



STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Corporate Equality & Diversity Policy





1. Introduction

We are committed to promoting equality and tackling discrimination. This means treating people fairly, valuing differences and removing the barriers that prevent people from participating fully in public life and realising their full potential. As a Council we have worked extremely hard to reduce inequality, yet we know that some people still experience disadvantage and unfair treatment simply because of their personal characteristics or circumstances.

This Policy sets out how we will make equality integral to the way we reach decisions, provide services, recruit and support our employees, work with other organisations and involve local people. Our aim is to make Stroud District Council a fully accessible and inclusive organisation that welcomes and respects the diversity of its customers, elected members, staff and visitors to the district.

This Policy replaces all of the Council's previous equality schemes. The [links](#) throughout the policy will take you to more detailed information.

2. Our Legal Responsibilities

We will meet all legal duties in respect of equality and diversity. The key piece of legislation is the [Equality Act 2010](#), which came into effect in October 2010. It replaces and consolidates all other anti-discrimination laws with a single Act, and has implications for us as an employer and service provider.

The Equality Act 2010 protects people from discrimination on the basis of the following nine **protected characteristics**: (*Please see the [glossary](#) for a full explanation of the terms used*).

- Age
- Disability
- Gender Reassignment
- Marriage & Civil Partnership
- Pregnancy & Maternity
- Race
- Religion & Belief
- Sex (Gender)
- Sexual Orientation

The Act contains a new single Public Sector Equality Duty, which requires all public bodies and private bodies that deliver a public function, to consider the needs of protected groups when designing and delivering services.

Under the Act we must have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; and
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.



Having due regard for advancing equality involves:

- Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to protected characteristics
- Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people
- Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low
- Tackling prejudice and promoting understanding between different communities.

We will also comply with the Conventions contained within the [Human Rights Act 1998](#), which sets out the fundamental rights and freedoms that individuals in the UK have access to.

GOOD PRACTICE: Training has been provided to ensure that all of our staff and Councillors are fully aware of the scope and implications of the Equality Act 2010. We have used a variety of methods from drama based training to e-learning to help embed equality into our day-to-day business.

3. Our Commitment

We are committed to ensuring equality, fairness, inclusion and good relations are at the heart of everything we do - be it policy-making, service delivery or employment practice.

This is key to delivering our vision of **“Leading a community that is making Stroud District a better place to live, work and visit for everyone”**

To support our commitment on equality and diversity, we will:

1. Comply with and embrace equality law and good practice, which includes carrying out our public sector duties to promote equality
2. Regularly monitor and assess the impact of our policies, services and functions to make sure they are fair and reflect people's different needs and opinions
3. Use our influence with our partners and businesses to generate opportunities in the district
4. Celebrate diversity and support campaigns for greater equality and awareness
5. Make equality and consideration of diversity a part of our everyday business. To do this we will expect all of our Councillors, employees and contractors to:
 - Treat everyone with courtesy, dignity and respect at all times
 - Provide the best possible standards of service and value for money to all our customers
 - Consider the needs and opinions of every community.

Specific commitments in employment

We are committed to being a fair and supportive employer, developing the skills and talent within our workforce so that employees are able to deliver high quality services to everyone. To achieve this we will:



- Carry out recruitment fairly
- Provide training to employees so that they can implement this policy
- Treat all employees fairly, with dignity and respect at all times
- Tackle unacceptable behaviour in the workplace
- Provide employees with opportunities to influence the development of our policies and practice
- Reward all employees fairly and provide employment conditions which support them to do a good job
- Promote a good work-life balance and opportunities to work flexibly
- Support disabled employees by making reasonable adjustments
- Monitor and publish the make-up of our workforce as required by the specific public sector equality duty.

GOOD PRACTICE: We have been awarded use of the *Positive about Disabled People Two Ticks Symbol* in recognition of our commitment to employ, retain and develop the skills of disabled people. This symbol is used in all of our recruitment material.

Specific commitments in Tenant Services

We are one of the few local authorities that retain and manage our housing stock. Tenant Services have developed a specific [Equality and Diversity Service Standard](#):

Recognising and respecting the diverse needs of our tenants and leaseholders we will provide services to meet these needs

To achieve this we will:

- Monitor the diversity of tenants and leaseholders
- Ensure our services are accessible to all tenants and leaseholders
- Ensure our services treat all tenants and leaseholders fairly.

Specific commitments in partnership working

We have always seen working with and supporting the voluntary and community sectors as an essential part of meeting the needs of protected groups in the district. The Gloucestershire Compact '[Advancing Equalities](#)' code of practice, sets out our specific and joint undertakings with the voluntary sector to promote equality and tackle discrimination through partnership working.

4. Who is responsible for equalities?

Equality is the responsibility of every Councillor, employee of Stroud District Council, and any other person or organisation employed by us to work or to deliver services on our behalf, including those employed through contractual, commissioning or grant-aided arrangements.



GOOD PRACTICE: As part of our procurement process, where relevant, any contractor wishing to provide goods or services on our behalf is asked to provide evidence of their compliance with equalities legislation. The contractor awarded the gas contract for our housing tenants was able to demonstrate that they were advancing equality of opportunity by offering specific training for female operatives.

Our customers and tenants also have a responsibility to treat our staff with dignity and respect, and to let us know if they require assistance or adjustments to enable them to access our services.

An [Equalities Steering Group](#) comprising officers from across council services has been established to champion the equalities agenda and *'to help create a positive environment where employees and customers are treated fairly and feel valued.'*

5. Implementing this Policy

We recognise that leadership, ownership and commitment by elected members and staff, with adequate resources allocated, are essential for this policy to be effective.

To date we have been using the [Equality Framework for Local Government](#) as a mechanism to help assess our progress. It consists of three levels:

Level 1 – Developing

Level 2 – Achieving

Level 3 – Excellent

- and is constructed around five areas of change management:

- a) Knowing our communities – equality mapping
- b) Place shaping, leadership, partnership and organisational commitment
- c) Community engagement and satisfaction
- d) Responsive services and customer care
- e) A modern and diverse workforce

GOOD PRACTICE: We have carried out a self-assessment against the 'Achieving' level criteria of the framework and produced a report which outlines our equalities journey. This includes an action plan which addresses the areas for improvement that were identified through the process and which will help us progress towards the 'Excellent' level.

We understand that identifying and taking action is a key to mainstreaming equality and we will therefore include our equality objectives as part of our annual [Corporate Delivery Plan](#), which details our key priorities. Progress in delivering our equality objectives will be monitored through our performance management framework and reported in our Annual Report.

Our work will be guided by the codes of practice and guidance published by the Equality and Human Rights Commission. We will share best practice through membership of regional and sub-regional equality groups, and internally, through the Equalities Steering Group.



6. Equality Analysis - Making Fair Decisions

Every day, decisions are made within the Council that affect the lives and relationships of local people, service users and employees.

Equality Analysis will be used as a tool to help us make fair, sound and transparent decisions that are based on a robust understanding of the needs and rights of the groups and individuals who may be affected. Our [assessment process](#) ensures that equality analysis is exercised in such a way that influences the final decision. It will also be used to identify positive actions that will mitigate any negative effects of our decision, or enhance any benefits for protected groups and others at risk of disadvantage.

We will produce and publish electronically, a written record of the equality analysis in relation to any relevant decisions that are taken by Cabinet and Council.

7. Equality Information

We will collate, analyse, interpret and publish information about equality and diversity in the workforce, service delivery and our communities. This information will be used in equality analysis to inform our service planning and decision making process, to help us develop and monitor equality objectives, identify ways of improving performance and to demonstrate compliance with the Equality Duty.

In order to do this, we will routinely ask staff and service-users to provide information about their personal characteristics. This will only be done where the information is relevant to the aims of the equality duty – for example, if there are known inequalities in relation to a particular outcome or service.

We will always make it clear that disclosure of sensitive information (e.g sexual orientation, gender reassignment or religion or belief) is optional and not compulsory.

However, without gathering some form of evidence, it may be difficult to monitor the impact of policies and procedures on certain protected groups. We will aim to overcome this by creating a culture of trust whereby individuals are comfortable disclosing such information.

GOOD PRACTICE: To ensure that all staff and councillors are fully aware of why equality monitoring information is asked for, everyone is provided with the Stonewall booklet "What's it got to do with you?" Featuring ten frequently asked questions, the booklet is also available on our website and distributed to service users.

We will uphold our duty to protect an individual's right to privacy, and will not publish information that could identify an individual. Nor will the information be used to identify an individual or make a decision about them purely on the grounds of the information that has been provided in relation to their protected characteristics. All personal data will be processed in accordance with the [Data Protection Act](#) and in compliance with our [Data Protection Policy and Guidance](#).



8. Making our services accessible and easy to use

We constantly strive to deliver services that are easily accessible by all who need them, and to support people to participate in public life. This in turn will help us to achieve our duty to foster good relations between different groups and individuals. We are committed to listening to our residents, service users and customers to develop an understanding of how we can break down barriers and better meet their needs. This may involve making adjustments to the way we deliver services where it is reasonable to do so.

GOOD PRACTICE: We have established an excellent relationship with the Stroud & District Access Group, ensuring that people with disabilities are involved in reviewing and developing our services at an early stage. The group has been involved in a wide range of projects - from the refurbishment of the town's public conveniences to advising on the suitability of towpaths as part of the redevelopment of the Cotswold Canal.

We will make sure that everyone has the information they need about our services. We will aim to provide all information in plain English and alternative formats on request.

We are committed to engaging effectively with local people, community groups and other stakeholders. We will actively seek their views about the Council and the services they receive, as well as involving them in shaping services and local decision making.

GOOD PRACTICE: The Stroud District, like many rural areas, has an ageing population. To hear older people's views we meet regularly with the Stroud District Older Persons Forum. To enable the district's young people to also have a say in how services are delivered, we have an established Stroud District Youth Council and in 2008 we adopted "Hear by Right", based on Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

9. Protecting People

Safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults is everybody's business, wherever they work and whatever they do for the Council. This includes staff, elected members and people who work for organisations that provide services on our behalf. We will endeavour to make sure that all staff and Councillors are aware of our [Safeguarding People Policy](#) and receive the appropriate training in safeguarding awareness.

We are committed to working in partnership to make sure that [hate crime](#) is not tolerated within our communities and neighbourhoods. Hate crime is motivated because of prejudice, hostility or hatred towards a person, family or groups because of their sexuality, gender identity, disability, ethnicity, religion or faith. It can include physical attacks to either a person or their property, threats, verbal abuse and insults. Nobody should suffer because of who they are, and nobody should put up with it. Through the [Cotswold & Stroud Hate Crime & Incidents Group](#), we will raise awareness of hate crime, encourage victims to report incidents, support known victims and take actions against offenders as necessary.



To report a hate incident or crime contact **0800 077 8460** or complete the [Report It](#) form.

We are also working with our partners to tackle domestic abuse and sexual violence, and have developed a county wide strategy to ensure that all residents in the district have a fundamental right to live their lives in an environment which will not tolerate domestic violence, will support victims/survivors and will hold perpetrators accountable for their actions.

GOOD PRACTICE: The Hate Crime partnership, together with the National Star College, have produced a DVD to raise awareness of hate crime. This has been widely distributed to schools, public bodies and community groups, and is a clear demonstration of how we are working with our partners to meet the general equality duty.

11. Employing, Supporting and Developing our People

Our employment practice is guided by the principles of equality and fairness. This includes recruitment, terms and conditions, appraisals, learning and development, promotion and when ending employment. Our activities and approach to achieving this are set out in our [Employee Handbook](#), which contains our suite of HR policies (this link is to our internal intranet. Please contact us if you would like copies of any of the policies).

As stated in our specific commitments, all employees and elected members should be treated with respect and dignity in the workplace. We will not tolerate bullying and harassment in any form, and the Promoting Acceptable Behaviour Policy (7.6), sets out how individual members of staff might raise concerns they have about actions taking place within the workplace.

GOOD PRACTICE: We have been awarded Investors in People accreditation year-on-year since 1999, recognising our commitment to developing our employees. Our *Work Positive* staff groups have developed the 'ORACLE' behaviours which are the basis of our annual staff appraisal - *Openness to improvement; Respectfulness; Approachability; Confidence; Listening actively; Enthusiasm.*

12. Further information

Enquiries regarding the Corporate Equality & Diversity Policy should be directed to:

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General information about the Council and our services is available on our website: www.stroud.gov.uk.