**Equality and Diversity Policy for St Albans Parish Council**

**1. Introduction**

St Albans Parish Council is committed to fostering a community where equality, diversity, and inclusion are promoted, and where all individuals are treated with respect, dignity, and fairness. We recognize that diversity enhances the strength of our parish and strive to create a welcoming, accessible, and supportive environment for all, irrespective of background, ethnicity, gender, age, disability, religion, sexual orientation, or any other characteristic.

This policy outlines the Parish Council’s commitment to promoting equality and diversity in all its activities, including council operations, meetings, employment, and services. It applies to all councillors, staff, volunteers, and members of the community.

**2. Legal Responsibilities**

St Albans Parish Council recognises its legal obligations under the Equality Act 2010, which prohibits discrimination, harassment, and victimization on the grounds of:

* Age
* Disability
* Gender reassignment
* Marriage and civil partnership
* Pregnancy and maternity
* Race (including colour, nationality, and ethnic or national origins)
* Religion or belief
* Sex
* Sexual orientation

The Parish Council will ensure compliance with these laws and will take proactive steps to promote equality of opportunity, prevent discrimination, and address any inequalities.

**3. Reasonable Adjustments for Disabilities**

The Parish Council is committed to making reasonable adjustments to ensure that people with disabilities can fully participate in council activities, including meetings, events, and access to services. These adjustments will be made where necessary for councillors, staff, and parishioners.

* **Councillors:** If a councillor has a disability that affects their ability to participate in meetings, decision-making, or other council duties, the Council will work with them to identify reasonable adjustments, such as alternative formats for materials, special equipment, or assistance with attendance.
* **Staff:** The Parish Council will ensure that staff members with disabilities are provided with reasonable adjustments that may include flexible working hours, accessible workspaces, adapted equipment, or additional support to enable them to carry out their duties effectively.
* **Parishioners:** The Parish Council will take steps to make meetings, events, and facilities accessible to parishioners with disabilities. This includes providing information in accessible formats (e.g., large print, audio), offering assistance to help individuals attend meetings, and ensuring venues are physically accessible (e.g., ramps, accessible parking, seating arrangements).

**4. Equality in Meetings**

St Albans Parish Council is committed to holding inclusive and accessible meetings for all individuals, regardless of their background, needs, or abilities. All public meetings of the Parish Council will be held in locations that are accessible to those with physical disabilities. The following principles will be adhered to:

* **Access and Facilities:** Meeting venues will be assessed to ensure they are accessible for individuals with physical or sensory impairments, including wheelchair access and appropriate seating.
* **Communication Support:** The Parish Council will provide reasonable adjustments to ensure effective communication during meetings, such as documents in alternative formats, upon request.
* **Participation and Representation:** The Parish Council is committed to encouraging active participation from all members of the community. We will actively seek to remove any barriers that may prevent parishioners from attending meetings or engaging with the Council. This includes ensuring the meeting times are convenient for the community and providing additional support if required for those with disabilities.
* **Diverse Representation:** The Council will take steps to ensure diverse representation in decision-making processes, striving to reflect the variety of backgrounds, needs, and experiences of the parish population in our leadership and committees.

**5. Promoting Equality and Diversity in Employment**

The Parish Council is dedicated to promoting equality of opportunity in all aspects of employment, from recruitment and training to promotion and development. We will:

* Ensure that our recruitment process is free from discrimination and based on merit and skills.
* Provide equal opportunities for training, development, and career progression for all staff, regardless of their background or identity.
* Create a safe and supportive working environment free from harassment, bullying, and discrimination.
* Ensure that policies and procedures, including recruitment and performance management, are inclusive and fair.

**6. Responsibilities of Councillors, Staff, and Volunteers**

Councillors, staff, and volunteers of St Albans Parish Council have a shared responsibility to:

* Uphold the principles of equality, diversity, and inclusion in all their activities.
* Treat all individuals with respect and dignity.
* Be aware of and comply with this policy and any associated procedures or guidelines.
* Take appropriate action if they witness or are made aware of discriminatory behaviour or practices.
* Actively contribute to creating an inclusive and welcoming environment within the Council and the wider community.

**7. Monitoring and Review**

The Parish Council will regularly monitor and review its equality and diversity practices to ensure they are effective and in line with legal requirements. This policy will be reviewed annually and updated as necessary. Feedback from councillors, staff, volunteers, and parishioners will be encouraged to improve our approach and ensure we are meeting the needs of the community.

**8. Complaints and Grievances**

Anyone who feels they have been discriminated against or harassed in breach of this policy has the right to raise a complaint. The Parish Council will handle such complaints with confidentiality, fairness, and in line with the established grievance procedures.

**9. Conclusion**

St Albans Parish Council is fully committed to building an inclusive, fair, and respectful community. This policy underlines our dedication to promoting equality and diversity, ensuring that everyone – regardless of their background or ability – can access opportunities, participate, and contribute to the development of the Parish.

This policy reflects the commitment of St Albans Parish Council to its legal duties and values of fairness, respect, and inclusion for all members of the community, whether they are councillors, staff, or parishioners.