaints and equality guidance in Wales

Welsh Language Commissioner
- Phone: 0845 603 3221
- Email: post@welshlanguagecommissioner.wales
- Website: www.welshlanguagecommissioner.wales
- For Welsh language rights and standards compliance

ACAS Cymru

- Helpline: 0300 123 1100
- Website: www.acas.org.uk/wales
- For employment-related equality issues in Wales

Scotland

Equality and Human Rights Commission (Scotland)

- Phone: 0845 604 5510
- Website: www.equalityhumanrights.com/scotland
- For discrimination complaints and equality guidance in Scotland

Bòrd na Gàidhlig (Gaelic Language Board)

- Phone: 01463 225 454
- Email: fios@gaidhlig.scot
- Website: www.gaidhlig.scot
- For Gaelic language development and planning

ACAS Scotland

- Helpline: 0300 123 1100
- Website: www.acas.org.uk/scotland
- For employment-related equality issues in Scotland
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Northern Ireland

Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

- Phone: 028 9050 0600
- Textphone: 028 9050 0589
- Email: information@equalityni.org
- Website: www.equalityni.org
- For equality advice and discrimination complaints in Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission

- Phone: 028 9024 3987
- Email: info@nihrc.org
- Website: www.nihrc.org
- For human rights issues and advice in Northern Ireland

Labour Relations Agency (Northern Ireland)

- Phone: 028 9032 1442
- Email: info@lra.org.uk
- Website: www.lra.org.uk
- For employment-related equality issues in Northern Ireland

Charity Commission for England and Wales

- Phone: 0300 066 9197
- Email: rsiteam@charitycommission.gov.uk
- Website: www.gov.uk/charity-commission
- For complaints about charity governance and management

Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR)

- Phone: 01382 220446
- Email: info@oscr.org.uk
- Website: www.oscr.org.uk
- For Scottish charity regulation matters

Charity Commission for Northern Ireland

- Phone: 028 3834 7279
- Email: admin@charitycommissionni.org.uk
- Website: www.charitycommissionni.org.uk
- For Northern Ireland charity regulation and compliance

Mental Health and Crisis Support

Samaritans

- Phone: 116 123 (free from any phone)
- Email: jo@samaritans.org
- Available 24/7 for emotional support

Combat Stress

- 24-hour helpline: 0800 138 1619
- Text: 07537 173 683
- Website: www.combatstress.org.uk
- Specialist support for veterans with mental health conditions

14.4 Making a Complaint or Raising Concerns

How to Contact Us About Equality Issues

1. **Informal Discussion:** Speak directly with your usual contact or line manager
2. **Formal Complaint:** Write to our Chief Executive or Chair of Trustees
3. **Anonymous Reporting:** Use our online reporting system or suggestion box
4. **Third Party Reporting:** Ask a friend, family member, or advocate to contact us on your behalf
5. **External Support:** Contact external organisations listed above for independent advice

What Information to Include

When contacting us about equality concerns, it helps if you can provide:

- Your name and contact details (unless you wish to remain anonymous)
- Details of what happened, when, and who was involved
- Any evidence or witnesses to the incident
- How the incident has affected you
- What outcome or resolution you are seeking
- Any support you might need during the process

Response Timescales

- **Acknowledgment:** We will acknowledge your contact within 2 working days
- **Initial Response:** Full response to informal queries within 5 working days
- **Formal Investigation:** Formal complaints investigated within 20 working days
- **Complex Cases:** Extended timescales with regular updates provided
- **Appeals Process:** Right of appeal within 10 working days of formal decision

15. Implementation Timeline and Action Plan

15.1 Year One Implementation Priorities (2025-2026)

Quarter 1 (September - November 2025)

Policy Launch and Communication

- Board approval and formal adoption of policy
- Staff and volunteer briefing sessions
- Website publication and public announcement
- Initial equality training programme launch
- Baseline equality monitoring data collection

Key Performance Indicators:

- 100% of staff and trustees receive policy briefing
- Policy published in 3 alternative formats
- Baseline data collected from 80% of current service users
- Equality champion appointed and trained

Quarter 2 (December 2025 - February 2026)

Training and Development Phase

- Mandatory equality training rollout for all staff
- Specialist training for service delivery teams
- Trustee development programme implementation
- Reasonable adjustments assessment and implementation
- Partnership agreements updated with equality clauses

Key Performance Indicators:

- 90% of staff complete mandatory training
- All trustees receive equality training
- 10 reasonable adjustments identified and implemented
- 5 partnership agreements updated
-

Quarter 3 (March - May 2026)

Service Development and Improvement

- Equality impact assessments for all services
- Service delivery improvements based on monitoring data
- Community engagement and consultation programme
- Positive action initiatives development
- Complaint procedure testing and refinement

Key Performance Indicators:

- Equality impact assessments completed for all services
- 3 community consultation sessions held
- 2 positive action initiatives launched
- Complaint response time averaged under 10 days

Quarter 4 (June - August 2026)

Monitoring and Review Phase

- First annual equality monitoring report
- Service user satisfaction survey including equality questions
- Staff experience survey on equality and inclusion
- Policy effectiveness review and initial updates
- Year two planning and objective setting

Key Performance Indicators:

- Annual report published and disseminated
- 70% service user satisfaction with equality performance
- 80% staff report positive experience of equality initiatives
- Year two action plan developed and approved

15.2 Long-term Development Plan (2026-2030)

Years 2-3: Embedding and Excellence

- **Deep Culture Change:** Equality principles fully embedded in organisational culture
- **Service Excellence:** All services demonstrating best practice in equality delivery
- **Leadership Development:** Diverse leadership at all organisational levels

- **Sector Leadership:** Organisation recognised as equality leader in veteran sector
- **Innovation:** Pioneering new approaches to inclusive service delivery

Years 4-5: Innovation and Impact

- **Research and Development:** Contributing to knowledge base on veteran equality
- **Policy Influence:** Influencing sector-wide and government policy on veteran equality
- **Partnership Leadership:** Leading collaborative equality initiatives across the sector
- **International Learning:** Sharing best practices internationally
- **Sustainable Impact:** Demonstrable long-term positive outcomes for diverse veteran communities

15.3 Resource Allocation and Investment

Financial Investment

- **Training and Development:** £1500 annually for comprehensive training programmes
- **Accessibility Improvements:** £1500 annually for reasonable adjustments and accessibility
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** £2000 annually for data collection and analysis systems
- **Community Engagement:** £2000 annually for outreach and consultation activities
- **Staff Development:** £2000 annually for specialist equality roles and development

Human Resources

- **Equality Champion:** 0.2 FTE trustee or senior staff time allocation
- **Equality Officer:** 0.6 FTE dedicated staff role
- **Training Coordination:** 0.3 FTE training and development coordination
- **Data Analysis:** 0.2 FTE data analysis and monitoring role
- **Community Engagement:** 0.4 FTE community outreach and engagement

Infrastructure Investment

- **Technology Systems:** Investment in accessible website and data management systems
- **Physical Accessibility:** Ongoing investment in accessible venues and facilities
- **Communication Materials:** Development of diverse and accessible communication resources
- **Partnership Development:** Investment in collaborative systems and shared resources

16. Success Measures and Key Performance Indicators

16.1 Service Delivery Excellence Indicators

Access and Inclusion Measures

- **Service Reach:** Percentage of local veteran population accessing services by demographic group
- **Referral Patterns:** Analysis of referral sources and pathways by protected characteristics
- **Geographic Coverage:** Service accessibility across different geographic areas
- **Demographic Representation:** Service user profile compared to known veteran population demographics
- **Barrier Removal:** Number and types of access barriers identified and addressed annually

Quality and Satisfaction Measures

- **Service Satisfaction:** Overall satisfaction rates by different demographic groups
- **Cultural Competence:** Feedback scores on cultural sensitivity and appropriateness
- **Outcome Achievement:** Success rates in achieving service goals by protected characteristics
- **Reasonable Adjustments:** Number, types, and effectiveness of adjustments made
- **Complaint Resolution:** Satisfaction with complaint handling and resolution processes

16.2 Organisational Excellence Indicators

Workforce Diversity and Inclusion

- **Recruitment Diversity:** Applications and appointments by protected characteristics
- **Retention Rates:** Staff and volunteer retention by demographic groups
- **Career Progression:** Promotion and development opportunities by protected characteristics
- **Pay Equity:** Pay gap analysis across different demographic groups
- **Workplace Satisfaction:** Annual survey results on inclusion and workplace culture

Leadership and Governance

- **Board Diversity:** Trustee demographic profile and diversity measures
- **Decision-Making:** Integration of equality considerations in strategic decisions
- **Policy Implementation:** Progress against equality action plan objectives
- **Training Completion:** Participation rates in equality and diversity training
- **Cultural Change:** Evidence of positive culture change through surveys and feedback

16.3 Community Impact Indicators

Community Engagement and Trust

- **Community Participation:** Engagement levels from different veteran communities
- **Partnership Development:** Number and quality of partnerships with diverse organisations
- **Advocacy Impact:** Influence on sector practices and policy development
- **Public Recognition:** Awards, recognition, and positive media coverage for equality work
- **Peer Evaluation:** Feedback from other organisations on our equality performance

Long-term Outcomes

- **Systemic Change:** Evidence of improved equality across the veteran support sector
- **Policy Influence:** Contribution to improved equality policies and practices
- **Research Contribution:** Publications and research outputs on veteran equality
- **Sustainable Impact:** Long-term positive outcomes for served communities
- **Knowledge Transfer:** Other organisations adopting our equality approaches

16.4 Reporting and Accountability Framework

Internal Performance Management

- **Quarterly Reviews:** Regular performance assessment against KPIs
- **Annual Reporting:** Comprehensive annual equality performance report
- **Board Oversight:** Regular board review and strategic direction setting
- **Staff Engagement:** Regular staff input into performance assessment and improvement
- **Service User Voice:** Ongoing service user involvement in performance evaluation

External Accountability

- **Public Reporting:** Annual public report on equality performance and progress
- **Regulatory Compliance:** Meeting all regulatory reporting requirements
- **Sector Benchmarking:** Comparison with sector standards and best practices
- **Independent Evaluation:** Regular external assessment of equality performance
- **Stakeholder Feedback:** Regular consultation with external stakeholders on performance

This comprehensive equality and diversity policy represents Forces Online's unwavering commitment to creating an inclusive organisation that serves all members of the Armed Forces community with dignity, respect, and excellence. Through this policy, we pledge to be a leader in equality within the veteran sector, continuously striving to remove barriers, celebrate diversity, and ensure that every veteran and military family member can access the support they need and deserve.

We recognise that equality is not a destination but a journey, and we commit to continuous learning, improvement, and adaptation as we work to create a more equitable society for all who have served our country.

Document Control Information:

- **Policy Title:**   Forces Online - Equality and Diversity Policy
- **Version:**   5.0
- **Created:**   07/04/2020
- **Next Review:**   07/04/2026
- **Approved by:**   Board of Trustees, Forces Online CIO
- **Policy Owner:**   Chief Executive Officer
- **Document Length:** [Comprehensive - approximately 10,000 words]
- **Accessibility:**   Available in multiple formats upon request
- **Distribution:**   Public document available via website and on request

Related Documents:

- Forces Online Service User Charter
- Forces Online Staff Handbook
- Forces Online Volunteer Policy
- Forces Online Safeguarding Policy
- Forces Online Data Protection Policy
- Forces Online Complaints Procedure

Change Record

Date of Change:	Changed By:	Comments:
07/04/2000	LC/ME	Authorised by Trustees.
07/04/2021	LC/ME	Policy Check
07/04/2022	LC/PE	Policy Check
07/04/2023	LC/PE	Policy Check
07/04/2024	LC/PE	Policy Check
07/04/2025	LC/GD	Policy Check
01/09/2025	LC/KS/SD	Format changed to PDF