

WILTSHIRE FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE

Policy Guidance On Religion Or Belief

Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service is committed to eliminating discrimination against people on account of their religion or belief. In pursuing this objective, we acknowledge our statutory obligations under the Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003, the Human Rights Act 1998 The Equality Act 2006 - which makes discrimination against religious or belief groups in goods and services illegal -and our guidelines in respect of observing religious duties outlined below.

WFRS will ensure that in meeting its duties and other arrangements that people are protected from unlawful discrimination and harassment on grounds of religion or belief.

We aim to achieve these objectives by:

- Ensuring that faith and belief communities are involved in the planning and delivery of our services through consultation
- Considering the use of the faith and belief media in advertising and promoting services and job opportunities.
- Ensuring that recruitment and selection is carried out in accordance with our policies, procedures, standards and best practice
- Handling sensitively allegations of religious discrimination and harassment and providing appropriate support to the alleged victim(s) in accordance with our corporate procedures, standards and best practice
- Managing employees fairly and appropriately, ensuring there is no discrimination on religious grounds in terms of attitude, work allocations, consultation and communication, development opportunities, appraisals, granting of leave and grievance and disciplinary matters
- Acknowledging and openly recognising cultural and religious festivals and holidays across the service

-Dealing sensitively with issues where religious requirements, (e.g re prayer, washing or wearing beards) may conflict with standard fire service procedures

- Ensuring that all contractors, consultants, suppliers and partners are made aware of this policy and our expectation that their policies will include as a minimum:

- * A commitment to equality of opportunity
- * The name or position of the person responsible for the effective implementation of the policy.

2 Guidelines Regarding The Observation Of Religious Duties

2.1 Introduction

Wiltshire is a multi-cultural and multi-faith and belief county. As a large employer we can reasonably expect to have amongst our employees, currently or in the future, members from most of the religions represented in the UK. This also includes non-believers.

When dealing with religious issues we must not assume that any one religion will be represented by a specific ethnic group. For example, there are large numbers of European Muslims as well as Asian Christians. Nor should it be assumed that all faith and belief members would wish to be equally observant of their religious duties; all religions have their nominal followers as well as strict believers. UK law protects the rights of citizens to practice religion in the workplace and it should be noted that there is case law where religious discrimination has proved to be indirect racial discrimination also.

2.2 Arrangements for Praying During Working Hours

Best practice would encourage a personal agreement between a manager and the employee concerned. Managers should recognise the personal commitment of individuals to observe their religious duties and be flexible as to how a suitable time and place could be found to accommodate a request, subject to operational requirements.

Employees should be able to indicate the amount of time required to fulfil their religious duties and be up front about making up any work time given to prayer. Exercising flexibility is advised here as time taken for prayers (usually about five minutes) must be balanced against employees taking cigarette breaks etc.

Facilities for prayer need to be negotiated and agreed between the respective parties. Managers are advised where possible to identify in advance a central prayer area within their respective station/area.

Religions such as Islam require followers to undertake ritual washing prior to prayer. Arrangements should be made between the individuals and their respective managers for this facility to be available where possible. If general facilities are used, co-operation and understanding from work colleagues would be assumed.

Time required away from working place for religious observances.

Some employees may request short periods away from the workplace for special prayers or observances e.g. Jumma (Friday prayer) for Muslims, days of obligation for Christians or beginning of shabbat during winter for Jews.

Such requests are likely to involve no more than an hour of working time. Employees would need to adjust their working arrangements accordingly by negotiation with their line manager.

2.3 Leave for Religious Festivals

Employees whose religious beliefs require observance of festivals which fall on normal working days should negotiate with their line managers for time off. Options available include exchange of annual leave, flexible working leave, paid or unpaid leave. Applying for religious leave should be done through normal holiday leave or leave of absence procedures.

In considering applications for religious leave, it is important to bear in mind that:

- Leave arrangements will not always fall at the same time of the year as some festivals are set following the lunar calendar and the solar calendar.
- Not all employees of the same ethnic origin follow the same religion. Therefore, assumptions should not be made as to when members of any ethnic group may be seeking leave for religious purposes.
- For some Muslim holy days, the exact timing can only be fixed a few days before the actual event on the confirmed sightings of the moon. This may mean that different communities observe the same festival on different days depending on their source for confirmation of sighting of the moon.
- All Jewish holy days commence at sunset on the day before the festival, therefore employees may wish to get home before sunset.

2.4 Religious Dress Code

Many religions require modesty of dress and/or the covering of the head for both male and female followers. Some religions also have precise rules as to what is considered suitable styles of clothing for each sex.

Those who follow a specific dress code do so as a natural part of their daily life.

Conditions of employment which require specific forms of dress should be examined carefully to see that they do not give rise to indirect discrimination.

When employees dress, including personal appearance like wearing of beards, dreadlocks etc in accordance with their religion or culture other employees are expected to show sensitivity and understanding towards this.

2.5 Leave for Cultural Observation

Some employees may request annual leave or unpaid leave to accommodate certain cultural events such as independence or republican days of their country of origin. If these events fall on days which count as normal working days, employees should negotiate with their line managers for leave. Options available include exchange for annual leave , flexi-leave, paid or unpaid leave.

3 Legislation

The Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003 prohibit discrimination on grounds of religion or belief in respect of employment and vocational training. These were extended to include service delivery in 2006