

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

Policy on Faith, Religion, Belief and Non-belief (Spirituality)

1. Policy Statement

This policy details the Council's stance in relation to employment matters concerning faith, religion, belief and non-belief. It is emphasised that the Council, as an organisation, does not have any particular spiritual or religious affiliation, nor does it endorse any particular denomination or religious faith. It does, however, recognise the commitment individual employees may have to spiritual or religious practice and will therefore actively support their right to do so in an atmosphere of tolerance and respect. It also further recognises that there are a variety of obligations placed upon those following particular religious or faith traditions which may impact on their working lives.

Where practicable, the Council will seek to accommodate employees who are required to follow essential religious observances in accordance with the contents of the Equality Act 2010 Code of Practice. However, the Council can only support employees in their spiritual or religious practice to a degree where measures do not compromise operational requirements of the organisation and where it is reasonably practicable to put in place arrangements, taking account the impact on service delivery, cost and the needs of other employees.

2. Scope

This policy and procedure applies to all employees and workers of the Council.

3. Issues to be considered

Items of Clothing or Accessories

The Council does not operate a dress code. The wearing of items of clothing or accessories in accordance with particular spiritual, religious or faith traditions and associated cultural practices will be recognised as acceptable. However, in order to comply with health and safety requirements, specific items of clothing or accessories may be prohibited. Line managers will inform employees at the outset if this is the case. Also, if in the unusual circumstance, the items of clothing or accessories are in conflict with another employee's religious beliefs, the issue would be referred to the line manager with the aim of finding a solution.

Requests for Leave for Religious Occasions

The Council will seek to accommodate requests for annual leave for a religious occasion or to visit family overseas provided the employee has sufficient holiday due to them and it is reasonable for them to be absent from work during the period requested.

It is recognised that many religions or beliefs have special periods of religious observance, festivals or holidays. We are aware that some of these occasions are aligned with lunar phases. As a result, dates can change from year to year and may not become clear until closer to the actual date. However, where practicable, employees should provide as much notice as possible to their line manager if the request is for a significant period of annual leave.

Quiet Space for Prayer

The Council is aware that some religions or beliefs require individuals to pray at specific times during working time and that employees may request access to an appropriate quiet place (or prayer room) to undertake their religious observance.

Although employers are not legally required to provide a quiet room, the Council will endeavor, where practicable, to provide a quiet space in its various workplaces for use for prayer and contemplation where this is requested by an employee. In deciding whether this is practicable, consideration will be given as to whether a suitable room is available and to the needs of other employees who may have a need for a rest room. The Council will consult with relevant employee representatives (including trade unions) within the workplace before any decision was made on designating a room or space for prayer and contemplation and to discuss any rules in respect of its use. Consideration would also be given to providing separate storage facilities for ceremonial objects.

Dietary Requirements and Fasting

It is recognised that some religions or beliefs have specific dietary requirements. If an employee with such needs brings food into the workplace, they may need to store and heat it separately from other food. The Council will consult relevant employee representatives (including trade unions) on such issues where they arise to attempt to find a mutually acceptable way of accommodating such requirements.

We are aware that some religions require extended periods of fasting. The Council will give consideration to supporting employees through a fasting period. However, consideration will also require to be given to other employees to ensure that extra work burdens are not placed on them.

Washing Facilities

It is recognised that certain religions require people to wash before prayer, which can be done using normal washing facilities. Where an employee requests this, the Council will endeavor to ensure that other relevant employees understand the religion or belief-related observances of their colleagues, to avoid any misunderstandings.

Breaks

It is recognised that certain religions have differing prayer needs and as a result requests may be made by certain employees for additional or different breaks.

Requests for additional breaks for prayer will be given consideration, however, operational requirements would take precedence and any additional time given over and above normal break times would be either unpaid or the time would require to be made up at a later point. Consideration would also be given to the varying of the times that breaks are taken to accommodate prayer but again this would be subject to operational needs. The impact the above might have on other employees would also require to be taken into consideration before any alternative arrangement was granted and put in place.

4. Chaplaincy Service

The Council has available a chaplaincy service for employees to use which is available to those of any faith or religion. The Chaplain can provide support to any employee with a problem or issue that they may wish to discuss in confidence. The Chaplain's contact details can be on the Zone.

5. Harassment on Grounds of Faith, Religion or Belief

Harassment or bullying on grounds of faith, religion, belief and non-belief will not be tolerated and any complaints of alleged harassment will be investigated under the Managing Bullying & Harassment policy, except where the issue relates to a conflict between employees/workers in relation to their faith, religion and/or beliefs. Where this has been considered by a manager and following legal/HR advice a decision has been made to support an individual or group, the other individual or group will need to use the grievance procedure should they wish to challenge the decision.

All employees have the right to practice a religion or belief. However, beliefs promoted in a way that impinges on the rights and freedoms of other employees or workers will not be permitted. Also, the wearing of slogans or symbols which express negative or hostile messages or which may constitute harassment again will not be permitted.

6. Review of the policy

Human Resources and Customer Services will review this policy every 3 years. It will, nevertheless, be subject to continual review and amendment in light of experience of its operation, employment best practice and statutory requirements. Changes will only be made following normal consultation arrangements.