



**STROUD
DISTRICT
COUNCIL**

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Equality and Diversity Policy

April 2018

Corporate Services

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Approved by: *Chief Executive*

1. Introduction

Stroud District Council is committed to promoting equality and tackling discrimination. This means treating people fairly, valuing differences and removing the barriers that prevent people from fully participating 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.

2. Our legal responsibilities

The Council will meet all legal duties in respect of equality and diversity. The key piece of legislation is the **Equality Act 2010**, which replaced and consolidated the raft of 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: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage & civil partnership, pregnancy & maternity, race, religion & belief, sex and sexual orientation.

The Act contains an integrated 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, the Council 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.

The Council 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.

3. Our commitment

Stroud District Council is 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 to equality and diversity, the Council will:

- a. Comply with and embrace equality law and good practice, which includes carrying out our public sector duties to promote equality
- b. Regularly monitor and assess the impact of our policies, services and functions to ensure they are fair and reflect people's different needs and opinions
- c. Use our influence with our partners and businesses to generate opportunities in the district
- d. Celebrate diversity and support campaigns for greater equality and awareness
- e. 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.

3.1 Specific commitments in employment

Stroud District Council is 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.

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 the Council to work or to deliver services on its behalf, including those employed through contractual, commissioning or grant-aided arrangements.

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 better access our services.

5. 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.

The Council's 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.

6. Equality information

Whenever relevant to do so 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.

When we 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. The Council will always make it clear that disclosure of sensitive information (eg sexual orientation, gender orientation 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. The Council will aim to overcome this by creating a culture of trust whereby individuals are comfortable disclosing such information.

The Council will uphold its 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](#).

7. 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 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.

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.

8. 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 behalf of the Council. We will endeavour to ensure all staff and elected members are aware of our [Safeguarding responsibilities](#) and receive the appropriate training in safeguarding awareness.

The Council is committed to working in partnership to ensure 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.

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.

9. Employing, supporting and developing our workforce

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 the Council's 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. The Council will not tolerate unacceptable behaviour in any form, and the [Bullying and Harassment Policy](#) (2.6.2) sets out how individual members of staff should raise concerns they have about the workplace.