

East Suffolk Equality and Diversity Policy

Our Commitment:

East Suffolk are dedicated to encouraging a supportive and inclusive culture amongst our workforce, striving to promote diversity and eliminating all forms of unlawful and unfair discrimination. This policy reinforces our commitment to providing equality and fairness to all in our employment, to treat all employees with respect and not to provide less favourable services, facilities or treatment on the grounds of protected characteristics.

The nine protected characteristics are: **age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership status, pregnancy and maternity, race (including ethnic origin, colour, nationality and national origin), religion or belief, or sex and sexual orientation**. The District Councils also include consider **socio economic factors** in addition to the nine protected characteristics.

This policy will positively contribute to the delivery of the East Suffolk Business Plan by promoting and valuing diversity within our community in order to *“maintain and sustainably improve the quality of life for everyone growing up in, living in, working in and visiting East Suffolk”* (East Suffolk Business Plan).

Our Duty as a Public Authority:

The Equality Act 2010 introduced some specific duties for public bodies, including local authorities. These include a set of provisions that we must comply with as an employer, and a regulator. We must have ‘due regard’ to the need to:

- **Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation or any other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010.**
- **Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a ‘protected characteristic’ and those who do not share it.**
- **Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it**

What is Equality and Diversity?

East Suffolk recognise that “Equality and Diversity” is about promoting diversity within the workforce of the organisation, providing equal opportunities for both employees and service users and eliminating all forms of discrimination, harassment and victimisation. We regularly examine our policies and practices to guard against institutional discrimination. We recognise that people may experience different forms of disadvantage depending on their age, ethnicity, race, gender (including if they have had gender reassignment), religion and belief, sexual orientation, marital or civil partnership status, and whether or not they have a disability. Whilst there is no legal requirement to do so, we also consider the impact that our activities and policies may have on socio-economic status and additional groups including those on low income, those who are isolated due to rurality and those for whom English is not a first language.

As both a service provider and employer we are committed to promoting equal opportunities. We are also committed to providing services fairly to all sections of the community and valuing cultural diversity.

1. Aims and objectives

- Services that are accessible for all;
- Equal and appropriate opportunities in employment and recruitment;
- Effective partnership working with all sectors of the community; and
- Positive action to promote equality wherever possible.

2. We are committed to promoting equality by:

- Ensuring that service users are treated with dignity, respect and fairness (All)
- Ensuring that our services are accessible and relevant to the needs of our community and that services adapt and change to the needs of service users, including through consultation with affected groups and communities when developing policies (Section 3);
- Ensuring that services are provided without discrimination, prejudice or bias towards any of the protected characteristic groups (Section 3);
- Supporting a diverse and engaged workforce that feels empowered and involved, who are encouraged to put forward new ideas, and who receive praise and recognition (Sections 4 and 5)
- Endeavouring to have appropriate recruitment, employment and promotion practices and procedures (Section 5)
- Providing training opportunities for staff and councillors (Section 7.4);
- Letting contracts to suitable/appropriate suppliers services (Section 6.2);
- Working effectively in partnership with all sectors of the community (Section 3 and 6.1);
- Taking positive action to promote equality wherever possible (All);
- Providing clear and understandable information about the services we provide and policies and aim to make these in accessible formats, e.g. in different languages (Section 3);
- Ensuring equal access to our compliments, comments and complaints and other procedures (All);
- Making funding decisions based on a fair, equitable and consistent approach (as well as the requirements of the Suffolk Compact and Best Value Statutory Guidance) (Section 7.3 and 9).

3. The environment that East Suffolk aims to create for both employees and service users.

- Access to council buildings – we will work to ensure that buildings from which a public service is delivered are as accessible as is reasonably practicable to people with disabilities.
- Charges for services – when charges are made for services we will recognise this may have an impact on people with low incomes and work to minimise impacts where possible.
- Community consultation – we will, where appropriate, consult with organisations and individuals who represent their community in order to help us develop policies and services – using a co-production approach.
- Information about services – we will provide, on request, information on our services, policies and practices in a reasonable variety of formats to avoid exclusion or discrimination against any group or individual.
- Inspection and regulation – we will undertake inspection and regulation duties in such a way that prevents prejudice, stereotyping and unequal treatment.
- Interacting with the public – we will ensure, through training and raising awareness, that all staff and councillors are familiar with the principles, practices and policies in regard to equal opportunities.
- Service delivery – we will seek to ensure equality of access and will strive to meet people’s specific needs.
- Take-up of services – we will, wherever practicable, monitor the use of our services to ensure that no individual or groups are excluded because of disability, economic status, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation or age and take positive action where possible. We will utilise the Services for All group to review and monitor service provision and any customer feedback.
- Transparency – we will be open about the information on which we base our decisions, about what we are seeking to achieve and about our results.
- We will ensure through training our frontline staff that they understand customer needs and know how to interact accordingly e.g. with a customer with impaired hearing.

4. How East Suffolk will protect those in employment under the protected characteristics.

East Suffolk aims to have a workforce that is representative of the community it serves. This will be achieved by ensuring that there are no barriers to securing with positions or progression within the Councils. All employees will be given help and encouragement to develop to their full potential and utilise their unique talents. Therefore, the skills and resources of our organisation will be fully utilised and we will maximise the efficiency of our whole workforce.

For employees East Suffolk aims to:

- Create a positive and supportive working environment for all employees.
- Protect employees from being discriminated against because of one or more protected characteristics.

- Provide equal opportunities to all employees in the workplace.
- Promote diversity in the workplace.
- Respond to changing demographics and working patterns.

We aim to create a working environment that is inclusive and free of discrimination. We recognise that people may experience different forms of disadvantage depending on their protected characteristic type. Therefore, equalities information, advice, training and support will be provided as part of the induction training to all new employees to promote a positive culture within the organisation in relation to all protected characteristics and we will ensure that this is embedded in all services that the organisation provides.

East Suffolk will embed the equality and diversity policy is in operation and ensure that all employees comply with its requirements and promote fairness in the workplace. The policy will also be drawn to the attention of funding agencies, stakeholders, customers, learners, and job applicants.

We encourage a diverse workforce and aim to provide a working environment where staff are valued and respected, and where discrimination, bullying and harassment are not tolerated. This responsibility is shared by everyone including both councillors and staff. We aim to ensure that all employees are aware of Bullying and Harassment Policies and that all employees are comfortable to raise any concerns so we can apply corrective measures. Any concerns raised through our Bullying and Harassment Policies will be reviewed by the Services for All group (explained later in the policy).

5. Selection for employment, promotion and training

When appointing individuals to positions or promotions the selection process will be solely based on their aptitude, ability and behaviours, which will determine their suitability to the role. The appointment to a position will not be affected by any of the protected characteristics i.e. someone with one or more protected characteristic will not be either treated unfairly nor favoured.

East Suffolk are committed to providing all our staff with opportunities to maximise their skills and achieve their potential, offering flexible working arrangements wherever possible.

We carry out regular staff surveys to keep up to date with staff opinions and this helps us to identify what we can do better. We also carry out a biennial staff engagement survey and the results of this feed into our People Strategy workforce and service plans and actions. This is also carried out within regular 1-1 'My Conversation' between staff and their line managers.

6. Equality and Diversity in partnership.

6.1 Partnership Working

We work in partnership with other organisations to achieve best practice and ensure the best use of resources across Suffolk.

As a public authority involved in partnership work, we are still responsible for meeting the equality duty in relation to any partnership working.

6.2 Procurement and Social Value

Procurement is the process by which we enter into a contract to carry out works or provide goods and services – it's the way we buy things. Equality considerations form a very important part of the procurement process. We will ensure that the purchase of goods, services and facilities is undertaken in line with our commitment to ensure equality of access and opportunity for all and complies with the requirements included in the Equality Act 2010.

We aim to ensure that our suppliers abide by the law and are working to best practice in this area. As part of our tender evaluation criteria, suppliers are required to provide evidence that they have appropriate equal opportunities policies in place and are committed to them.

East Suffolk supports Social Value through its Social Value policy, to ensure the capital invested with our partners, contractors and suppliers contributes to the delivery of the East Suffolk Business plan key objectives (Enabling Communities, Economic Growth and Financial Self Sufficiency), with particular regard to social, economic and environmental objectives.

7. East Suffolk - intolerant towards discrimination.

7.1 Managing Equality and Diversity

East Suffolk's Equality and Diversity policy is fully supported by senior management and has been agreed with trade unions and/or employee representatives. Senior management in all departments take ownership for its implementation across each service area.

7.2 Equality and Diversity Steering Group – Services for All Group:

The organisation has created an Equality and Diversity steering group – “Services for All”. The aim of the group is to co-ordinate, review and lead on Equality and Diversity issues and initiatives across East Suffolk. The group aim to meet quarterly to discuss any issues surrounding Equality and Diversity. The group will be made up of managers, employees and elected members.

7.3 Councillors:

The Government Equality Office suggest that Equality Impact Assessments should be a normal and integral part of the decision making process, showing that we have given 'due regard' to achieving the three general duties under the Equality Act (2010).

Therefore, to ensure that we have given due regard to all duties under the Equality Act, Councillors will consider the findings of EqIA's completed and submitted by employees, and consideration of the findings of Equality Impact Assessments and any actions proposed to mitigate negative findings will be recorded in the minutes of relevant Councillor meetings.

7.4 Human Resources:

The Human Resources (HR) Team drive the transformation and organisational development of the Council through the implementation of the People Strategy while at the same time ensuring the Councils are meeting their ethical and legal responsibilities in respect of all employment and workforce matters including the equality duty. The HR team encourage a culture where our staff are able to achieve their potential, feeling valued and supported in a safe and healthy workplace. The team works hard to ensure that the Council has a productive and skilled workforce and effective policies in place which support diversity and good people management. The HR team will report quarterly on relevant workforce equalities monitoring information.

Regular training workshops are provided including equality and diversity duties and responsibilities, equality impact analysis, safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults and community mapping. Equalities are part of the Council's induction programme for new recruits to the Council and specialist training is provided depending on the needs of the employee and their role.

7.5 Employees:

Employees have an integral part to play in ensuring that the policy is implemented correctly. All employees will complete Equality and Diversity training as part of their induction and further training depending on the needs of their role. They will be expected to act on and to raise their concerns so we can apply corrective measures and appropriate action can be taken.

Details of the organisation's grievance and disciplinary policies and procedures can be found on FRED. This includes with whom an employee should raise a grievance e.g. their line manager or department manager.

8. How East Suffolk will monitor the policy.

Our policy will be monitored and reviewed annually to ensure that Equality and Diversity is continually promoted in the workplace, including through the Services for All group. The policy will be reviewed more widely and on a regular basis through the Waveney and Suffolk Coastal Disability Forums and through the Council website.

The Waveney Disability Forum was set up as a reference group to assist the Council to listen to, learn from and consult with disabled people. It has created an opportunity for disabled people, their carers and disability organisations in the Waveney district to come together to consult directly with Waveney District

Council on the services and facilities which affect disabled people and provide a collective and stronger voice on all issues of disability to achieve positive outcomes for the community. SCDC has also created a Disability Forum in order to meet the aims stated above. Both the Suffolk Coastal and Waveney Disability Forums are represented on the Suffolk Disability Forum which generates a Suffolk wide voice on disability related issues and services.

The Councils are involved with and support the Suffolk County Council's hate crime unit initiatives such as the Stay Safe scheme. This scheme is a project run by Suffolk's Hate Crime Service, in partnership with learning disability groups and Young Voices Youth Parliament.

9. Equality Impact Analysis (EqIA's):

We undertake EqIA's in order to help us fully consider the impact that our work has on different communities, promote access to services for all of our communities and take positive action where possible to promote access to services and community cohesion. We are required to be transparent about the results of such assessments and the data that underpins them. We therefore publish summaries of our EqIAs on our website.

Under the new equality duty, we are not required to follow any specific methodology or template to undertake equality analysis, but we need to be able to demonstrate that we have had due regard to the effect of our policies and practices on equality – this will involve looking at evidence, engaging with people, staff, service users and others and considering the effect of what we do on the whole community.

The Council EqIA template has recently been updated into an electronic version, to ensure that it is easier to access and can be quickly submitted to the respective person to check and agree with what has been put forward within the EqIA. (A copy of this can be seen in Appendix 1).

Appendix 1

The council's electronic Equality Impact Analysis (EqIA) can be found on the councils' website. See the following link.

<https://my.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/service/EQIA>