

Stafford Borough Council

Equality and Inclusion Policy

2021 - 2024

Document Title: Equality and Inclusion Policy 2021 - 2024

Owner: Corporate Business and Partnerships

Status: Approved

Effective from: July 2021

Approved on: 20 July 2021

Review date: March 2024

Previous update: April 2018

Updated by: Corporate Business and Partnerships

Purpose: Outlines the aims and objectives of the public sector equality duty and areas of consideration in order to demonstrate services, policies and procedures have been planned in a holistic and inclusive way.

Foreword

Over the years we have seen our communities become more complex and diverse and in the last 18 months we have seen the devastating effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on those communities. The pandemic has highlighted not only the resilience of our communities and residents but also the vulnerabilities and we have a moral obligation to make sure that they are all treated fairly and equally.

All public bodies have a duty to comply with the 2010 Equality Act but over and above our legal responsibilities, fairness and equality are moral obligations for everyone working for the council across a wide range of services – whether delivering front line services to meet the needs of a diverse population across the Borough or in our dealings with our colleagues. Equal treatment reduces barriers of access and opportunity that people with protected characteristics may experience either as individuals or as groups that may be less likely to enjoy positive outcomes due to discrimination, prejudice or other reasons such as socio-economic, health or educational factors.

Organisations benefit from employees with a breadth of talent and experience that equips them to work with people from all backgrounds and circumstances and, through access to a supportive environment, practices and culture within the workplace they will be happier and more productive. We all benefit from shared values of respect, an understanding of how other people live, and a sense of belonging within an organisation, community or family. We all have the right, and deserve the chance, to achieve our potential while being truly ourselves.

Collectively, our equalities and diversity activities, as well as what we do, bring communities together creating strong and tangible benefits for everyone.

Councillor Mike Smith

Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Resources

Contents

1. Why do we need an Equality Strategy?	1
2. What the law says about equalities	2
3. Context	3
4. Considering the impact of everything we do	4
5. What are Community Impact Assessments?	5
6. Procurement	5
7. Our commitment as an Employer	6
8. Monitoring Workforce Diversity	7
9. Strategic Objectives and Outcomes	7
10. Monitoring and Review	10
APPENDIX 1: Protected Characteristics	11
APPENDIX 2: Definitions	12

1. Why do we need an Equality Strategy?

Our vision is to have a prosperous and attractive borough with resilient communities and we realise that this vision can only be achieved if we promote equality of opportunity for all groups of people and eliminate discrimination and harassment both in our role as an employer and as a provider of services. This focus on equality, diversity and inclusion is one that is rooted in the desire to make sure that there is representations across the authority to support the strengthening of inclusive services to our communities.

Covid-19 has had a devastating effect on the whole Country, on families that have lost loved ones, the economy, and the way we live our lives. During our responses to Covid-19 we have continued to provide essential services and to support to those residents who are most vulnerable. Our Covid-19 recovery plans recognised the impact that the pandemic had on different groups such as ethnic minority communities and communities in areas of deprivation so we need to guarantee that different groups' position in society, issues of poverty, health and wellbeing are taken into account in everything we do.

While our fundamental approach to equalities remains unchanged, in line with our Public Sector Equality Duty responsibilities, we know that we cannot stand still in a changing world. True commitment to fair and equal treatment for everybody means constantly seeking to improve what we do already as well as ensuring that the council can respond to new challenges, either directly or by working closely with others.

Specific hate crimes or activities on the grounds of extremist views or directed towards a particular faith or belief, including Antisemitism and Islamophobia, or any ethnic group, are a threat to good relations and community cohesion. Over the past 12 months we have seen rises in the number of pressure groups from the left and right so we are proactively working with our partners to monitor this situation. The impact of Britain leaving the European Union is much of an unknown at this present time but we are working with our partners and communities to plan and mitigate any major impact that this might have on the borough.

Making people more aware of equalities issues, rights and risks is also part of our renewed focus in this strategy. Accessibility of information, not just in the sense of providing the formats that people need, but also good quality and clear information about the council and its services, will be a priority so that people's engagement with the council, including those of seldom heard groups, can be improved. We also want to ensure that all our staff are fully aware of the responsibilities they have, in their day to day roles in services and with colleagues at work, for advancing the council's equality and diversity objectives. We will continue to provide staff with a range of mandatory and bespoke equality and diversity training as well as seeking how this can be more widely taken up throughout the council including by elected members. Improving the representation of staff from protected characteristic groups at management levels within the council will also remain as a priority.

2. What the law says about equalities

The Equality Act became law in October 2010. For the first time it brought together all of the legal requirements for equality that private, public and voluntary organisations must follow when they work with their employees and the public. Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 places a duty on public sector organisations to pay due regard to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination (harassment, victimisation and any other prohibited conduct)
- advance equality of opportunity between those who share a protected characteristic and people who do not
- foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and people who do not

This is known as the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), and this puts in place some other things that the Council must do to show that it is working fairly. The Equality Act 2010 brings together all previous anti-discrimination laws into a single act to make the law easier for people to understand and comply with and to remove inconsistencies. The new duty applies to 'relevant protected characteristics' which are:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex (gender)
- sexual orientation

(**APPENDIX 1** provides a definition of each of these protected characteristics) As part of this duty we are required to:

- publish information to show compliance with the Equality Duty on an annual basis
- publish specific and measurable equalities objectives
- publish those objectives in such a manner that they are accessible to the public

3. Context

Stafford Borough has experienced significant economic growth over the past few years which has delivered investments in the town centre and surrounding areas and increases in the population. The Borough lies in the centre of the county, is home to the county town of 'Stafford' and the canal town of Stone. It is the largest borough geographically in Staffordshire, covering an area of approximately 230 square miles.

There are approximately 60,000 households in the borough which are predominantly owner-occupied. There are a number of social landlords operating in the area but Stafford and Rural Homes is the largest with around 6,000 homes across the Borough. The average price of a house in Stafford Borough is £184,156 . This is above the Staffordshire average price, but below the national and regional average. For those on lower incomes, homeownership is less affordable than both the West Midlands and England. The ward indicator matrix demonstrates that there are six ward areas that are more deprived and experience poorer outcomes. The wards with the highest levels of need in terms of families and communities facing multiple issues are: Common, Coton, Doxey and Castletown, Forebridge, Highfields and Western Downs and Penkside.

The Borough has an ageing population, with more people living here who are over 65 years; there is a lower proportion of children and young people aged under 24 years of age with average proportions of adults aged 35 – 50 years. The ethnicity of the population is approximately 94% White British, which is comparable to the population of Staffordshire. The general health of our population is important to the future prosperity of the borough. Residents of Stafford Borough generally live longer, with the healthy life expectancy in the district better than the national average for both males (81 years) and females (83 years). However, the life expectancy for both men and women living in deprived areas is six years less.

The changes in the population bring its own challenges and these coupled with the rurality of the borough mean that we need to ensure that the services we provide are holistic, inclusive and accessible to all. Stafford Borough Council is committed to promoting diversity and equality of opportunity to everyone it comes into contact with. Inclusivity is at the heart to all our core values and is explicitly expressed within the three business objectives contained in our corporate business plan:

- To deliver innovative, sustainable economic and housing growth to provide income and jobs .
- To improve the quality of life of local people by providing a safe, clean, attractive place to live and work and encouraging people to be engaged in developing resilient communities that promote health and wellbeing.
- To tackle Climate Change by implementing our Climate Change and Green Recovery objectives
- To be a well-run, financially sustainable and ambitious organisation, responsive to the needs of our customers and communities and focussed on delivering our objectives.

Our vision is to have a prosperous and attractive borough with strong communities and we realise that this vision can only be achieved if we ensure that we promote equality for all groups of people and eliminate discrimination and harassment both in our role as an employer and as a provider of services.

4. Considering the impact of everything we do

As an authority we have a responsibility to provide excellent services to the public that are value for money to the taxpayer. This is at the core of our values and our approach to equalities, our Corporate Business Plan and also the work we are undertaking on Covid Recovery. Covid has changed everyone's lives; our residents, businesses and the Council (both for employees and Members).

As part of our recovery strategy and planning we acknowledged that now there are opportunities to create a new normal, building on what we have achieved over the past 12 months and linking it to the Digital Customer Strategy, promoting the digital workplace supported by appropriate infrastructure. We now need to consider what our "new normal" is for Customers; Employees, the Council's Operating Model; and Members and how far, and at what pace we want to move forward on our journey over the next 3 years.

Customer expectation is changing and the customer experience is important and needs to be at the core of everything the council does. We need to enable customers to succeed the first time they engage with any of our services and the opportunity to procure a new digital service platform will help us to achieve this. Capitalising on some of these opportunities and benefits would:

- Provide a more efficient service to customers
- Streamline and transform systems and processes
- Reduce our carbon footprint
- Reduce operating costs
- Improve the wellbeing of staff and members

We also aspire to be an employer of choice so the way we operate in the future will be critical to making sure that we are able to attract the right person for the right role. It will be important for us to drive this forward through our recruitment, learning and development and engagement strategies

5. What are Community Impact Assessments?

The Duty does not set out a particular way for assessing the impact of policies on equality. However, the Duty does require local authorities to have due regard to the aims of the equality duty through their decision making process, service delivery and policy formulation. It is necessary for decision makers to understand the potential impact that their decisions could have on people with different characteristics. Therefore we will continue to carry out Community Impact Assessments as a tool to determine the impact policies and decisions will have on different groups of people.

A Community Impact Assessment is a way of evidencing how proposals for proposed policy, procedure, practice or service do, or may, affect people differently, and if so, whether it affects them in an adverse way. This process is designed to be holistic in the sense that it requires individuals to assess against a framework that encompasses health and community.

Assessments are carried out on all new policies and services, as they are developed and as part of a review programme for existing policies and services. All issues are considered alongside the protected characteristics: age (including children and young people), disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

6. Procurement

The Equality Act 2010 commits the Council to ensuring that contractors and suppliers also abide by the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty. We will ensure that:

- This policy is communicated to all potential contractors and service providers.
- Contractors and service providers have equality and diversity policies, procedures and practices in place.
- Those acting on our behalf will develop and deliver goods, facilities and services that are appropriate and accessible.
- We will provide opportunities for all to bid for contracts
- We will conduct impact assessments on all major procurement and commissioning activities in order to ensure that they meet equality and diversity commitments.

7. Our commitment as an Employer

The Council aims to promote equality of opportunity for all existing and potential employees, by avoiding working and recruitment practices or arrangements that are discriminatory and engendering a working environment that develops good practice, acts to eliminate prejudice and values diversity. Employment issues covered include appointments, training, promotion, terms and conditions of service and termination of employment.

- All decisions relating to recruitment, training, promotion or termination will be made on a purely objective basis, relating to skills, experience and ability, and recorded on the forms provided. Guidance Notes on recruitment and selection procedures will be published on the intranet.
- Qualifications or conditions applied must be justifiable in terms of the demands of the job.
- Tests must be non-discriminatory and relate purely to the demands of the job.
- Applicants with a disability are guaranteed an interview if they meet the essential job related criteria; (the Council have the two ticks accreditation)
- Special needs will be met at interview, subject to prior notification. Recruitment details will be available on-line in large print or colour contrast
- Necessary and reasonable adjustments will be made under Section 39 of the Equality Act 2010 for new employees, and for existing employees who develop disabilities.
- Managers and staff involved in recruitment will receive mandatory training and guidance including awareness of equal opportunity issues including the need to encourage people from disadvantaged groups to seek employment with the Authority.
- All staff are made aware of their duty to ensure that the policy is adhered to. This will be highlighted at induction and reinforced by training, in particular Diversity training, and guidance as appropriate.
- Robust policies have been developed, re-defined and publicised as required, e.g. Bullying and Harassment Policy, Grievance and Disciplinary procedures, to ensure that everyone is treated without bias.
- The Council has in place an objective job evaluation process.

Celebrating Successes

- Enabling all our people to be who they are is at the heart of this strategy. If we forget the people behind an equalities issue, we will fail to meet their needs in the best and most inclusive way. But we also believe in recognising and celebrating all the good work that is helping to build and maintain strong relationships between people of different backgrounds, skills and experiences within our workplaces and communities. We want to show how equality matters and the difference it makes to people that they are welcomed in, and can actively contribute to, our wider society. Improving our knowledge of communities, groups and networks and publicising local initiatives and activities will send a strong message that equality works for everyone.

8. Monitoring Workforce Diversity

We will ensure that as a responsible Authority we will collect data on equality and diversity against each of the characteristics. We will use this data to monitor progress against our targets; identify discrimination; assess the impact of changes in employment practices and policies and to assess equality of opportunity in learning and development.

Each year the information on the workforce is published publicly this can be found at <https://www.staffordbc.gov.uk/equalities-and-diversity1>

9. Strategic Objectives and Outcomes

The overarching aim of this policy is that consideration to equality becomes an intrinsic part of daily working, the organisation culture and service delivery. There are two areas of focus that support the aim and objectives in the corporate business plan and these relate to:

- Organisational commitment
- Delivering the best outcomes for residents, businesses and visitors in our borough

Organisational Commitment

Objective	How do we demonstrate this?	Why is this important?
Members, senior managers and staff continue to demonstrate their commitment to equality	<p>Equality and Inclusion is included in the portfolio of Cabinet Lead for Resources</p> <p>Responsibility for Equality and Inclusion held at senior management level</p> <p>Recruitment, Selection, Training, Harassment, Bullying and Discrimination process/policies are reviewed and redesigned as appropriate</p> <p>Responsibility for equalities is detailed in job descriptions</p> <p>Equality and Inclusion is embedded in each service area</p> <p>Equality and Inclusion training is rolled out to all staff and elected members and evaluated.</p>	<p>The Council is able to demonstrate the commitment to promoting a culture where equality principles are embedded in everything that we do.</p> <p>The Council is able to demonstrate that its Policies/Strategies/Processes are fair and equitable, modern and driving changes required.</p> <p>The Council is able to evidence how training is making an impact on workforce diversity and in creating an inclusive workforce</p>

Objective	How do we demonstrate this?	Why is this important?
<p>Services and policies are developed using community impact assessments throughout the authority.</p> <p>Ensure that workforce information includes analysis narrative and identifies gaps and plans to address the</p>	<p>Equality and Inclusion Policy and CIA's published on the Council website.</p> <p>CIA's undertaken for all new or revised services, contracts, policies and published on the intranet.</p> <p>Actions arising from CIA's incorporated into cabinet reports and provision made in all services and plans.</p> <p>Equality principles included in all contracts and services.</p> <p>Workforce profile information is analysed and published on the council website on an annual basis.</p>	<p>High level strategic plans should ensure inclusivity and demonstrate equality in service provision</p> <p>Demonstrates compliance with Equality Duty 2010</p> <p>Information will be easier to understand and will identify plans to address gaps, meet targets and assess the impact of changes in policies and practices.</p>

Delivering the best outcomes for residents, businesses and visitors in our Borough

Objective	How do we demonstrate this?	Why is this important?
Operate as One Team	<p>Everyone working for the council understanding how they support the delivery of the corporate business objectives and vision.</p> <p>Working together to achieve business objectives</p> <p>Utilising skills and abilities of others to deliver priorities Working collectively, collaboratively to drive forward the ambitions of the council</p> <p>Working together to build resilience in order to achieve the best for the organisation</p> <p>Being an employer of choice</p> <p>Offering different ways in how customers can interact, engage, and communicate with us (Channel Choice)</p> <p>Offering different way in how customers can access our services</p> <p>Communicating and engaging with everyone in the council</p> <p>Investing and developing our members and employees Services are Digital by Design</p>	<p>Council able to deliver better outcomes whilst protecting front line services and demonstrating future sustainability.</p> <p>Our services need to be accessible to all residents.</p> <p>Services provided need to reflect local communities, their demographics and needs.</p> <p>Customer satisfaction and value for money needs to be at the heart of our performance management framework.</p> <p>There needs to be an emphasis on two-way communications - using relevant channels to share information that residents, businesses, partners and other organisations within our communities need to know.</p> <p>Residents, customers, businesses and others are listened to through both formal and informal consultations.</p>

Objective	How do we demonstrate this?	Why is this important?
	Publishing a set of corporate Customer Standards annually. Consulting residents are consulted about new and changes to existing services. Producing a Communications Plan for every major project or key initiative Access Audit and DDA compliance The Website is accessible and easy to use	

10. Monitoring and Review

The policy will be reviewed in three years' time in line with the corporate business plan and will be performance managed through our scrutiny process. We will be open and transparent in how we work and conduct consultation and engagement activities for all of our major projects so that we can ensure our residents are able to have their say and be part of the process.

For further information please contact Corporate Business and Partnerships:
corporatebusiness@staffordbc.gov.uk

APPENDIX 1: Protected Characteristics

Age

Where this is referred to, it refers to a person belonging to a particular age (e.g. 32 year olds) or a range of ages (e.g. 18-30 year olds).

Disability

A person has a disability if s/he has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on that person's ability to carry out normal day to day activities.

Gender reassignment

The process of transitioning from one sex to another.

Marriage and civil partnership

Marriage is a union between a man and a woman or between a same-sex couple. Same-sex couples can also have their relationships legally recognised as 'civil partnerships'. Civil partners must not be treated less favourably than married couples (except where permitted by the Equality Act).

Pregnancy and maternity

Pregnancy is the condition of being pregnant or expecting a baby. Maternity refers to the period after the birth and is linked to maternity leave in the employment context. In the non-work context, protect against maternity discrimination is for 26 weeks after giving birth, and this includes treating a woman unfavourably because she is breastfeeding.

Race

Refers to the protected characteristic of Race. It refers to a group of people defined by their race, colour and nationality (including citizenship) ethnic or national origins.

Religion and belief

Religion has the meaning usually given to it but belief includes religious and philosophical belief (e.g. Atheism). Generally, a belief should affect your life choices or the way you live for it to be included in the definition.

Sex (gender)

A man or a woman

Sexual Orientation

Whether a person's sexual attraction is towards their own sex, the opposite sex or both sexes.

APPENDIX 2: Definitions

Direct Discrimination

Direct discrimination consists of treating a person less favourably than others on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion and belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnerships and pregnancy and maternity.

Discrimination by Perception

A person treated less favourably or harassed/victimised based on a perception that the affected has one of the protected characteristics and is targeted because of this.

Discrimination by Association

Associative discrimination is behaviour motivated against an individual because of their associations with someone who has a protected characteristic.

Indirect discrimination

Indirect discrimination is a condition or requirement that applies to all, but in practice:

- has a detrimental effect upon a group of individuals
- means that a smaller proportion of people of a particular protected group can comply than the proportion of other persons;
- and cannot be justified

Discrimination Arising from Disability

Someone is treated unfavourably because of something connected to their disability and there is no good reason for doing this. It is also disability discrimination if someone does not make adjustments to allow disabled people to access a service or carry out a job. For example by providing information leaflet in Braille. This is called the duty to make reasonable adjustments.

Harassment

Harassment takes many forms. It is the unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct that creates an intimidating, hostile or humiliating environment for the recipient.

The definition of harassment according to the act is described as follows:-

- violating a person's dignity
- creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for the person

Equality Act 2010

This brings together the majority of existing equality legislation into one place so that it is easier to use.

Equality Information

The information that you hold or will collect about people with protected characteristics, and the impact of your decisions and policies on them.

Equality Objectives

A requirement to prepare, set and publish objectives is one of the specific duties set out under the equality duty.

Protected Characteristics

The public sector equality duty covers age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. It also covers marriage and civil partnerships, but not for all aspects of the duty.

