



Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Policy

Inclusive services, fair employment and respect for every person

Legal entity	Heartbeat Healthcare Ltd
Company number	16072594
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Version	1.0
Effective date	20 June 2026
Review date	20 June 2027, or sooner if law, guidance or services change

Current regulatory status

Heartbeat Healthcare Ltd is not currently registered with the Care Quality Commission. The company currently provides healthcare staffing and unregulated home support only. It must not provide regulated personal care or any other regulated activity unless and until the required registration is granted. This policy supports current lawful practice and future regulatory readiness, but it does not represent or imply CQC registration.

Approved and signed by

Shadreck Chawira, Director

Approval details

Approval date: 20 June 2026

Effective date: 20 June 2026

Next review: 20 June 2027

Version: 1.0

Document control and approval

This is a controlled policy of Heartbeat Healthcare Ltd. The current approved electronic version takes precedence over any printed copy. Managers must withdraw obsolete copies when a revised version is issued.

Control item	Details
Policy title	Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Policy
Reference	HBH-POL-EDHR-001
Owner	Shadreck Chawira, Director
Operational lead	Director or delegated Care Services and Compliance Lead
Applies to	Directors, employees, workers, agency workers, candidates, volunteers, contractors, consultants, service users, families, representatives, visitors, suppliers, client organisations and other stakeholders
Current activities	Healthcare staffing and recruitment, workforce compliance support, and unregulated domiciliary and home support services
Regulatory boundary	No regulated personal care or other CQC-regulated activity may be provided before registration and authorisation
Distribution	Company induction, policy library, management briefings, worker communications, service information and website publication where appropriate
Review frequency	At least annually and sooner following a relevant legal, regulatory, organisational or service change, a significant incident, audit finding or learning review
Record retention	Previous versions and approval records retained in accordance with the Records Management and Data Protection Policy

Equality impact statement

This policy has been designed to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, promote fair access and foster respectful relationships. Its intended impact is positive for people with all protected characteristics and for people who may face disadvantage for reasons not expressly protected by the Equality Act 2010. Potential risks, including excessive collection of equality data, stereotyping, unlawful positive discrimination and inconsistent application of sex-based exceptions, are addressed through data minimisation, individual assessment, management oversight, proportionality and documented decision-making.

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Contents

1	Purpose and policy commitment
2	Scope, regulatory boundary and application
3	Definitions and core principles
4	Legal and good practice framework
5	Governance, accountability and responsibilities
6	Equality in access to services
7	Person-centred and culturally responsive support
8	Human rights-based practice
9	Reasonable adjustments and accessible communication
10	Equality throughout employment and placement
11	Preventing discrimination, bullying and harassment
12	Responding to concerns, incidents and complaints
13	Safeguarding, hate incidents and third-party abuse
14	Information governance and equality monitoring
15	Training, supervision and workforce development
16	Quality assurance, equality objectives and improvement
17	Breaches, disciplinary action and external reporting
18	Review, communication and document management
Appendix A	Protected characteristics and inclusive practice guide
Appendix B	Human rights decision-making checklist
Appendix C	Equality impact assessment template
Appendix D	Reasonable adjustment record
Appendix E	Equality incident and concern record
Appendix F	Sexual harassment preventative duty risk controls
Appendix G	Key references and sources of guidance

How to use this policy

The main policy sets mandatory standards. The appendices provide practical decision-making tools and records. Any person may ask for this policy in an alternative format, including large print, easy read, audio or a supported explanation.

Our commitment at a glance

Heartbeat Healthcare Ltd believes that equality, diversity, inclusion and human rights are essential to safe, compassionate and effective support. We value people as individuals, recognise that equal treatment does not always mean identical treatment, and act to remove barriers that lead to unequal access, experiences or outcomes.

FAIRNESS	RESPECT	INCLUSION	RIGHTS
Decisions are based on relevant evidence, clear criteria and individual need. We do not permit favouritism, prejudice or unlawful discrimination.	Every person is treated with dignity. Identity, privacy, culture, beliefs, relationships, communication and personal choices are respected.	We identify and remove barriers, make reasonable adjustments, promote participation and ensure that people can be heard.	We use lawful, proportionate and least restrictive approaches. Safety measures never become an excuse for unnecessary control or exclusion.

If something is wrong

Step	Action
1. Make safe	Take immediate action where anyone is at risk. Contact emergency services where necessary.
2. Listen and support	Take the concern seriously, protect confidentiality as far as possible and ask what support the person needs.
3. Report promptly	Tell the line manager or Director. Use the safeguarding, grievance, complaint or whistleblowing route that best fits the concern.
4. Record accurately	Record facts, words used, people involved, actions taken, adjustments required and any evidence preserved.
5. Investigate and learn	Use an impartial process, prevent victimisation, communicate outcomes appropriately and implement learning.

1. Purpose and policy commitment

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to set the standards by which Heartbeat Healthcare Ltd promotes equality, values diversity, advances inclusion and protects human rights across its services, employment practices, healthcare staffing activities and relationships with stakeholders. It establishes a clear framework for preventing discrimination, making reasonable adjustments, responding to unacceptable behaviour and using evidence to improve access, experiences and outcomes.

The policy is intended to be practical. It explains what people can expect from Heartbeat, what Heartbeat expects from its workforce and partners, who is accountable, how concerns will be managed and what records must be maintained. It must be read with the Safeguarding, Complaints, Grievance, Disciplinary, Whistleblowing, Recruitment, Data Protection, Accessible Communication, Lone Working and Scope of Service policies.

1.2 Our policy statement

Heartbeat Healthcare Ltd is committed to providing services and employment practices that are free from unlawful discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment, victimisation, bullying, prejudice and avoidable barriers. We will treat each person as an individual and will not make assumptions based on appearance, name, accent, age, disability, diagnosis, culture, faith, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, family status, nationality, immigration route, socio-economic background or any other personal characteristic.

We recognise that equality is not achieved merely by treating everybody in exactly the same way. Different people may require different information, support, working arrangements or adjustments in order to participate on an equitable basis. We will take a proportionate, person-centred approach that balances autonomy, safety, privacy, dignity, rights and the rights of others.

Heartbeat will not tolerate discriminatory requests from service users, families, employees, candidates, client organisations or other third parties. Legitimate preferences linked to privacy, dignity, trauma, religion, communication or assessed need will be considered carefully, but prejudice will not be treated as preference.

1.3 Intended outcomes

- People can access information, services, work and development opportunities without avoidable barriers.
- Support is personalised and reflects each person's identity, communication, culture, relationships, beliefs, strengths and choices.
- Workers and candidates are recruited, paid, deployed, developed and managed fairly using relevant and transparent criteria.
- Reasonable adjustments are identified early, agreed with the person, implemented promptly and reviewed.
- Harassment and sexual harassment are anticipated and prevented through risk assessment, training, supervision and decisive management action.
- Concerns are safe to raise, investigated impartially and used to improve systems without victimisation.
- Equality information is used lawfully and proportionately to identify patterns, not to stereotype or make unfair decisions.
- The company is ready to evidence a mature, inclusive culture as it develops and prepares for future CQC registration.

No hierarchy of rights

Heartbeat does not rank protected characteristics or assume that one group's dignity matters more than another's. Where rights appear to conflict, decisions must be lawful, evidence-based, respectful and proportionate. The aim is to protect the rights of everyone affected as far as reasonably possible.

2. Scope, regulatory boundary and application

2.1 Who and what this policy covers

This policy applies to all Heartbeat activities and to conduct connected with work or service delivery, whether it occurs at the registered office, in a person's home, at a client organisation, during travel, at training, at a work-related social event, through telephone or video calls, on messaging platforms, by email, on social media or through any digital system used for work.

Group	Application
People receiving support	Access, assessment, matching, communication, home support, community participation, reviews, complaints, safeguarding, endings and transitions.
Employees and workers	Recruitment, selection, checks, induction, pay, hours, shifts, allocation, training, supervision, appraisal, promotion, conduct, discipline, grievance, family leave, sickness, adjustments and termination.
Candidates and applicants	Advertising, application processes, interviews, assessments, references, right-to-work checks, occupational health questions and feedback.
Client organisations and placements	Contracting, worker safety, workplace adjustments, reporting routes, discriminatory requests, harassment by third parties and shared investigations.
Families and representatives	Communication, involvement, consent, confidentiality, respectful conduct, complaints and safeguarding.
Suppliers, contractors and visitors	Procurement, contract standards, access, behaviour, reporting and corrective action.

2.2 Current service scope

Heartbeat currently operates healthcare staffing and recruitment activities and provides unregulated home support. Unregulated support may include companionship, social support, welfare checks, shopping, meal preparation that does not amount to regulated personal care, light household assistance, appointment accompaniment, community access and other agreed support that falls outside the regulated activity of personal care.

The exact support offered must be defined in the person's agreement and support plan. Staff must not add tasks informally where those tasks may cross the regulatory boundary. Any uncertainty must be referred to the Director before the task is accepted or carried out.

2.3 CQC registration boundary

Heartbeat Healthcare Ltd is not currently registered with the Care Quality Commission. It is an offence to carry on a regulated activity without registration unless a specific exception or exemption applies. The nature of the activity, not the marketing label used for the service, determines whether registration is required.

- **Heartbeat must not provide:** physical assistance with eating or drinking, toileting, washing, bathing, dressing, oral care, or the care of skin, hair or nails where this amounts to regulated personal care.
- **Heartbeat must not provide:** prompting together with direct supervision of those personal care activities where a person cannot make the relevant decision without that prompting and supervision.
- **Heartbeat must not provide:** any other regulated activity, including nursing care, treatment, diagnostic procedures or clinical activity, unless registration and all required authorisations are in place.
- **Managers must:** use the Scope of Service and Regulated Activity Boundary Procedure, document decisions, train staff and audit records to ensure the boundary is maintained.
- **Future registration:** before regulated personal care begins, Heartbeat must obtain CQC registration, update its Statement of Purpose and policies, appoint required registered roles, confirm insurance and competency arrangements, and communicate the change accurately.

Marketing and communication rule

No employee, advert, proposal, website statement or service agreement may state or imply that Heartbeat is CQC registered or offers regulated personal care before registration is granted. Descriptions such as care, home care or domiciliary care must be qualified where necessary so that the current unregulated scope is clear.

2.4 Territorial scope

This policy is written for Heartbeat's activities in England. Equality law applies across Great Britain with some differences in devolved health and care regulation. Before services are delivered in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, the Director must obtain advice on the applicable regulator and legal framework and update operational documents accordingly.

3. Definitions and core principles

3.1 Definitions

Term	Meaning in this policy
Equality	Ensuring fair access, treatment and opportunity. Equality may require different action for different people so that barriers and disadvantage are addressed.
Equity	A focus on fairness in practical outcomes, including the additional support or resources required to remove a specific barrier.
Diversity	The range of differences between people, including identity, background, experience, perspective, communication, strengths and circumstances.
Inclusion	Creating conditions in which people are welcomed, can participate, are listened to, can influence decisions and do not have to hide important aspects of who they are.
Human rights	Fundamental rights and freedoms that protect life, dignity, liberty, privacy, belief, expression, family life, property, participation and freedom from inhuman or discriminatory treatment.
Protected characteristics	Age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
Reasonable adjustment	A change to remove or reduce a substantial disadvantage experienced by a disabled person. It may involve changing a provision, criterion or practice, providing an auxiliary aid or service, or addressing a physical feature.
Service user	A person who receives or is being considered for Heartbeat support. The term includes people who use unregulated home support.
Worker	Employees, agency workers, bank workers, contractors, consultants, apprentices, volunteers and others working under Heartbeat's direction or on its behalf.
Third party	A person or organisation other than Heartbeat and the worker, including a service user, relative, client, supplier, visitor or member of the public.

3.2 Forms of unacceptable and unlawful treatment

Form	Explanation
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Form	Explanation
Direct discrimination	Treating a person less favourably because of a protected characteristic. This includes discrimination because of a characteristic a person is perceived to have or because of association with someone who has it.
Indirect discrimination	Applying a provision, criterion or practice to everyone that places people sharing a protected characteristic at a particular disadvantage and cannot be objectively justified.
Discrimination arising from disability	Treating a disabled person unfavourably because of something arising in consequence of disability, without lawful objective justification.
Failure to make reasonable adjustments	Not taking reasonable steps to remove a substantial disadvantage for a disabled person.
Harassment	Unwanted conduct related to a protected characteristic that has the purpose or effect of violating dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.
Sexual harassment	Unwanted conduct of a sexual nature that has the purpose or effect of violating dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.
Victimisation	Subjecting a person to a detriment because they did, or were believed to have done, a protected act such as raising a discrimination complaint or supporting another person's complaint.
Bullying	Offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, or misuse of power, that undermines, humiliates or harms a person. Bullying is prohibited whether or not it relates to a protected characteristic.
Microaggressions and stereotyping	Everyday comments, assumptions or behaviours that communicate bias or exclusion. They may be intentional or unintentional, but impact and pattern matter and will be addressed.
Hate incident or crime	Conduct perceived to be motivated by hostility or prejudice based on race, religion, disability, sexual orientation or transgender identity. Criminal conduct will be reported or supported to be reported where appropriate.

3.3 Human rights principles

Heartbeat uses the following principles when decisions affect a person's rights.

- **Participation:** people are involved in decisions that affect them and supported to express their views.
- **Accountability:** responsibilities, reasons, records and routes to challenge decisions are clear.
- **Non-discrimination and equality:** barriers, disadvantage and unequal outcomes are actively identified and addressed.
- **Empowerment:** people receive information and support to understand choices, exercise rights and raise concerns.
- **Legality:** actions are grounded in law, policy and proper authority.
- **Proportionality:** any restriction must pursue a legitimate aim, be necessary, use the least restrictive option and be reviewed.

3.4 Positive action

Heartbeat may use lawful positive action to address disadvantage, under-representation or different needs connected with a protected characteristic. Examples may include targeted outreach, mentoring, development support, accessible recruitment or proportionate encouragement to apply. Positive action does not permit automatic preference, quotas or the appointment of a less suitable person simply because of a protected characteristic, except where a narrow statutory provision clearly applies and management has documented the legal basis.

4. Legal and good practice framework

Heartbeat will comply with applicable law and will monitor changes. The following framework is particularly relevant. This list is not exhaustive and the current law always takes precedence over this policy.

Requirement	Relevance to Heartbeat
Equality Act 2010	Prohibits discrimination, harassment and victimisation in employment and services, protects nine characteristics, permits lawful positive action and requires reasonable adjustments for disabled people.
Human Rights Act 1998	Requires public authorities and organisations performing public functions to act compatibly with Convention rights. Heartbeat uses a human rights-based approach across all work, including when acting under public contracts.
Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023	Creates a proactive duty on employers to take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment of workers, including foreseeable third-party harassment.
Care Act 2014	Provides important adult social care principles on wellbeing, prevention, involvement, safeguarding and individual outcomes. It is directly relevant to public bodies and informs Heartbeat's partnership practice.
Mental Capacity Act 2005 and Code of Practice	Requires the presumption of capacity, support for decision-making, respect for unwise decisions, best interests where applicable and least restrictive action.
UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018, as amended	Govern fair and lawful processing of personal and special category information, including equality, health and employment data.
Data (Use and Access) Act 2025	Amends aspects of the UK data protection and information standards framework. Heartbeat will apply provisions as they come into force.
Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974	Requires safe systems of work. Equality and adjustment needs must be considered within risk management and not treated as an afterthought.
Protection from Harassment Act 1997	Provides civil and criminal protections from a course of conduct amounting to harassment.
Employment Rights Act 1996 and related regulations	Provides employment protections relevant to fair treatment, family rights, flexible working, dismissal, part-time and fixed-term work.
Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 and Exceptions Order	Requires fair use of criminal record information while enabling appropriate checks for eligible health and care roles.
Gender Recognition Act 2004	Provides legal protections concerning acquired gender and privacy of protected information, subject to current Equality Act interpretation and lawful exceptions.
Accessible Information Standard DAPB1605	Sets requirements for identifying, recording, flagging, sharing, meeting and reviewing disability-related information and communication needs in NHS and publicly funded adult social care. Heartbeat adopts these steps as good practice across its services.
CQC scope and quality guidance	Heartbeat will maintain the boundary between unregulated support and regulated personal care. Future regulated services will align with requirements on equity in access, equity in experiences and outcomes, treating people as individuals, dignity and workforce equality, diversity and inclusion.

4.1 Current interpretation of sex and gender reassignment

Heartbeat will apply the Equality Act 2010 in accordance with current legislation and binding case law. For Equality Act purposes, the terms sex, woman and man are interpreted in line with the Supreme Court judgment in *For Women Scotland Ltd v The Scottish Ministers* [2025] UKSC 16. Gender reassignment remains a separate protected characteristic and trans people remain protected from discrimination, harassment and victimisation.

Any proposal for a sex-based occupational requirement, separate arrangement or exclusion must be considered case by case. It must have a clear legal basis, pursue a legitimate aim, be proportionate, be supported by evidence and be authorised by the Director. Staff must not make informal exclusions or use the law as a reason to disrespect, misgender, disclose private information or deny a person ordinary access to services and employment.

Legal review point	At the approval date, an updated Equality and Human Rights Commission Code of Practice for services, public functions and associations had been laid before Parliament but was not yet confirmed as in force. The Director will monitor commencement and review this policy, related procedures and staff guidance promptly if changes are required.
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5. Governance, accountability and responsibilities

Role	Mandatory responsibilities
Board and Directors	Set the culture, approve the policy, allocate resources, model inclusive leadership, receive assurance, address systemic risk and ensure that growth or future CQC registration does not outpace governance.
Shadreck Chawira, Director and Policy Owner	Maintain legal oversight, approve exceptions and high-risk decisions, ensure sexual harassment risk assessment, review equality data, oversee serious investigations and authorise policy revisions.
Managers and team leaders	Implement the policy, identify barriers, respond to adjustment requests, challenge discriminatory behaviour, protect people who raise concerns, keep accurate records, supervise staff and escalate risks.
Recruitment and compliance staff	Use objective criteria, make recruitment accessible, conduct checks consistently, protect sensitive information, challenge discriminatory client requests and ensure fair placement practices.
Care and support workers	Treat people with dignity, follow individual plans, use preferred communication, make agreed adjustments, avoid assumptions, report concerns promptly and maintain confidentiality.
All workers and candidates	Behave respectfully, complete training, cooperate with investigations, disclose relevant adjustment needs where they choose, and never retaliate against a person who raises a concern.
Client organisations	Provide a safe and non-discriminatory placement, implement agreed adjustments, cooperate with incident management, protect Heartbeat workers from third-party harassment and meet contractual equality standards.
Service users, families and visitors	Treat Heartbeat workers and other people with respect. Preferences and concerns will be listened to, but discriminatory abuse, harassment or demands will be challenged and managed.

5.1 Decision escalation

The following decisions require referral to the Director or a formally delegated senior manager before implementation.

- Refusal, withdrawal or restriction of a service where a protected characteristic may be relevant.
- A request from a client or service user to exclude workers because of race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, religion, disability, sexual orientation, gender reassignment or another protected characteristic.
- A proposed occupational requirement linked to a protected characteristic.

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- A disputed or high-cost reasonable adjustment, or a decision that an adjustment is not reasonable.
 - A serious allegation of discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment, victimisation, hate crime or systemic bias.
 - Any use of sex-based or separate arrangements or an issue involving protected Gender Recognition Act information.
 - A decision to terminate a service because of discriminatory or abusive behaviour by a service user or third party.
 - Any equality issue likely to attract regulator, commissioner, legal or public interest.

5.2 Non-delegable expectations

Even where operational tasks are delegated, the Directors remain accountable for ensuring that the company has an effective policy, competent leaders, adequate resources, auditable systems and a culture in which poor behaviour is challenged. Equality cannot be delegated solely to human resources or compliance staff. It is a responsibility shared by every person who makes decisions or represents Heartbeat.

6. Equality in access to services

6.1 Fair access and eligibility

Heartbeat will publish clear information about the services it currently provides, the areas served, eligibility criteria, charges, operating hours and regulatory boundaries. Decisions to accept, decline, pause or end a service must be based on lawful, relevant and documented criteria such as assessed need, service scope, safety, workforce competence, capacity and available resources. A protected characteristic must never be used as a proxy for risk or suitability.

Where Heartbeat cannot meet a need, it will explain the reason in accessible language and, where appropriate, signpost the person to a more suitable service. Signposting must not amount to abandonment and must not conceal discrimination or a failure to make a reasonable adjustment.

6.2 Referral, enquiry and assessment

- **Accessible first contact:** people can contact Heartbeat by telephone, email or another reasonable method, and can request communication support or an alternative format.
- **Individual assessment:** the assessor asks about goals, strengths, routines, communication, culture, faith, relationships, disability, sensory needs, gender-related privacy, safety, community links and adjustments without making assumptions.
- **Consent and privacy:** only relevant information is collected, the person is told why it is needed, and sensitive identity information is not shared unnecessarily.
- **Involvement:** the person leads the assessment wherever possible. Family members, advocates or representatives are involved with consent or other lawful authority.
- **Regulatory boundary:** the assessor checks that requested tasks are within unregulated scope. Potential personal care or clinical tasks are escalated and not commenced.
- **Review:** needs and adjustments are reviewed when the service begins, after a significant change and at agreed intervals.

6.3 Matching and continuity

Worker matching will consider competence, availability, communication, personality, continuity, safeguarding and the person's assessed needs. Heartbeat may consider a preference connected to privacy, dignity, trauma, religion or communication where it is lawful and reasonably achievable. It will not accept requests that amount to racial, nationality-based, religious, disability-related, homophobic or transphobic exclusion.

Where a service user expresses prejudice, staff will listen to any underlying concern and explain the company's standards. A different worker will not be assigned merely to validate discriminatory attitudes. Where there is a genuine safety or therapeutic issue, the manager will complete a risk assessment, document the rationale and identify a proportionate solution that protects both the person and workers.

6.4 Digital inclusion

No person will be disadvantaged because they cannot use an online portal, smartphone, app or email. Telephone, paper, supported or face-to-face alternatives will be provided where reasonably required. Digital systems will be selected and configured with accessibility, language, font size, contrast, screen-reader compatibility, cognitive accessibility and data protection in mind.

6.5 Affordability and socio-economic disadvantage

Socio-economic status is not a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010, but poverty and digital exclusion can create real barriers. Heartbeat will communicate charges transparently, avoid hidden costs, explain cancellation arrangements, consider practical barriers to access and ensure that people are not treated with less dignity because of income, housing status, benefits, education or social class.

7. Person-centred and culturally responsive support

7.1 Individual identity and preferences

Support plans must describe the person, not reduce them to a diagnosis or category. Records should use the person's chosen name, respectful language and relevant preferences. Staff must ask rather than assume how a person wishes to be addressed, what matters to them, who is important in their life and how culture, faith, sexuality, gender, disability or past experiences affect the way support should be provided.

7.2 Culture, race, colour, nationality and language

- Respect cultural practices, family structures, food preferences, hair and skin care preferences, dress, celebrations, mourning practices and community links where they are relevant to support.
- Do not treat accent, name, nationality or English fluency as evidence of intelligence, competence, risk or immigration status.
- Use professional interpretation or translation where accuracy, consent or safety requires it. Children, relatives or workers should not be relied upon for sensitive interpretation unless appropriate, agreed and safe.
- Challenge racist language, jokes, stereotypes, requests and assumptions from any source.
- Record nationality or ethnicity only where relevant and lawful, and never use it to make blanket decisions.

7.3 Religion, belief and non-belief

Heartbeat will respect religion, philosophical belief and the absence of belief. Staff will support reasonable practices concerning prayer, worship, fasting, diet, dress, sacred objects, festivals, end-of-life customs and contact with faith communities where these fall within the agreed service. No person will be pressured to participate in religious activity or to conceal their belief or non-belief.

Where a practice creates a genuine safety, legal or service-delivery issue, staff will discuss options respectfully and seek the least restrictive solution. A restriction must not be based on discomfort or stereotype.

7.4 Sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment and relationships

- Treat same-sex partners, spouses and families with the same respect and involvement as other relationships, subject to the person's wishes and lawful authority.
- Do not assume sexual orientation, relationship status, gender identity or pronouns. Ask respectfully where the information is relevant.
- Do not disclose that a person is lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans or undergoing gender reassignment without consent or another clear lawful basis.
- Protect privacy when recording information about gender history or a Gender Recognition Certificate. Access must be strictly limited.
- Address homophobic, biphobic, transphobic and sexist conduct promptly, including conduct presented as humour or personal opinion.
- Where privacy or dignity creates a legitimate sex-related preference, record the individual reason and consider a proportionate response without making promises that cannot lawfully or operationally be met.

7.5 Disability, sensory loss and neurodiversity

Heartbeat adopts a social model approach. Disability is not viewed only as an individual impairment. Barriers can arise from inaccessible communication, rigid procedures, environments, attitudes, sensory demands, scheduling, technology and lack of support. Staff must identify and reduce those barriers rather than expecting the disabled person to adapt without help.

- Recognise visible and non-visible disabilities, fluctuating conditions, long-term health conditions, learning disabilities, mental health conditions and neurodivergence.
- Use strengths-based language and avoid infantilising, patronising or speaking over a disabled person.
- Allow processing time, breaks, quiet environments, written follow-up, visual supports, communication aids or a supporter where required.
- Do not treat disability-related behaviour as misconduct without considering context, adjustments and discrimination arising from disability.
- Ensure risk assessments support participation and positive risk-taking rather than default exclusion.

7.6 Age, pregnancy, maternity and family life

Age must not be used as a shortcut for assumptions about capacity, digital ability, physical ability, reliability, ambition or health. Pregnancy and maternity must be supported without unfavourable treatment. Family responsibilities, including caring roles, will be considered fairly in service planning and employment decisions, subject to legitimate operational requirements.

8. Human rights-based practice

8.1 Our approach

Heartbeat is a private company and is not automatically a public authority in every activity. However, it may perform functions under contract with public bodies and, in any event, it chooses to embed human rights principles throughout its work. Respect for human rights is part of good care, good employment and responsible governance.

Right	What this means in Heartbeat practice
Article 2, right to life	Take threats to life seriously, respond to emergencies, follow safeguarding and health and safety procedures, share relevant information lawfully and learn from incidents.
Article 3, freedom from inhuman or degrading treatment	Never humiliate, neglect, abuse, coerce or knowingly expose a person to degrading treatment. Escalate concerns immediately.
Article 5, right to liberty	Heartbeat staff have no authority to detain or deprive a person of liberty. Restrictions must not be introduced informally. Capacity or liberty concerns are escalated to appropriate professionals.
Article 6, right to a fair hearing	Use fair, impartial and timely complaint, grievance and disciplinary processes, give people an opportunity to respond and provide reasons for decisions.
Article 8, private and family life, home and correspondence	Respect privacy, confidentiality, personal relationships, family contact, identity, bodily integrity, personal space, records and the fact that staff are guests in a person's home.
Article 9, thought, conscience and religion	Respect belief, non-belief and religious practice, subject only to lawful and proportionate limits.
Article 10, freedom of expression	Support people to express opinions, preferences and complaints, including views with which others disagree, while addressing threats, abuse and unlawful harassment.
Article 11, assembly and association	Support lawful community, social, political, trade union and group participation without unfair interference.
Article 14, non-discrimination	Ensure rights are enjoyed without unlawful discrimination. Consider intersectional disadvantage where more than one characteristic or circumstance is relevant.

Right	What this means in Heartbeat practice
Protocol 1 Article 1, peaceful enjoyment of possessions	Respect a person's property, money and belongings. Staff must not use, remove or control possessions without clear consent and authority.

8.2 Decision-making and proportionality

Before an action restricts choice, privacy, contact, movement, expression or access, the decision-maker must use the checklist in Appendix B. The decision must identify the risk or legitimate aim, consider the person's wishes, test less restrictive options, assess impact on other people, record the legal and policy basis, define a review date and explain how the person can challenge the decision.

8.3 Consent and mental capacity

- Assume an adult has capacity unless it is established otherwise in relation to the specific decision at the specific time.
- Take practical steps to support decision-making, including accessible information, suitable timing, communication support and involvement of a trusted person with consent.
- Do not treat an unwise decision, disability, diagnosis, communication difference or disagreement as proof of incapacity.
- For non-urgent support, pause and escalate where there is a genuine concern that the person cannot decide and the action is not clearly authorised.
- Heartbeat workers must not make formal best-interests decisions beyond their authority. Relevant health, social care or legal professionals must be involved.
- Any emergency action must be necessary, proportionate, recorded and reported immediately.

8.4 Privacy in the home

A person's home is not a workplace that belongs to Heartbeat. Workers must knock, introduce themselves, seek permission before entering rooms or touching belongings, protect conversations from being overheard, avoid unnecessary photography or recording and respect household customs where safe and lawful. Information observed in the home must be shared only for legitimate work, safety or safeguarding reasons.

9. Reasonable adjustments and accessible communication

9.1 Duty and anticipatory approach

Heartbeat will take an anticipatory approach to disability access. It will not wait for a person to struggle or make a formal legal request where a barrier is foreseeable. Standard documents, recruitment systems, training, offices, telephone arrangements and digital tools will be designed to be usable by as many people as reasonably possible, with individual adjustments added where required.

9.2 Adjustment process

1. Identify the barrier through conversation, observation, an application, assessment, occupational health advice, feedback or a change in circumstances.
2. Ask the person what would help and what has worked previously. Do not demand a diagnosis where the functional barrier and solution are clear.
3. Record the request, urgency, confidentiality preferences, interim steps and person responsible for action.
4. Consider effectiveness, practicality, cost, available resources, disruption, health and safety and the overall resources of the organisation. Cost alone is not an automatic reason to refuse.
5. Implement agreed adjustments promptly. Where the preferred adjustment is not reasonable, discuss effective alternatives and provide reasons.
6. Review after implementation, when circumstances change and at agreed intervals. Maintain an adjustment passport for workers where useful.

A disabled person will not be charged for an adjustment that Heartbeat is legally required to make. Information about disability and adjustments will be shared only with people who need it to implement the adjustment, unless there is a safety or other lawful reason for wider sharing.

9.3 Examples of adjustments

Context	Possible adjustments
Service information	Large print, easy read, audio, translated information, plain English, pictorial prompts, BSL interpretation, text relay, email rather than telephone or supported explanation.
Assessment and reviews	Longer appointment, quiet setting, familiar supporter, breaks, communication aid, questions in advance, home visit, video option or staged assessment.
Recruitment	Accessible application, alternative to online-only forms, extra time, adapted assessment, interview questions in advance where appropriate, accessible venue or remote interview.
Work and placement	Adjusted duties, equipment, software, altered hours, predictable rota, quiet workspace, written instructions, phased return, additional supervision or Access to Work support.
Training	Accessible materials, captions, BSL, recording, practical demonstration, repetition, additional time, alternative assessment or one-to-one support.
Digital systems	Keyboard navigation, screen-reader compatibility, sufficient contrast, scalable text, captions, accessible PDFs, alternative authentication and human support.

9.4 Accessible Information Standard steps

Step	Heartbeat standard
Identify	Ask whether the person has information or communication needs related to disability, impairment or sensory loss.
Record	Record the need in a clear, structured and respectful way, including the format or support required.
Flag	Make the need visible to authorised workers at the point they need to communicate, without exposing unnecessary sensitive detail.
Share	Share the need with relevant organisations or workers lawfully, securely and with consent where required.
Meet	Provide information and communication in the required way, not merely note the need.
Review	Check that the support worked and update it when needs, technology or circumstances change.

9.5 Complaints about adjustments

A person may challenge an adjustment decision through the complaints or grievance process. The review must be undertaken by someone not responsible for the original decision where reasonably possible. Urgent interim measures should remain in place while the review is completed if this is safe and practicable.

10. Equality throughout employment and placement

10.1 General standard

Heartbeat is an equal opportunities employer and staffing organisation. Employment and placement decisions will be based on objective, relevant and proportionate criteria. This policy applies to recruitment, selection,

vetting, pay, terms, hours, shift allocation, training, appraisal, promotion, disciplinary action, grievance, redundancy, dismissal, references and all other aspects of work.

10.2 Job design and advertising

- Job descriptions will identify genuine duties, competencies, qualifications and working conditions without unnecessary requirements that exclude people.
- Language and imagery will be inclusive and will not signal that a role is intended for a particular age, race, sex or background unless a lawful occupational requirement applies.
- Roles will be advertised through proportionate channels to reach a diverse pool, and reasonable adjustments will be offered throughout the process.
- Requirements for driving, shift patterns, physical activity, English language, length of experience or specific qualifications must be job-related and justifiable.
- Salary or rate ranges, employment status and key conditions will be communicated clearly.

10.3 Shortlisting, interview and selection

- Use a documented person specification and consistent scoring criteria.
- Where reasonably practicable, use more than one trained decision-maker and record reasons for decisions.
- Ask only job-relevant questions. Do not ask about pregnancy, family plans, marital status, religion, sexual orientation, gender history, disability or health except where lawful and necessary, including to arrange adjustments or confirm ability to perform an intrinsic function after reasonable adjustments.
- Make reasonable adjustments to interviews and assessments and avoid penalising communication style, eye contact, accent or unfamiliarity with informal norms where these are not essential to the role.
- Retain recruitment records for the approved period so that decisions can be audited.

10.4 Pre-employment checks

Right-to-work, identity, DBS, references, professional registration and health checks will be conducted consistently and lawfully. Right-to-work checks must not become nationality or race discrimination. Workers must not be selected, paid or treated less favourably because of visa type, sponsorship status or country of origin. Original identity documents will be handled securely and returned promptly. Heartbeat will not retain passports as a means of control.

Criminal record information will be considered fairly, confidentially and in context, including relevance to the role, seriousness, age at the time, pattern, time elapsed, evidence of rehabilitation and safeguarding requirements. A record does not automatically exclude a person unless law or risk requires it.

10.5 Pay, shifts and working conditions

- Equivalent work will be paid and rewarded fairly, subject to lawful differences based on role, skill, experience, responsibility, location or performance.
- Shift allocation and preferred hours will be managed transparently. Managers must monitor for patterns that disadvantage particular groups or sponsored workers.
- Part-time, fixed-term, bank, agency and internationally recruited workers will not be treated less favourably without objective justification.
- Religious observance, disability, pregnancy, menopause, caring responsibilities and flexible working requests will be considered individually and fairly.
- Uniform, dress and appearance requirements must be necessary, proportionate, inclusive and compatible with health, safety and infection prevention. Alternatives will be considered where possible.

10.6 Learning, promotion and progression

Training, acting-up opportunities, mentorship, appraisal and promotion will be communicated fairly and based on relevant criteria. Managers will avoid informal sponsorship networks that favour people who share their background or working pattern. Where data or feedback shows under-representation or unequal progression, lawful positive action and targeted development may be used.

10.7 Performance, conduct, grievance and dismissal

Standards will be applied consistently while considering disability, language, cultural context, pregnancy, health, neurodivergence and other relevant circumstances. Before treating behaviour or attendance as misconduct or capability, managers must consider whether it arises from disability, whether adjustments are required and whether comparable cases have been handled consistently. Disciplinary action or dismissal must never be used to punish a person for raising an equality concern, requesting an adjustment or supporting another person.

10.8 Client placements and discriminatory requests

Heartbeat will not accept a client instruction to select or reject a worker because of a protected characteristic unless a genuine and lawful occupational requirement or other statutory exception clearly applies. Client preferences for a certain race, nationality, accent, religion, age or sexual orientation are not valid placement criteria. Any request of this kind must be escalated, challenged and recorded.

Before placement, workers will be told how to report discrimination or harassment at the client site. Heartbeat will cooperate with the client on reasonable adjustments and investigations, but it will retain responsibility for supporting its worker and will not simply defer to the client where safety or rights are at risk.

11. Preventing discrimination, bullying and harassment

11.1 Zero tolerance with fair process

Heartbeat has zero tolerance for discriminatory, bullying, harassing, sexually harassing or victimising behaviour. Zero tolerance means concerns are taken seriously and acted upon, not that every allegation leads automatically to dismissal. Allegations will be assessed fairly, evidence will be considered, the person complained about will have an opportunity to respond and outcomes will be proportionate to the facts and risk.

11.2 Behaviour prohibited by this policy

- Slurs, insults, jokes, ridicule, stereotypes, mimicking accents, hostile nicknames or comments about a person's body, age, disability, race, religion, sex, sexuality, gender reassignment or pregnancy.
- Unwanted sexual comments, questions, invitations, messages, images, gestures, touching, staring, propositions or conduct linked to rejection or submission.
- Repeatedly excluding a person from communication, shifts, social contact, training or opportunities for a discriminatory reason.
- Deliberate mispronunciation or misuse of a name, intrusive questioning about identity, or disclosure of private gender, health, immigration or relationship information.
- Threats, intimidation, stalking, cyberbullying, offensive social media activity or sharing discriminatory content connected with work.
- Using religious, cultural or philosophical belief to justify harassment or denial of another person's dignity and rights.
- Punishing, disadvantaging or isolating a person because they raised or supported a complaint.
- Managers ignoring warning signs, dismissing concerns as banter or requiring the target to resolve serious conduct alone.

11.3 Preventative duty for sexual harassment

Heartbeat will take proactive and reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment. It will not wait for a formal complaint. The Director will ensure a documented risk assessment addresses the nature of home support, lone working, night work, travel, temporary placements, client homes, power imbalances, informal messaging, social events and contact with service users, relatives and client staff.

- Communicate clear standards to workers, service users, families, clients and contractors.
- Provide induction and refresher training, with additional training for managers and investigators.
- Offer more than one reporting route, including a route outside the immediate line management chain.
- Assess third-party risk before and during placements and home visits.
- Act on warning signs, patterns, informal reports, exit feedback and repeated boundary concerns.

- Protect workers who withdraw from an unsafe situation and arrange safe alternatives.
- Review incidents and near misses to improve controls, not merely close individual cases.

11.4 Third-party harassment

Workers can be harassed by service users, relatives, visitors, client staff, contractors or members of the public. Heartbeat will take reasonable steps to prevent foreseeable third-party sexual harassment and will address all forms of third-party harassment. Measures may include expectations in service agreements, pre-placement risk information, lone-working controls, check-in arrangements, rapid escalation, warnings, reassignment, removal from a placement, service review, contract enforcement or termination where necessary.

11.5 Freedom of belief and expression

People may hold and express a wide range of lawful beliefs and opinions. This does not create a right to harass, humiliate, threaten, misgender deliberately, use slurs, pressure others into religious activity or refuse ordinary professional interaction. Managers must distinguish respectful expression or disagreement from conduct that undermines dignity, safety or equal participation.

12. Responding to concerns, incidents and complaints

12.1 Routes for raising a concern

A concern may be raised verbally or in writing, anonymously where feasible, or through any of the following routes. The recipient must help the person identify the most appropriate process rather than sending them away because they used the wrong label.

Concern	Primary route
Service user or family concern	Complaints Procedure, with safeguarding referral where abuse or risk is indicated.
Employee concern about own treatment	Informal resolution where appropriate, Grievance Procedure or Harassment Procedure.
Concern about serious wrongdoing or public interest	Whistleblowing and Freedom to Speak Up Procedure.
Immediate safety concern	Emergency, safeguarding, lone-working or incident procedure.
Concern at a client placement	Heartbeat line manager and client reporting route, with joint action where appropriate.
Data confidentiality or equality monitoring concern	Data Protection Officer or designated privacy lead and complaints route.

12.2 Immediate response

- Check whether anyone needs urgent medical, police, safeguarding or emotional support.
- Separate people or change duties where necessary without treating this as a finding of guilt.
- Preserve messages, emails, CCTV, rota records, notes or other evidence lawfully.
- Ask the person what outcome and support they seek, while explaining that some action may be required to protect others.
- Offer a companion, advocate, interpreter, adjustment, alternative contact or safe transport where appropriate.
- Record the concern in the person's own words as far as possible and do not ask unnecessary or blaming questions.

12.3 Triage and investigation

The manager will decide which procedures apply, whether safeguarding or criminal concerns require external referral, whether an investigator independent of the events is required and what interim measures are proportionate. Serious or complex allegations will be overseen by the Director and may require external human resources, legal or safeguarding advice.

Investigations will be timely, impartial, confidential as far as possible and sensitive to trauma and communication needs. Conclusions will be based on the balance of probabilities for internal processes unless a different standard applies. Records will distinguish fact, allegation, evidence, analysis and decision.

12.4 Outcomes and remedies

- Apology, explanation, facilitated resolution or restoration where this is safe and genuinely voluntary.
- Reasonable adjustments, revised support planning, rota or placement changes.
- Training, supervision, management instruction, performance action or disciplinary action.
- Warning, behavioural agreement, restriction or termination of a service or contract where third-party abuse persists.
- Safeguarding, police, professional regulator, commissioner, employment or data protection referral where required.
- Review of policy, recruitment, training, risk assessment, technology, supervision or leadership where the issue is systemic.

12.5 Protection from victimisation

No person will be subjected to a detriment for raising a concern in good faith, supporting another person, giving evidence, requesting an adjustment or challenging discrimination. Managers will monitor shifts, communication, performance action, opportunities and treatment after a concern is raised. Deliberate false allegations may be addressed, but an allegation that is not substantiated is not automatically malicious or made in bad faith.

12.6 External options

Internal procedures do not remove legal rights. Depending on the issue, a person may seek advice from ACAS, a trade union, the Equality Advisory and Support Service, the Equality and Human Rights Commission, the Information Commissioner's Office, the police, a local authority safeguarding team, a professional regulator, an employment tribunal or the courts. Heartbeat will not obstruct lawful access to advice or external reporting.

13. Safeguarding, hate incidents and third-party abuse

13.1 Equality-related abuse as safeguarding

Discrimination can be a form or indicator of abuse. Targeting a person because of disability, race, religion, sexual orientation, sex, gender reassignment, age or another characteristic may involve psychological abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, financial abuse, neglect, coercive control, exploitation, mate crime or organisational abuse. Staff must not treat identity-based abuse as merely a disagreement or lifestyle issue.

13.2 Hate incidents and hate crime

A hate incident is any incident perceived by the victim or another person to be motivated by hostility or prejudice based on disability, race, religion, sexual orientation or transgender identity. Some hate incidents are criminal offences. Staff will listen, record the person's perception, address immediate safety, preserve evidence and support reporting to the police or other authorities where appropriate. The person's wishes will be respected unless sharing is required to prevent serious harm or meet another legal duty.

13.3 Discriminatory behaviour by a service user or relative

7. Make the worker safe and provide immediate support. A worker is not required to remain in an unsafe or abusive situation.

8. Clarify the behaviour and any underlying communication, cognitive, trauma, health or environmental factors without excusing harm.
9. Explain the expected standard and, where possible, agree a behaviour and safety plan with the service user or representative.
10. Consider adjustments, staffing arrangements, timing, communication, environment and clinical or social work input where relevant.
11. Issue a formal warning or review the service where behaviour continues or risk is high.
12. End the service or contract where necessary and lawful, using a safe transition plan and without discriminatory abandonment.

13.4 Organisational abuse and closed cultures

Heartbeat will be alert to patterns in which poor practice becomes normal, including staff speaking about people as tasks, discouraging complaints, prioritising convenience over rights, mocking difference, concealing incidents, excessive control or managers protecting high performers from accountability. Audits, spot checks, supervision, feedback and whistleblowing will be used to identify and disrupt these patterns early.

14. Information governance and equality monitoring

14.1 Lawful and respectful records

Records must be accurate, relevant, respectful and written in language the person would reasonably understand. Staff must avoid labels, jokes, assumptions and unnecessary detail about identity, relationships, religion, nationality, immigration, disability or gender history. Where a person disputes a record, their view and any correction process must be documented.

14.2 Special category and sensitive data

Information about health, race or ethnic origin, religion or belief, sexual orientation, sex life, trade union membership, genetics and biometrics may be special category data. Criminal offence data and Gender Recognition Act information also require particular care. Heartbeat will identify a lawful basis and any additional condition before processing, collect only what is necessary, restrict access, apply retention rules and use secure systems.

Equality monitoring is normally voluntary and separate from selection decisions. People will be told why information is collected, how it will be used, whether it will be anonymised or aggregated and who can access it. Small numbers will not be published where this could identify a person.

14.3 Monitoring purposes

- Assess whether applicant pools, shortlisting, appointment, pay, training, promotion, discipline, grievance and turnover show unexplained disparities.
- Identify whether particular groups experience barriers, complaints, missed visits, service endings, poorer satisfaction or unequal outcomes.
- Evaluate whether reasonable adjustments are timely and effective.
- Monitor harassment, sexual harassment, hate incidents and third-party abuse for themes and repeated locations or individuals.
- Test whether policies, technology, contracts and service changes have disproportionate effects.
- Set proportionate equality objectives and measure improvement.

14.4 Automated and data-assisted decisions

Heartbeat will not rely on an automated score or artificial intelligence tool to make a significant employment or service decision without appropriate human review, transparency, data quality checks and assessment of discriminatory impact. Procurement of digital systems must consider bias, accessibility, explainability, security and the ability to correct inaccurate data.

15. Training, supervision and workforce development

15.1 Mandatory learning

Audience	Minimum learning
All workers at induction	Policy standards, protected characteristics, dignity, human rights, reasonable adjustments, accessible communication, reporting routes, safeguarding and boundaries.
All workers annually	Refresher using scenarios from home support, staffing placements, digital communication, third-party harassment and service user interactions.
Managers	Inclusive recruitment, adjustment decisions, equality impact assessment, handling complaints, trauma-informed response, fair investigation, data interpretation and preventative duty risk assessment.
Recruitment and compliance teams	Objective selection, right-to-work consistency, DBS fairness, client requests, international recruitment risks, accessible recruitment and confidentiality.
Investigators and disciplinary decision-makers	Impartial investigation, evidence, credibility, unconscious bias, standard of proof, reasonable adjustments, victimisation and appropriate remedies.
Board and Directors	Strategic oversight, legal updates, workforce and service data, culture risk, serious cases, equality objectives and assurance.

15.2 Learning method and competence

Completion of an online module alone is not sufficient evidence of competence. Learning will include discussion, case studies, reflective supervision, observation, questions and practical application. Managers will check whether workers can recognise discrimination, use accessible communication, respond to harassment, respect boundaries and escalate uncertainty. Additional support or retraining will be provided where competence is not demonstrated.

15.3 Reflective supervision

Supervision will provide a confidential space to discuss bias, culture, communication, identity, ethical dilemmas, service user preferences, discriminatory behaviour, adjustment needs and emotional impact. Managers must not discourage discussion because a subject feels uncomfortable. Recurring issues will be anonymised and used for team learning and policy improvement.

15.4 Lived experience and co-production

Where feasible, Heartbeat will involve people with lived experience in reviewing information, training scenarios, recruitment processes, service design and equality objectives. Participation will be voluntary, accessible, properly supported and recognised. One person will not be expected to speak for an entire community.

16. Quality assurance, equality objectives and improvement

16.1 Assurance framework

Assurance source	Evidence reviewed
Policy compliance audit	Current documents, staff acknowledgements, training, adjustment records, incident records and actions.
Service file audit	Assessments, communication needs, cultural preferences, consent, reviews, complaints and respectful recording.

Assurance source	Evidence reviewed
Workforce audit	Recruitment stages, pay, rota patterns, training, promotion, disciplinary outcomes, grievances, turnover and exit feedback.
Placement assurance	Client due diligence, reporting routes, third-party risk, worker feedback and adjustment implementation.
Feedback	Service user, family, worker, candidate, client and stakeholder feedback in accessible formats.
Leadership review	Serious cases, trends, legal updates, equality objectives, risks, resources and effectiveness of improvement actions.

16.2 Annual equality objectives

The Directors will approve proportionate annual equality objectives. Initial objectives for the first policy year are set out below and may be refined as the company gathers reliable baseline information.

Objective	Measures
Accessible communication	100% of people asked about communication needs; needs recorded and met; key public documents available in alternative formats on request.
Inclusive workforce	Recruitment and progression data reviewed at least twice yearly; unexplained disparities investigated; adjustment requests tracked to completion.
Prevent harassment	Sexual harassment and third-party risk assessment completed and reviewed; 100% manager training; all incidents triaged and actioned.
Equitable service experience	Feedback and complaints analysed for protected characteristics and vulnerable circumstances where lawful; improvement actions documented.
Regulatory readiness	Scope boundary audits completed; no unauthorised regulated personal care; policy suite updated before any CQC application or service change.

16.3 Equality impact assessment

An equality impact assessment must be completed for significant new policies, service models, technology, office moves, contracts, workforce changes, pricing arrangements, eligibility criteria, marketing campaigns and other decisions likely to affect access, treatment or outcomes. The assessment is a decision-making tool, not a formality. It must identify affected groups, evidence, positive and negative impacts, mitigation, alternatives, consultation, responsible owners and review dates.

16.4 Learning from data without stereotyping

Data may reveal a disparity but does not by itself explain the cause. Managers must test data quality, sample size, contextual factors and the experiences of people affected. Improvement action should address systems and barriers rather than treating a group as a problem. Where information is limited, Heartbeat will acknowledge uncertainty and gather better evidence.

17. Breaches, disciplinary action and external reporting

17.1 Breaches by workers

A breach may be managed through coaching, supervision, capability or disciplinary procedures depending on seriousness, intent, impact, repetition, position of responsibility, cooperation, insight and risk. Serious discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment, victimisation, retaliation, deliberate concealment, hate conduct or misuse of sensitive information may amount to gross misconduct and could result in dismissal.

17.2 Breaches by service users or third parties

Heartbeat will balance the safety and rights of workers with the needs and circumstances of the service user. The company may use explanation, adjustment, behaviour agreements, warnings, additional controls, reassignment, contract enforcement or termination. Disability, dementia, communication need or distress may affect the response and support required, but does not mean workers must accept ongoing harm.

17.3 Professional and external reporting

Where conduct raises fitness-to-practise, safeguarding, criminal, employment, data protection, immigration compliance or contractual concerns, Heartbeat will consider referral to the appropriate body. Decisions will be lawful, proportionate, documented and shared with the person where appropriate. The company will not use confidentiality clauses or informal pressure to prevent lawful reporting of discrimination, harassment, safeguarding or wrongdoing.

17.4 Malicious complaints and good faith

A knowingly false allegation made maliciously may be addressed under conduct procedures. This threshold is high. A complaint is not malicious merely because evidence is insufficient, accounts differ or it is not upheld. People must be able to raise concerns without fear that an unsuccessful complaint will itself lead to punishment.

18. Review, communication and document management

18.1 Review triggers

- Annual review date is reached.
- The Equality Act, Human Rights Act, employment law, data protection law or related regulations change.
- The updated EHRC Services Code of Practice comes into force or material guidance is revised.
- Heartbeat applies for or obtains CQC registration, changes its service scope or introduces regulated personal care.
- A serious incident, complaint, tribunal claim, safeguarding review, audit or whistleblowing concern identifies a gap.
- Equality monitoring shows a persistent disparity or people report that the policy is not working.
- New technology, contracts, office locations or workforce models create different barriers or risks.

18.2 Communication

The policy will be introduced at induction, available in the controlled policy library and communicated to current workers when materially revised. Service users and stakeholders may receive a summary or full copy. Alternative formats and supported explanation will be provided on request. Managers must confirm understanding rather than rely only on distribution by email.

18.3 Related policies and procedures

- Scope of Service and Regulated Activity Boundary Procedure
- Safeguarding Adults and Children Policy
- Complaints, Compliments and Feedback Policy
- Whistleblowing and Freedom to Speak Up Policy
- Bullying, Harassment and Sexual Harassment Procedure
- Grievance and Disciplinary Procedures
- Recruitment, Selection and Vetting Policy
- Reasonable Adjustments and Accessible Communication Procedure
- Data Protection, Confidentiality and Records Management Policy
- Mental Capacity, Consent and Decision-Making Policy
- Lone Working and Personal Safety Policy
- Service User Conduct and Ending Services Procedure
- Training, Supervision and Appraisal Policy
- Modern Slavery and Ethical Recruitment Policy

18.4 Approval

Approved and signed by  Shadreck Chawira, Director	Approval details Approval date: 20 June 2026 Effective date: 20 June 2026 Next review: 20 June 2027 Version: 1.0
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Appendix A. Protected characteristics and inclusive practice guide

Characteristic	Inclusive practice
Age	All ages are protected in employment and adults are protected in services. Avoid assumptions about ability, reliability, technology, ambition or capacity. Any age-based rule must have a lawful basis and objective justification where required.
Disability	Includes physical or mental impairments with substantial and long-term adverse effects. Some conditions are deemed disabilities. Consider non-visible, fluctuating and progressive conditions. Make reasonable adjustments and consider discrimination arising from disability.
Gender reassignment	Protection applies to a person proposing to undergo, starting or completing a process to reassign sex. Medical treatment is not required. Respect privacy, dignity and protection from harassment.
Marriage and civil partnership	Protected principally in employment. Do not treat a worker less favourably because they are married or in a civil partnership.
Pregnancy and maternity	Protect against unfavourable treatment because of pregnancy, pregnancy-related illness, maternity leave or recent childbirth. Complete appropriate risk assessment and support return to work.
Race	Includes colour, nationality, ethnic origin and national origin. Challenge racism, accent discrimination, xenophobia and stereotyped assumptions. Conduct right-to-work checks consistently.
Religion or belief	Includes religion, lack of religion and qualifying philosophical beliefs. Consider dress, diet, worship, time off and expression fairly, while protecting the rights and safety of others.
Sex	Protect women and men from discrimination, harassment and unequal treatment. Apply current law on the meaning of sex and use lawful, proportionate decision-making for any sex-based rule.
Sexual orientation	Protect lesbian, gay, bisexual and heterosexual people. Respect relationships, confidentiality and family life. Challenge homophobia and biphobia.

A.1 Additional circumstances

Heartbeat also seeks to prevent unfair treatment connected with socio-economic background, caring responsibilities, immigration or visa status, language, accent, health history, menopause, neurodivergence, body size, appearance, education, working pattern, trade union activity, criminal record, housing status or any other irrelevant circumstance. Some of these may fall within a protected characteristic or another legal protection depending on the facts.

A.2 Intersectionality

People may experience disadvantage connected with several characteristics and circumstances at the same time. For example, a disabled older person from a minority ethnic community may face communication, digital, transport and cultural barriers that cannot be understood by considering each factor separately. Assessments and equality impact reviews must consider the person's whole situation.

Appendix B. Human rights decision-making checklist

Use this checklist before making or continuing a decision that restricts a person's choice, privacy, movement, relationships, communication, possessions, religious practice, access to services or work.

Question	Record
1. What is the exact decision or proposed restriction?	Describe the action, who it affects, where, when and for how long.
2. Which rights, protected characteristics or vulnerabilities may be affected?	Consider privacy, family life, liberty, expression, belief, property, dignity, disability and discrimination.
3. What is the legitimate aim?	Identify the specific safety, legal, service or rights-based objective. Avoid vague statements such as policy or risk.
4. What evidence supports the concern?	Record facts, incidents, professional advice and the person's view. Distinguish evidence from assumption.
5. Is the person involved and supported to decide?	Record communication support, consent, capacity considerations, advocate or representative involvement.
6. What less restrictive alternatives were considered?	List alternatives and why they would or would not achieve the aim.
7. Is the proposed action necessary and proportionate?	Explain why the impact is not excessive compared with the objective and how the rights of others are balanced.
8. What adjustments or safeguards reduce the impact?	Record time limits, supervision, communication, review, appeal and support.
9. Who authorised the decision?	Name and role. High-risk decisions require Director oversight.
10. When will it be reviewed and how can it be challenged?	Set a date and explain the route to request reconsideration or complain.

Appendix C. Equality impact assessment template

Field	Entry
Decision, policy, project or change	
Owner and decision-maker	
Date and review date	
Purpose and intended outcome	
Who may be affected	
Evidence used	
Consultation or lived experience input	

C.1 Impact analysis

Characteristic or group	Positive impact	Negative or differential impact	Mitigation or action
Age			
Disability			
Gender reassignment			
Marriage or civil partnership			
Pregnancy and maternity			
Race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin			
Religion or belief			
Sex			
Sexual orientation			
Other vulnerable or disadvantaged circumstances			

C.2 Decision and action plan

Question	Response
Can negative impacts be removed or reduced?	
Were less discriminatory alternatives considered?	
Is any differential treatment objectively justified and proportionate?	
What consultation or further evidence is required?	
How will impact be monitored and reviewed?	
Final decision and reasons	

C.3 Mitigation and improvement actions

Action	Owner	Deadline	Evidence of completion

C.4 Approval and review

Approval item	Record
Approved by and role	
Signature and date	
Review date	
Review findings and further action	

Appendix D. Reasonable adjustment record

Field	Record
Person and role or service	
Date requested or identified	
Barrier or substantial disadvantage	
Adjustment requested and desired outcome	
Interim arrangement	
Information or advice considered	
Options considered	
Decision and reasons	
Agreed adjustment, owner and implementation date	
Confidentiality and who needs to know	
Review date and outcome	
Person's comments	
Manager approval	

Adjustment principles

Consult the person, focus on the barrier, avoid excessive medical evidence, consider interim support, do not pass legal adjustment costs to the disabled person, explain decisions and review effectiveness.

Appendix E. Equality incident and concern record

Field	Record
Date, time and location	
Person raising concern and preferred contact	
Person affected	
Person or organisation complained about	
Protected characteristic or issue involved	
Description in the person's own words	
Immediate safety and support action	
Evidence preserved	
Safeguarding, police, client or external referral	
Interim measures	
Investigator and process	
Findings and outcome	
Remedy and support	
Victimisation monitoring	
Learning and systemic action	
Closure and review date	

Appendix F. Sexual harassment preventative duty risk controls

The Director will maintain a live risk assessment. The following baseline risks and controls must be considered and tailored to current operations.

Risk setting	Examples of risk	Minimum controls
Service users' homes	Lone working, private environment, close contact, relatives or visitors, comments or touching, difficulty leaving.	Pre-service conduct expectations, worker briefing, check-in and escalation, safe exit, rapid management response, reassignment or service review.
Client placements	Temporary worker unfamiliar with culture, client power imbalance, mixed reporting lines, night work, changing teams.	Client due diligence, contractual standards, named contacts, worker induction, independent Heartbeat reporting, joint investigation, removal from unsafe placement.
Digital communication	Personal numbers, WhatsApp, late-night messaging, sexual images or comments, blurred boundaries.	Approved channels, communication rules, privacy settings, evidence preservation, monitoring where lawful, prompt action.
Recruitment and interviews	Power imbalance, informal meetings, intrusive questions, travel or hospitality.	Structured interviews, trained panel, professional settings, documented criteria, clear complaints route, no unnecessary one-to-one social contact.
Training and social events	Alcohol, travel, overnight stays, informal behaviour, seniority differences.	Risk assessment, conduct reminder, responsible organiser, safe travel, multiple reporting routes, no retaliation.
Uniform and appearance	Sexualised comments, body-based jokes, unequal standards.	Neutral and role-related standards, appropriate sizing and options, challenge comments, adjustment process.
Management response	Banter culture, low reporting, conflicts of interest, moving the complainant, repeat perpetrators.	Manager training, independent escalation, trend review, interim measures that do not penalise complainant, board oversight of serious cases.

F.1 Review questions

- What has changed in services, placements, staffing, hours, locations or technology?
- What concerns, near misses, informal reports, exit feedback or complaints have occurred?
- Which workers may be particularly exposed because of lone work, age, status, disability, immigration dependency or insecure hours?
- Are third-party risks being assessed, communicated and acted upon?
- Do workers know more than one reporting route and trust that action will follow?
- Have controls been tested for effectiveness rather than merely documented?

Appendix G. Key references and sources of guidance

- [Equality Act 2010](#)
- [Human Rights Act 1998](#)
- [Worker Protection \(Amendment of Equality Act 2010\) Act 2023](#)
- [Mental Capacity Act 2005](#)
- [Data Protection Act 2018](#)
- [Data \(Use and Access\) Act 2025](#)
- [GOV.UK Equality Act 2010 guidance](#)
- [EHRC sexual harassment and harassment at work technical guidance](#)
- [EHRC Equality Act codes of practice](#)
- [NHS England Accessible Information Standard](#)
- [CQC scope of registration guidance](#)
- [CQC guidance on the regulated activity of personal care](#)
- [ACAS equality, discrimination and bullying guidance](#)
- [Equality Advisory and Support Service](#)
- [Information Commissioner's Office](#)

Reference status

Legal and regulatory sources can change. Managers must use current official versions and seek competent advice for complex or high-risk decisions. This policy is operational guidance and is not a substitute for legal advice.

Final approval

Approved and signed by



Shadreck Chawira, Director

Approval details

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