

Connected Voice

Equity diversity and inclusion policy

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Document details and review

Reviewed: March 2026
Next review: March 2027

Circulated to: Management Group, Connected Voice Board, EDI Group All Staff

Frequency of review: Annually

Signed by responsible person:



1. Equity, diversity and inclusion statement

Connected Voice is committed to embedding equity, diversity and inclusion in all of our strategies, activities and decisions. We aim to create and promote a culture that will support trustees, staff and volunteers to feel empowered, knowledgeable and able to administer this policy in all of our interactions with service users, members, partners, stakeholders and suppliers. We will promote equity, diversity and inclusion and will take steps to challenge discrimination, harassment and victimisation in everything we do.

We understand that everyone's life experiences are different and we aim to encourage a culture of open-ness and ensure our people feel comfortable to ask questions related to EDI. We know that discrimination and oppression take many forms and that regular experience of micro aggressions can be as harmful as overt discrimination.

This policy is supported by a framework of principles that have been agreed by the Connected Voice Board and an action plan that identifies areas for development and improvement. Trustees and senior managers will reflect on equity, diversity and inclusion when deciding on strategies, recruitment, employment and new services.

Connected Voice as a leader in the voluntary and community sector will influence and encourage organisations we work with to be aware of our equity, diversity and inclusion policy and support them to adopt their own policies.

This equity, diversity and inclusion policy is at the heart of all that we do to improve the quality of life across the region and to work towards a fairer future for all. It is supported by our values:

- We amplify voices – from individuals to organisations, we believe everyone has a right to be heard. Trusted to listen, understand and advocate, we strive for excellence. We're open and honest, we stick by people and give our support to ensure their voices are heard.
- We champion Equality – we believe that diversity should be celebrated and valued, and everyone deserves equality. Working towards a fairer future for all, we won't stand still. By making an impact on causes big and small, we want to improve the quality of life across the region.
- We inspire change – courageous, resourceful and determined, we will challenge unfairness and ask difficult questions. Working effectively and accountably to instil confidence. We aim to become stronger and more sustainable to inspire positive and lasting change throughout our community.
- We support action – we understand from our own experiences the challenges people face. We truly value people and we won't judge or dictate. Leading independently and side by side with our communities and partners, we share our resources, skills and expertise to enable people to take meaningful action.
- We connect people – at the heart of voluntary and community action for 90 years, we are immersed and rooted in the North East. We work collectively and inclusively to connect, grow and strengthen our society. We are warm and approachable, and we create opportunities to exchange ideas, learn from and empower one another.

2. Principles

The trustees, staff and volunteers will work to ensure that our services meet the needs of all the communities in Newcastle, Gateshead and any other area in which we provide services. We will strive to ensure services are equally accessible to everyone and promote community cohesion and social inclusion.

We recognise that some individuals and groups of people are subject to discrimination and unfair and unequal treatment on grounds of their personal and social characteristics.

Connected Voice therefore aims to ensure that every organisation or individual to whom we provide services, job applicant, staff member, trustee or volunteer, will be respectfully treated and not discriminated against by us on any condition or requirement that cannot be shown to be justified including but not limited to the nine protected characteristics defined in the Equality Act 2010

- ✓ Age
- ✓ Disability (including invisible disability)
- ✓ Gender identity
- ✓ Marriage and civil partnership
- ✓ Pregnancy and maternity
- ✓ Race including nationality, colour and ethnic or national origins
- ✓ Religion or belief
- ✓ Sex
- ✓ Sexual orientation

Connected Voice understands that there are many other things that influence our lives that are not included in the protected characteristics above. We will be respectful of different views and encourage a culture of open discussion and healthy debate.

We regard all forms of discrimination as unacceptable and will promote equity, diversity and inclusion with trustees, management, staff and volunteers through a programme of training, support and monitoring, as outlined in our EDI action plan.

Connected Voice follows good practice and has a number of policies and procedures in place to encourage and support inclusive behaviour and attitudes by staff, trustees or volunteers. They include:

- ✓ Connected Voice Code of Conduct
- ✓ Connected Voice Disciplinary Procedure
- ✓ Connected Voice Grievance Procedure
- ✓ Connected Voice Zero Tolerance of Abuse
- ✓ Connected Voice Bullying and Sexual Harassment Policy
- ✓ Connected Voice Volunteer Policy
- ✓ Connected Voice Recruitment Guidelines
- ✓ Connected Voice Whistleblowing Policy
- ✓ Connected Voice Confidentiality Policy
- ✓ Connected Voice Data Protection Policy
- ✓ Working with Interpreters Policy

3. Aims

This policy aims to:

- ✓ Promote and ensure equity, diversity and inclusion in the delivery of services, activities, strategies and decisions
- ✓ Ensure we have appropriate plans in place to educate, inform, and where necessary challenge attitudes and promote good practice in equity, diversity and inclusion
- ✓ Ensure other policies and procedures prevent unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and promote equity, diversity and inclusion in Connected Voice
- ✓ Ensure that all staff, trustees and volunteers are aware of our responsibility to comply with relevant equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory legislation and with the spirit of the Human Rights Act

4. Implementation

Connected Voice will ensure that all staff, trustees and volunteers are aware of our responsibilities under the law and this policy by

- ✓ Actively promoting equity, diversity and inclusion in all areas of Connected Voice's work. This will include staff and trustee handbooks; through recruitment, selection and employment; in strategies and action plans; and, in all Connected Voice's policies
- ✓ Developing an equity, diversity and inclusion framework and action plan that underpins the Connected Voice values positively promotes work with the diverse communities in Newcastle, Gateshead and any other area in which we provide services.
- ✓ Ensuring all new employees, volunteers and trustees understand and are familiar with the Connected Voice equity, diversity and inclusion policy and how it is implemented in the organisation
- ✓ Requiring all staff, volunteers and trustees to attend equity, diversity and inclusion training at the point of induction, and on a regular basis as part of personal development
- ✓ All Connected Voice staff will take responsibility for equity, diversity and inclusion training. Staff training and personal development will be monitored by line managers through regular staff supervision. Connected Voice managers will ensure that all staff are made aware that they are expected to be proactive in attending equity, diversity and inclusion training and events
- ✓ Ensuring Connected Voice staff, trustees and volunteers are made aware at their induction of the organisation's principles, values and EDI policy. If a staff member is found not to be following or understanding the principles of the Connected Voice equity diversity and inclusion policy we will discuss this directly with them and they will be asked to take part in training. Discrimination, harassment or victimisation will be taken seriously, and will be dealt with in line with the Connected Voice Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Procedure.

5. Action Plan

The action plan objectives will be set by the equity, diversity and inclusion sub group, using the principles within the Connected Voice EDI framework. Progress will be reviewed regularly at:

- ✓ Connected Voice board meetings
- ✓ Management Group meetings
- ✓ Equity, diversity and inclusion sub group meetings
- ✓ Staff meetings

The equity, diversity and inclusion sub group will review all aspects of Connected Voice and its services and use the principles of the EDI framework to produce an action plan to support this policy. The action plan will include (but not exclusively) the following:

- Recruitment and service user involvement
- Employment good practice
- Induction process
- Training for staff, trustees and volunteers
- Staff Surveys
- Handling Complaints
- Organising accessible events including reviewing venues, speakers, topics and identifying under-represented groups
- Reviewing digital accessibility and enabling better communications
- Actively improving equity, diversity and inclusion in the membership offer
- Ensuring that local minority communities can access our services and barriers are identified and removed where possible
- Influential leadership – encouraging members to develop a meaningful equity, diversity and inclusion policy that supports good practice, culture and behaviours
- Proactive staff health and wellbeing, and support for carers
- Good governance of the organisation
- Tracking EDI actions at team meetings
- Monitoring the effectiveness of the policy

6. Connected Voice structure and responsibilities for equity, diversity and inclusion

Group	Responsibilities
Connected Voice board of trustees	• Review equity, diversity and inclusion Policy annually • Agree principles for equity, diversity and inclusion framework • Review progress on EDI action plan regularly • Review equity, diversity and inclusion sub group report half yearly • Review annual monitoring reports with statistics on staff, recruitment, membership, and feedback from organisations that use our services
Connected Voice Management Group	• Review equity, diversity and inclusion policy annually and review changes to go to Connected Voice board • Set equity, diversity and inclusion objectives annually • Review progress on EDI action plan twice a year • Review equity, diversity and inclusion sub group report quarterly

	• Discuss equity, diversity and inclusion issues at monthly management group meetings
Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Group	• Review equity, diversity and inclusion policy yearly and make changes in line with new legislation • Discuss priorities annually and make recommendations to management group • Produce an action plan for the implementation of priorities • Review progress on action plan at quarterly meetings • Collect and review data and monitoring • Ensure values are clearly communicated • Review guidelines on both data digital accessibility • Produce an annual schedule of staff EDI training including mandatory training • Consult on and administer the staff EDI survey • Produce an annual report for Connected Voice trustees and management group • Arrange staff training on equity, diversity and inclusion as required
Connected Voice Managers	• Ensure equity, diversity and inclusion issues are discussed at staff supervision sessions • Ensure EDI is included on team agendas or set a team EDI priority and monitor progress. • Ensure staff engage in equity, diversity and inclusion training – at induction and regularly updated • Ensure staff are aware of their responsibilities in arranging accessible meetings • Ensure staff are aware of their responsibilities in ensuring that local minority communities can access our services and barriers are identified and removed where possible • Ensure recruitment is carried out in line with the Connected Voice recruitment guidelines • Encourage a culture of learning

	through open conversations, and embedding equity, diversity and inclusion in all aspects of our work
Staff and volunteers	• All staff and volunteers are responsible for attending equity, diversity and inclusion training and events • Engaging and keeping informed on equity, diversity and inclusion issues through reading Connected Voice e-bulletins, Connected Voice articles and other publications • All staff and volunteers are responsible for challenging and reporting inappropriate behaviour where they see it • Ensuring that they consider issues of equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility in service provision

7. Monitoring and review

The equity, diversity and inclusion sub group will meet bi-monthly and undertake actions as outlined in section 6, including to review the equity, diversity and inclusion policy and make any changes necessary in line with new legislation. The Policy is then reviewed by management group and sent to the Board for approval.

Any actions arising from changes in legislation and the promotion of good practice will be monitored and reviewed by the Connected Voice management structure as above.

Connected Voice will make sure that all information gathered is administered in line with our confidentiality, safeguarding and data protection policies.

8. Keeping up to date with changes to equity, diversity and inclusion legislation

Connected Voice will keep up to date with changes to equity, diversity and inclusion legislation by circulating relevant information to staff, board and volunteers via email, displaying posters and leaflets, articles in Connected Voice e-bulletin, Connected Voice magazine, agenda items at staff meetings and arranging/attending appropriate training sessions.

Connected Voice receives updates about changes to legislation from the following:

- ✓ Various HR Consultants
- ✓ National membership bodies – including ACEVO, NAVCA, NCVO

9. Challenging and reporting inappropriate behaviour

Connected Voice is committed to promoting equity, diversity and inclusion and will take steps to challenge discrimination, harassment and victimisation in everything we do. If a staff member is found not to be following or understanding the principles of the Connected Voice equity diversity and inclusion policy they will be asked to take part in training to support attitude and behaviour change. We understand that people make mistakes, we are aware that some health conditions may result in people presenting behaviours that may challenge others eg Acquired Brain Injury and we want to encourage a culture of open-ness, asking questions and understanding the points of view and circumstances of others.

Discrimination, harassment or victimisation will be dealt with in line with the Connected Voice Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Procedure.

All staff are responsible for challenging and reporting inappropriate behaviour where they see it.

If a member of staff wants to challenge inappropriate behaviour they can in the first instance discuss it with any of the following:

- ✓ A Line Manager
- ✓ Chief Executive
- ✓ Equity, diversity and inclusion sub group member
- ✓ Staff Council

Depending on the nature of the incident, Connected Voice has a number of ways to deal with an issue that has been raised. The following policies and procedures are in place to support challenging inappropriate behaviour by staff, trustees or volunteers:

- ✓ Connected Voice Code of Conduct
- ✓ Connected Voice Disciplinary Procedure
- ✓ Connected Voice Grievance Procedure
- ✓ Connected Voice Zero Tolerance of Abuse
- ✓ Connected Voice Bullying and Sexual Harassment Policy
- ✓ Connected Voice Volunteer Policy
- ✓ Connected Voice Recruitment Guidelines
- ✓ Connected Voice Whistleblowing Policy
- ✓ Connected Voice Confidentiality Policy
- ✓ Connected Voice Data Protection Policy
- ✓ Connected Voice Safeguarding Policy

10. Recruitment, selection and employment

Connected Voice's recruitment, selection and employment policies aim to ensure that unfair direct or indirect discrimination or discrimination by association does not occur in our recruitment, selection and employment of staff, trustees and volunteers.

As an organisation we are committed to taking a proactive approach to achieving diversity as part of our recruitment, selection and employment processes. We have outlined in our EDI action plan how we will take steps to ensure that we reach under-represented communities, and to ensure that our staff team represents the communities we serve. We understand that we must continue to strive for diversity in recruitment, and that efforts must be sustained over a long period of time to truly achieve greater diversity across our workforce.

The recruitment and selection policy aims to ensure

- ✓ That no applicant, whether internal or external, is discriminated against either intentionally or unintentionally, or receives less favourable treatment on the grounds of personal or social characteristics.
- ✓ That no applicant is placed at a disadvantage by requirements or conditions which have a disproportionately adverse effect on people with their personal or social characteristic and which cannot be shown to be justifiable on other grounds.

All trustees and employees with responsibility for recruitment and selection are required to understand and operate within the recruitment and selection policy and procedures.

It is our policy to provide equity, diversity and inclusion training to all staff and trustees responsible for recruitment and selection and/or line management of staff. This will make sure that they are aware of equity, diversity and inclusion issues and carry out their responsibilities according to our adopted procedures.

Connected Voice understands the need to be sensitive to cultural and religious beliefs within recruitment. Any specific needs an employee might have regarding religious/cultural beliefs should be discussed with the line manager who should use their discretion (referring to the Cultural Beliefs Handbook as appropriate).

11. Services

Connected Voice is committed to equity, diversity and inclusion for everyone using our services, and we also strive to prioritise and target our services to communities and groups in greatest need. We strive to make our services accessible to the diverse communities in Newcastle, Gateshead, and any other area in which we provide services, and barriers are identified and removed, as far as is possible and reasonable given our resources.

In order to make services accessible we understand that we need to have clear knowledge of who currently uses them, and where the gaps are. When we review our services, we will consider how we can improve or change our services to provide greater access to communities not yet using or not making full use of our services.

Connected Voice recognises that we regularly use digital media when we deliver our events and for information on the website. The Connected Voice staff follow digital accessibility guidelines to ensure our services are inclusive.

Connected Voice employees should be aware of cultural, religious and other festivals appropriate to their work and client group/s.

There are systems in place for accessing bilingual advocates, British Sign Language interpreters and interpreters (see Working with Interpreters Policy).

12. Comments, suggestions and complaints

If Connected Voice staff, trustees or volunteers are concerned about an EDI issue, it should be raised with their Line Manager, a staff council member, the Chief Executive or the Chair. Depending on the nature of a complaint, it may be dealt with informally via a discussion, through the grievance policy and procedure, or other policies and procedures as appropriate.

If a service user, member, partner or other stakeholder of Connected Voice feels we are not providing our services in line with this policy, or feels they have been treated unfairly in any way, they should speak to the Chief Executive or Chair. Our comments, suggestions and complaints policy and procedure is on the Connected Voice website and a copy can also be provided by post to anyone who wishes, by contacting our office.

13. Statutory rights

Any action taken under section 9 is without prejudice to any statutory right to complain to an employment tribunal or other appropriate statutory body, or to involve the Equality and Human Rights Commission or other appropriate external body.

14. Relevant equality legislation

Connected Voice recognises its responsibilities under the following pieces of legislation plus any new or updated legislation that combats discrimination and promotes equity, diversity and inclusion.

- ✓ Equality Act 2010
- ✓ The Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2007
- ✓ The Equality Act 2006
- ✓ Work and Families Act 2006
- ✓ Employment Act 2002
- ✓ Employment Rights Act 1996
- ✓ Employment Rights Act 2025

Appendix 1 – Glossary

Sources – Equality Act 2010 guidance. Equality and Human Rights Commission technical guidance on the Public Sector Equality Duty 2023. Equality and Human Rights Commission guidance for businesses.

Age – A person belonging to a particular age (for example 32 year olds) or range of ages (for example 18 to 30 year olds). This includes all ages, including children and young people. Age is one of the nine protected characteristics in the Equality Act 2010.

Different needs - The different requirements that people with protected characteristics may have which either must or should be met to provide equality, including equality of opportunity and access. Having due regard to the need to meet different needs is one element of having due regard to 'advancing equality of opportunity

Direct discrimination – Less favourable treatment of a person compared with another person because of a protected characteristic. It includes discrimination because someone is perceived to have a protected characteristic or where someone is discriminated against because they are associated with someone else who has a protected characteristic

Disability – A person has a disability if they have a physical, mental invisible, learning, impairment or neurodivergence which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. Disability is one of the nine protected characteristics in the Equality Act 2010. The Equality Act 2010 defines a disabled person as “someone who has a

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physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities". Disability includes, but is not limited to, Vision (e.g. blindness or partial sight); Hearing (e.g. deafness or partial hearing); Mobility (e.g. walking short distances or climbing stairs); Learning/understanding/concentrating; Memory; Mental Health, Social or Behaviour (e.g. autism, attention deficit disorder or Asperger's syndrome).

Disability and impairment - This social model of disability emphasises human and civil rights, as well as the focus on access and the removal of barriers. **Impairment** is an individual's physical, sensory or cognitive difference (for example, being blind, experiencing bipolar, having M.S. or a learning difficulty). **Disability** is the name for the social consequences of having an impairment. People with impairments are disabled by society, so disability is therefore a social construct that can be changed and removed.

Disability language - Note the use of language as some communities adopt identity-first and some adopt person-first language. To follow the social model of disability some people use 'disabled person'. The d/Deaf community has preferred to see deafness as identity not disability.

Disabled person - Someone who has a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Disadvantage - A detriment or impediment – something that the individual affected might reasonably consider changes their position for the worse. Having due regard to the need to remove or minimise disadvantage is one element of having due regard to 'advancing equality of opportunity.

Diversity – diversity is about recognising, valuing and taking account of people's different backgrounds, knowledge, skills, and experiences, and encouraging and using those differences to create a productive and effective workforce.

Duty to make reasonable adjustments - Where a disabled person is at (or in a non-employment context, disabled persons) are at a substantial disadvantage in comparison with people who are not disabled, there is a duty to take reasonable steps to remove that disadvantage by: (a) changing provisions, criteria or practices; (b) altering, removing or providing a reasonable alternative means of avoiding physical features; and (c) providing auxiliary aids

Equality – is the state of being equal in status, rights or opportunities

Equity – recognises that each person has different circumstances and resources, and allocates resources in a way which ensures an equal outcome

Gender - The wider social roles and relationships that structure men's and women's lives. These change over time and vary between cultures.

Gender reassignment – Where a person undergoes, or proposes to undergo, a process for the purpose of reassigning their sex.

Harassment – Unwanted behaviour that has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity or creates a degrading, humiliating, hostile, intimidating or offensive environment.

Indirect discrimination - The use of an apparently neutral practice, provision or criterion which puts people with a particular protected characteristic at a disadvantage compared with others who do not share that characteristic, and applying the practice, provision or criterion cannot be objectively justified.

Liability – employers have legal liability for any act of discrimination (including harassment) carried out by their employees unless the employer can show that they have taken all reasonably practicable steps to prevent it.

Marriage and civil partnership - Marriage is no longer restricted to a union between a man and a woman and now includes a marriage between two people of the same sex. Same-sex and heterosexual couples can also have their relationships legally recognised as 'civil partnerships'. 'Marriage and civil partnership' is collectively described as one of the nine protected characteristics in the Equality Act 2010

Micro aggression - Microaggressions are brief, everyday interactions that send denigrating messages to people, which are subtle and insidious, often leaving the victim confused, distressed and frustrated and the perpetrator oblivious of the offence they have caused. Microaggressions can be intentional or unintentional. Microaggressions is not a legal term and such behaviour will not necessarily amount to harassment under the Equality Act (2010). This will depend on the facts of each case.

Occupational requirement - where having a protected characteristic is an occupational requirement, certain jobs can be reserved for people with that protected characteristic (eg women support workers in women's refuges; Ministers of Religion).

Pregnancy and maternity - pregnancy is the condition of being pregnant or expecting a baby. Maternity refers to the period after the birth, and is linked to maternity leave in the employment context. In the non-work context, protection against maternity discrimination is for 26 weeks after giving birth, and this includes treating someone unfavourably because they are breastfeeding.

Protected characteristics - these are the grounds upon which discrimination is unlawful. The nine characteristics are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

Race - A race is a group of people defined by their colour, nationality (including citizenship) ethnicity or national origins. A racial group can be made up of more than one distinct racial group, such as Black British.

Religion or belief - Religion refers to any religion, including a lack of religion. Belief refers to any religious or philosophical belief and includes a lack of belief. Generally, a belief should affect your life choices or the way you live for it to be included in the definition.

Sex - A man or a woman. The term refers to a person's biological and physical characteristics, associated with the categories of male and female.

Sexual orientation – whether a person's sexual attraction is towards their own sex, the opposite sex or to both sexes.

Trade unions - these are organisations formed to represent workers' rights and interests to their employers, for example in order to improve working conditions, wages or benefits. They also advocate more widely on behalf of their members' interests and make recommendations to government, industry bodies and other policy makers.

Transgender – A person has the protected characteristic of gender reassignment if the person is proposing to undergo, is undergoing or has undergone a process (or part of a process) for the purpose of reassigning the person's sex by changing physiological or other attributes of sex. Protection extends to those treated less favourably because they are perceived to be transsexual.

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Trans - People may use the term 'trans' to describe themselves if their own sense of gender (their gender identity) does not match or sit easily with the gender they were assumed to have based on the sex they were assigned at birth. The law does not require a person to undergo any medical, pharmacological, legal process to be recognised as a transgender person. Whilst not everyone who has this experience uses the term 'trans' to describe themselves, it is probably the broadest and most widely used single-word term currently in use. As such, the term 'trans' as a very broad single-word umbrella term to include trans men, trans women, non-binary people, agender people, and anyone else with an experience of gender different from the gender assigned at birth.

Transition - The changes a trans person makes to affirm their gender identity and to live their life in a way that better aligns with that identity.

These changes can be:

- Social (e.g. changing their name and/or pronoun; changing aspects of their presentation such as clothes, hair, mannerisms etc; changing the gender marker on their documents like passports; changing which toilets they use)
- Emotional (e.g. adapting to the world responding to them differently because of the shift in how their gender is perceived; learning how to navigate new or unfamiliar situations and spaces)
- Medical (e.g. using hormones and/or surgery)
- Legal (e.g. changing legal sex)

Some trans people make a social transition and don't seek medical support. Of those who do use medical support, not everybody takes up every option, and people may use medical support in different ways. Not all trans people transition.

Transsexual - a transsexual person is a reference to a person who has the protected characteristic of gender reassignment.

Victimisation – subjecting a person to a detriment because they have done a protected act or there is a belief that they have done a protected act ie bringing proceedings under the Equality Act; giving evidence or information in connection with proceedings under the Act; doing any other thing for the purposes or in connection with the Act; making an allegation that a person has contravened the Act.