

Equality Policy

2018 - 2021

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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. The population figures have grown and we are becoming more ethnically diverse with new patterns of migration affecting our Borough.

Stafford Borough has some significant challenges in that the population is ageing, life expectancy has increased for both males and females and this is projected to continue to rise over the next few years. We need to ensure that our communities are as resilient and as sustainable as they can be, so planning for the future is very important. Our new corporate business plan has aspirations for economic growth and community wellbeing and we want to create safe, well connected, cohesive communities that encourage healthy living and support community engagement and social capital. We will capitalise on existing partnerships with health providers, community safety and the voluntary sector to deliver positive outcomes for all of our residents.

Councillor Patrick Farrington

Leader of Stafford Borough Council

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1. Why do we need an Equality Strategy?

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

2. 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.

The population of Stafford Borough is currently 131, 000 and this figure is expected to increase to approximately 142,900 by 2033 with the number of people above the age of 65 in our borough expected to increase by up to 17,500. There are approximately 58,000 households in the Borough. The average price of a house in Stafford Borough is £184,156 and there is a significantly higher proportion of owner-occupied housing and a lower proportion of social housing and privately rented housing in Stafford when compared to national proportions.

The general health of our population is important to the future prosperity of the borough. Both males and females in Stafford live for significantly longer in good health compared to the national average. Life expectancy in the district is better than the national average for both males and females. The ethnicity of the population is approximately 94% White British, which is comparable to the population of Staffordshire.

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 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 strong communities that promote health and wellbeing
- 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.

3. 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 equality and diversity. Providing good customer services is one of the main areas of focus within our corporate business plan and through this we will be able to demonstrate how we will meet the demands of our customers using the resources that we have available. The way in which our customers now access our services has changed over the last few years because of advancements in technology.

This means that consideration needs to be given to this as we are planning new service provision or making changes to existing service provision. The channels through which public services are delivered and by which the public has contact with the authority, (be that via telephone, online, in person or via other means) are a critical part of public service provision and there is an ongoing impetus for them to be managed effectively and efficiently for everyone. We want local people to feel valued by their Council, trust us and have excellent customer experiences in their dealings with us.

4. 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 main objectives that support the aim and objectives in the corporate business plan. This is demonstrated in the table below and on the next page.

Objective 1: Demonstrating organisational commitment to equalities (Links to Corporate Business Plan Objective 3)						
Ref	Action	RO	Who do we need to work with	What does this mean	Timescale	Outcome
1.1	Senior managers and staff are able to demonstrate their commitment to equality		All Service Areas and staff Elected Members	Responsibility for equalities is detailed in job descriptions Equality training planned and rolled out for all staff and elected members Equality Policy and CIA's widely available on the internet	October 2018 March 2019 September 2018	The Council is able to demonstrate the commitment to promoting a culture where equality principles are embedded in everything that we do
1.2	Services and policies are developed using community impact assessments throughout the authority	TR	All Service Areas and Staff Elected Members	CIA's undertaken for all new or revised services, contracts, policies and published on the intranet. Actions arising from CIA's incorporated into cabinet reports and provision made in all services and plans Equality principles included in all contracts and services	Ongoing Ongoing March 2019	Equality objectives are built into all high level strategic plans to ensure inclusivity and demonstrate equality in service provision

Objective 1: Demonstrating organisational commitment to equalities (Links to Corporate Business Plan Objective 3)						
Ref	Action	RO	Who do we need to work with	What does this mean	Timescale	Outcome
1.3	Ensure that workforce information includes analysis narrative and identifies gaps and plans to address the gaps	NR	Human Resources	Compliance with EHRC Assessment	Annually	Information is easier to understand and identifies plans to address gaps.

Objective 2: Encourage and facilitate the involvement of customers in shaping the design and deliver of high quality, accessible and continuously improving service (Links to Corporate Business Plan Objective 3 and Customer Access Strategy)						
Ref	Action	RO	Who do we need to work with	What does this mean?	Timescale	Outcome
2.1	Develop the authority`s response to community engagement	TR	All Residents All Service Areas Elected Members	Customer engagement strategy is formulated, agreed and implemented	October - March 2019	Processes set up to enable effective customer engagement
2.2	Use insight and customer feedback to develop the organisation, design services and tailor interventions to be responsive to needs	TR HT	Staffordshire Observatory All Residents All Service Areas Elected Members	Customer Consultation process set up and implemented A set of corporate Customer Standards is published annually.	October - March 2019	Increased levels of data collection to ensure services provided reflect local communities Better understanding and provision of services for staff and customers Customer satisfaction and value for money will be at the heart of our performance management framework within the strategy.
2.3	Customers have a greater choice of how they access our services	NR HT ARW	HR – Property Services Operations – Customer Services Law and Administration - Communications	Access Audit and DDA compliance Ensure that the Website is accessible and easy to use Services will be Digital by Design	Ongoing Ongoing March 2019	All Council assets are DDA compliant We actively promote increased take-up of digital services for all through the assisted self-serve, website, customer/business portal and mobile app.

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 6 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 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, eg 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.

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.

9. Monitoring and Review

The Scheme will be reviewed in three years time in line with the corporate business plan and will be performance managed through our scrutiny process. The action plan will be updated and reviewed on an annual basis. We aim to be as open and transparent as we can, so will conduct consultation and engagement activities on all of our major changes to service provision and major projects that we plan to do.

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 (eg 32 year olds) or a range of ages (eg 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 defined as a 'union between a man and a woman'. Same sex couples can have their relationships legally recognised as 'civil partnerships'. Civil partners must be treated the same as married couples on a wide range of legal matters.

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 (eg 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.