

East Suffolk Council Equality and Diversity Policy

Our commitment

East Suffolk Council is committed to ensuring 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 treating all employees with respect and not providing less favourable services, facilities or treatment on the grounds of protected characteristics.

The 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 Council also includes **socio economic factors** in addition to the 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”*

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?

“Equality and Diversity” is about promoting diversity within the workforce of the organisation, providing equal opportunities for both employees and service users and eliminating discrimination, harassment and victimisation. People may experience different forms of disadvantage depending on one or more protected characteristic and/or their social and economic status e.g. the impact that our activities and policies may have on those on low income, isolated due to rurality and/or for whom English is not a first language. We regularly review our policies and practice to guard against institutional discrimination.

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 they adapt and change to service user needs, including through consultation with affected groups and communities when developing or adapting policies (Section 3);
- Ensuring that services are provided without discrimination or prejudice against, 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)
- Having in place appropriate and fair 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 of 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 on our policies/the services we provide, in accessible formats e.g. different languages (Section 3);
- Ensuring equal access to our compliments, comments and complaints and other procedures;
- Making funding decisions based on a fair, equitable and consistent approach (as well as Best Value Statutory Guidance) (Section 7.3 and 9).

3. The environment that East Suffolk District Councils aim 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
- **Charges for services** – when charges are made for services, we recognise this may have an impact on people with low incomes and work to minimise these impacts where possible.
- **Co-production** – we will, where appropriate, engage with relevant organisations/individuals in order to help us develop policies and services
- **Information about services** – we will provide, on request, information on our services, policies and practices in a reasonable variety of formats to avoid the exclusion of any group or individual.
- **Inspection and regulation** – we will undertake inspection/regulation duties in such a way that prevents prejudice, stereotyping and unequal treatment.
- **Interacting with the public** – we will ensure that all staff and councillors are familiar with the principles, practices and policies of equality and diversity and 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 group is excluded because of a protected characteristic and take positive action when positive We will 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.
- **Frontline Staff** - we will ensure, through training, that frontline staff understand how to respond to specific needs e.g. a customer with impaired hearing.

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

East Suffolk Council 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 positions or progression. 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. **East Suffolk Council aims to:**

- Create a positive and supportive working environment for all employees that is inclusive and free of discrimination.
- Protect employees from being discriminated against because of one or more protected characteristics that apply to them.
- Provide equal opportunities to all employees in the workplace.
- Promote diversity in the workplace.
- Respond to changing demographics and working patterns.

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 characteristic groups, and ensure that this is embedded in all services that the organisation provides. All employees will be clear that must comply with this Policy, which 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. It is intended that this responsibility is shared by everyone including both councillors and staff. The Council ensures that all employees are aware of Bullying and Harassment Policy 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).



Bullying and
Harassment Policy.do

5. Selection for employment, promotion and training

When appointing individuals to positions or promotions the selection process and their suitability for the role will be solely based on their aptitude, ability and behaviours. Appointments will not be affected by any of the protected characteristics i.e. anyone with one or more protected characteristic will not be treated unfairly nor favoured. East Suffolk Council is 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 engagement to keep up to date with staff opinions and this helps us to identify what we can do better and carry out a biennial staff engagement survey, the results of which feed into our People Strategy. This is also covered within regular 1-1 'My Conversation' between staff and their line managers.

6. How East Suffolk District Councils will maintain Equality and Diversity when working with partner organisations.

6.1 Partnership Working

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

- Sentinel Leisure / Place for People
- Openwide Coastal
- Town and Parish Councils
- Anglia Revenues Partnership
- Orwell Housing
- East Suffolk Shared Services
- Suffolk Coastal and Waveney Norse
- Norfolk Property Services
- Homechoice Administration Services
- Suffolk County Council
- Suffolk Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership.
- Lowestoft Rising /Felixstowe Forward /Leiston Together

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 Council 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).

7. East Suffolk - intolerant towards discrimination

7.1 Managing Equality and Diversity

This 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 of the Councils service areas.

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 and lead on Equality and Diversity issues and initiatives across the Council. The group aims to meet quarterly to discuss any issues surrounding Equality and Diversity across the councils and is made up of managers, employees and elected members.

7.3 Councillors

To ensure that we have given due regard to all duties under the Equality Act, Elected Members will check and ‘sign off’ EqIA’s (see final section) completed and submitted by East Suffolk Council employees and the active consideration of Equality Impact Assessments will be recorded in the minutes of relevant Council meetings.

7.4 Human Resources:

The Human Resources (HR) Team drive the transformation and organisational development of the Councils through the implementation of the People Strategy and ensuring the Council meets its 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 and feel valued and supported in a safe and healthy workplace. The team works hard to ensure that the Councils have a productive and skilled workforce and effective policies which support diversity and good people management. The HR team will report quarterly on relevant workforce equalities monitoring information.

Training and development provision - regular training is provided face to face and online, including equality and diversity duties and responsibilities, equality impact analysis, safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults and community mapping. Equalities is a key component 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 The role of 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.

8. How East Suffolk Council 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.

The Waveney Disability Forum provides an opportunity for disabled people, their carers and disability organisations in the area to come together to consult directly with the Council on the services and facilities which affect disabled people and provide a collective and stronger voice on disability issues to achieve positive outcomes for the community. SCDC also created a Disability Forum in order to meet the aims stated above. Both Disability Forums will continue under East Suffolk Council and are represented on the Suffolk Disability Forum which generates a Suffolk wide voice on disability related issues and services.

The Council is involved with and support the Suffolk County Council's Hate Crime unit initiatives such as the Stay Safe scheme and support the Domestic Abuse Forums that cover the area.

9. Equality Impact Analysis (EqIA's):

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 Government Equality Office (2010) suggests 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).

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 sections 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.

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