

East Herts Council Comprehensive Corporate Equality Policy

Forward

The East Herts Comprehensive Equality Policy sets out the Council's vision and commitment to ensure equality of access and opportunities for all living and working in the district.

East Herts Council is committed to improving the quality of life for all its residents and employees. The Council values the diversity of the community and wants to use the community's wealth of experience to create an excellent quality of life in East Hertfordshire.

The Council accepts that discrimination affects people in complex ways and discrimination is a major barrier to fair and just society. The Council is dedicated to the promotion of equal opportunities and to removing any discrimination in service delivery, procurement and employment. The Council is committed to achieving equality and community cohesion in partnership with other organisations and local communities.

This Comprehensive Equality Policy also clarifies the Council's existing commitment to equalities by incorporating our new legal duties, and best practice standards. The Council is always learning. It endeavours to deliver its promise, review regularly to ensure compliance with legislation and its duties.

Introduction

East Herts is a diverse, multi-cultural district situated in the county of Hertfordshire within the South East of England. At the time of the 2001 census it had a population of 128,919. The census also revealed that:

- 49% of the population was male and 51% was female. There is a high percentage of (re-) married people in the District (56.4%) and a lower percentage of single (27.6%), separated (2.1%), divorced (7.1%) or widowed (6.7%) individuals.
- 12.4% of the population of East Herts said that they had a limiting long-term illness and 5.8% said that their general health was 'not good'. If these two groups are used as the basis for estimating the number of people that may meet the Disability Discrimination Act definition of a disabled person that equates to 18.2% of the population, or just over 23,000 people.
- Only 5.5% of all people are not from a White British or Irish background. The Census shows that in 2001 the largest ethnic minority groups among dependent children were Other White (433), Mixed White and Asian (273), Other Mixed (158) and Indian (155). The 2007 Schools Census indicates that the ethnic make up of the district has changed considerably. The largest increase is in the number of children/pupils in the Other White category. Statistics for National Insurance Number allocations show that around 430 people were allocated National Insurance Numbers in East Hertfordshire in 2005/06, rising to around 530 in 2006/07. The majority of these people arrived from Poland, although significant numbers also arrived from the Slovak Republic, Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania and Latvia.
- Health based research indicates that 5.2% of the adult population are lesbian, gay or bisexual.

The council recognises that understanding the needs of different sections of the community is essential if it is to effectively deliver services.

This Comprehensive Equality Policy aims to oppose social exclusion for all disadvantaged people in East Herts. It recognises the Council's duties, obligations and responsibilities towards all our communities.

Our Vision

East Herts Council is committed to improving the quality of life and active participation for all living and working in the district. We are putting systems in place to ensure that we have a workforce that reflects the diversity of skills, knowledge, experience and richness of our communities.

Our Equalities Policy is guided by the following principles:

- That the District should remain a prosperous, safe and healthy place where people want and are able to live and work.
- Together with the Council, all residents and service users, service providers, stakeholders, partners and employees have a responsibility to promote equalities and challenge discrimination
- Everyone living and working in East Herts are able to participate fully and enjoy a safe environment free of discrimination and harassment.
- Our residents have equal access to quality services to meet their individual needs

Legal Duties

The Council recognises its duties under the following UK and EU legislation and statutory guidance:

- Equal Pay Act 1970 and Amendment 1983
- Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974
- Mental health Act 1983
- Children Act 1989
- Crime & Disorder Act 1998
- Asylum & Immigration Act 1999
- Sex Discrimination Act 1975
- Race Relations Act 1976
- Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and 2005
- Employment Rights Act 1996
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Parental Leave Directive 1999
- Sex Discrimination (Gender Reassignment) Regulations 1999
- **Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000**
- Part-time Workers Regulations 2000
- Employment Act 2002
- Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003
- Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003
- Civil Partnership Act 2004
- Gender Recognition Act 2004
- Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006
- **Equality Act 2006**

The Council is committed to meeting its duties under this legislation. It also recognises that some groups do not benefit from the protection of legislation, but will ensure good practice in equal opportunities towards these groups through the policy.

Policy Statement

East Herts Council is committed to identify and eradicate any form of discrimination, direct or indirect, institutional or other, both in employment and in the procurement and delivery of services. Promoting equalities is about putting principles into practice. Our commitment to all our staff and service users are:

- To eliminate discrimination on the grounds of gender, disability, learning difficulty, health status, race, colour, ethnic or national origin, faith or religious belief, age, marital status, responsibility for children or dependents, sexuality and gender assignment;
- To promote equality of opportunity and fair treatment for all our communities;
- To promote fair and equal access to services by all citizens on the basis of need and to provide services in a manner which is sensitive to the individual;
- To help and support members of the public and staff who face harassment and to take action against perpetrators where possible;
- To have a staff complement that reflects the diversity of our communities;
- To promote equality of opportunity and fair treatment in employment and training and to ensure equal pay for work of equal value;
- To exercise its community leadership role to promote equality;
- To work in partnership with stakeholders and communities to ensure effective consultation to support our equality objectives;
- To ensure that the Community Strategy is designed to promote and achieve equalities outcomes and to ensure that it promotes community cohesion and good relations between different communities;
- To develop a *Corporate Equalities Plan* and to develop the capacity needed to deliver it within all departments;
- To ensure that all departments develop and implement an Equality Action Plan with resources, targets and timescales;
- To monitor and evaluate all aspects of service delivery and employment and to eliminate differences demonstrated by unfair outcomes.

Equalities and Diversity Objectives – what the Council will do.

The Council's Equalities commitments will be promoted by a number of key actions. These are grouped under five strategic equality and diversity objectives.

- a. Promoting Community Leadership And Community Cohesion**
- b. Improving Community Engagement And Communication**
- c. Promoting Equality In Service Delivery**
- d. Promoting Equality Of Opportunity In Employment And Training**
- e. Evaluating The Success Of Our Equalities Commitments**

Actions

Promoting Community Leadership and Community Cohesion

East Herts Community Strategy

The Council will continue to ensure that its Community Strategy responds to the needs of all local communities through ongoing consultation with key groups and the use of equality impact assessments.

East Herts Cultural Strategy

The Council aims to work towards improving the quality and range of cultural opportunity available in the areas of arts, heritage, play and informal recreation and sports adopting the five themes from 'Every Child Matters'.

East Herts Strategic Plan

The Council will ensure that the strategic plan clearly sets targets to measure progress towards national equality performance indicators.

Corporate Equality Plan

The Council will develop a Corporate Equality Plan which will set out more detailed targets and actions for each department that will be delivered each year to implement this policy. This plan will be consulted on with designated community groups.

East Herts Community Safety Strategy

The Council will aim to ensure that the adverse impact of crime within the community is addressed through the annual action plans that are developed by the Community Safety Partnership.

Improving Consultation / Community Engagement and Communication

The Council will develop its consultation and communication strategies in order to ensure that the public has access to the information and services provided and are engaged in their development.

Consultation / Community Engagement

The Council will:

- Engage with users and designated community groups, staff and stakeholder groups on its service delivery and priorities in order to increase the appropriateness and responsiveness of services to all sections of the community. This process will be clear, open and inclusive;

- Develop consultation mechanisms to increase the participation of minority communities, disadvantaged groups and those who are socially excluded;
- Consult on its Corporate Equality Plan with local community groups and stakeholders representing the views of minority communities;
- Monitor the impact of consultation mechanisms.

Communication

The Council will:

- Publicise this policy and the Comprehensive Corporate Equalities Plan;
- Ensure that if needed information on key Council services can be made available in other languages and formats for non-English speakers and disabled people;
- Ensure that if needed a professional interpreting service is available for service users whose first language is not English;
- Ensure that communication responds to differing levels of literacy and comprehension;
- Ensure that all services address the access requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act;
- Ensure that the complaints procedure is accessible to all.

Promoting Equality in Service Delivery

Assess Functions and Policies

The Council will

- Assess the relevance of its policies and functions to equalities legislation and commitments;
- Undertake equality impact assessments of relevant functions, policies and proposed policies and publish the results.

Departmental Equality Action Plans

The Council will

- Ensure that all departments produce a Departmental Equality Action Plan linked to their Service Plan;
- Ensure that all council services, delivered directly or through contractors, take forward the Council's equalities and diversity commitments;
- Ensure that procedures for commissioning and awarding of tenders are free from all institutional discrimination;
- Promote the social model of disability in the design and delivery of services in order to reduce the environmental and cultural barriers encountered by disabled people due to other people's attitudes towards them;
- Identify groups within the community whose needs / requirements are not being met or are less well met by the Council;
- Ensure that all our services are flexible and respond to the needs of different groups within the community;
- Promote customer care.

Fair Treatment

The Council will

- Keep under review and respond to customer complaints about harassment and domestic violence;
- Provide appropriate support for the victims of harassment, including racism, homophobia and domestic violence.

Action for Access to Public Buildings

The Council will continue to implement its programme of action to fulfil its obligations for public building access under the Disability Discrimination Act and identify the necessary resources to support this.

Promoting Equality of Opportunity in Employment and Training

Recruitment, Selection and Retention

- The Council will recruit and treat applicants for jobs or promotion on objective criteria, having regard to relevant experience, potential, skills and abilities. No applicant or employee will be placed at a disadvantage by requirements or conditions which are not necessary to the job, or which constitute direct or indirect discrimination;
- The Council will ensure that all employees understand their responsibility for implementing the Comprehensive Equality Policy and review this through the staff appraisal process.

Training

The Council will

- Ensure that staff will be trained to carry out all duties in line with equalities legislation and the implementation of the Council's commitments in the Comprehensive Equality Policy;
- Provide a training plan which integrates diversity and equal opportunities. This plan will be consulted on with staff, managers and unions.

Review

The Council will

- Ensure that all employment policies and procedures are consistent with current legislation and all relevant Codes of Practice;
- Ensure that proactive measures are put in place to identify and address areas of inequality in all areas of human resource management.

Workforce Monitoring

The Council will

- Undertake Workforce Profiling by ethnic group, gender, disability, age, religion and sexual orientation, analyse implications of such profiling against community profiling, and publish the results;
- Monitor, by ethnic group, gender, disability, and age applicants for jobs, staff promotion and training, grievances, harassment, bullying, disciplinary action, performance appraisals, training and dismissals and report on findings;
- Undertake exit interviews to monitor reasons for staff leaving or transferring post.

Fair Treatment

The Council will

- Act on the Comprehensive Equality Policy and harassment policy, which promote every employee's right to be treated with respect, by challenging racist, sexist, homophobic, and other discriminatory behaviour;
- Provide clear employment policies and procedures which promote equal opportunities and family friendly employment practice;

- Monitor complaints from staff against harassment, victimisation and bullying and any other discriminatory behaviour.

Equal Pay

The Council will plan and implement an equal pay review and policy.

Complaints

The Council will safeguard the individual rights of any employee who wishes to complain.

Evaluating the Success of Our Equalities Commitments

Monitoring and Evaluation

The Council will

- Develop self-assessment and audit procedures to establish performance against the Equality Standard for Local Government;
- Monitor the progress of the Comprehensive Corporate Equality Plan, revising targets annually and publishing the results;
- Ensure that systems are developed to audit and monitor service delivery and customer satisfaction;
- Sensitively collect and analyse data on the background of service users, complainants, perpetrators and victims of harassment and publish results;
- Protect complainants against victimisation;
- Train staff to undertake peer inspections of services using the impact assessment process;
- Promote the use of customer feedback, service delivery feedback, Citizens' Panel survey information and information gathered from user satisfaction surveys to provide further monitoring information;
- Promote the use of the Citizens' Panel to test satisfaction of council services against equality and diversity objectives;
- Ensure that monitoring and consultation feedback is used to inform best practice;
- Review this policy every three years, or when new legislation requires it to be reassessed.

Roles and Responsibilities

Council

The Council is responsible for setting policy.

The Executive Member with the portfolio holder for Community Development, Leisure & Culture – Cllr Linda Haysey is the Council's Champion for promoting Equality and Diversity.

The Corporate Management Team and Equalities Officers groups responsible for reviewing the delivery and performance management of this Policy and the Corporate Equality Plan.

The Executive Committee will make recommendations to Council on the development of policy.

The Council will seek to have this policy endorsed by the East Herts Local Strategic Partnership and its constituent agencies.

Corporate Management Team

The lead officer for equalities in the Council is the Director of Customer and Community Services

The Chief Executive and Directors who make up the Council's Corporate Management Team are directly responsible for the implementation of this policy.

They are also responsible for ensuring that all staff are aware of their respective responsibilities under this policy and are given appropriate training and support.

Directors will be required to lead and direct its implementation corporately and within their own directorates.

Equalities Officers Group

The Equalities Officers Task Group will support the Corporate Management Team by guiding the implementation of the policy and developing monitoring, evaluation, audit and impact assessment procedures and guidance.

Heads of Service

Within directorates, implementation of this policy and the Corporate Equalities Plan will be managed through Departmental Management Teams made up of the Heads of Service.

Heads of Service will be responsible for ensuring that staff are aware of the policy and able to implement it.

Staff

All staff are responsible for complying with this Policy and its associated procedures and guidance. All staff are responsible for challenging breaches of this policy and can make use of the grievance procedure, harassment policy and whistle blowing policy where needed.