

Equality of Opportunity and Diversity Policy Statement



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Document summary

This policy statement sets out the County Council's commitment to equality of opportunity and diversity, as well as explaining the key principals, drivers and duties that inform this responsibility. It also explains how we measure our performance against this commitment.

Contents

Key points	3
1. Our commitments.....	3
2. Principles and drivers.....	3
3. The duty to promote equality.....	3
4. Our performance.....	4
5. Our promise	5
6. Future development of the Policy.....	6

About this document:

<p>Enquiries: HR Strategy Team Author: Personnel and Training Telephone: 01273 481194 Email: ~DBSPATHRStrategyteam@eastsussex.gov.uk</p> <p>Download this document From: http://intranet.escc.gov.uk/personnel/workin/g/payconditions/pages/az.aspx?startswith=e</p>	<p>Version number: 01 Related information:</p> <p>Promoting Diversity and Equality of Opportunity in Employment Grievance Policy and Procedure Disability Equality in Recruitment</p>
<p>Accessibility help</p> <p>Zoom in or out by holding down the CTRL key and turning the mouse wheel. CTRL and click on the table of contents to navigate. Press CTRL and Home key to return to the top of the document Press Alt-left arrow to return to your previous location. References shown in blue text are available on the Intranet and/or the Webshop. References shown in underlined blue text are hyperlinks to other parts of this document.</p>	

Equality of Opportunity and Diversity Policy Statement

Key points

- East Sussex County Council recognises the diverse needs of our community and is committed to promoting equality of opportunity and diversity in employment and service delivery.
- We will challenge discrimination and encourage respect, understanding and dignity for everyone living, working and visiting East Sussex. We will do this through our influence in the community, strategic planning and policy formation in employment and service delivery.

1. Our commitments

- 1.1. The County Council actively ensures that it complies with the current and forthcoming statutory requirements and standards, and seeks to influence and encourage our partners and contractors to meet their obligations through agreement and contractual arrangements. We will:
 - Value the talent, needs and desires of all members of the community;
 - employ principles of equity and fairness in consultation and community engagement;
 - promote good relations between all sections of society;
 - tackle institutional factors and behaviour that inhibit equality of opportunity in employment and fair service delivery.

2. Principles and drivers

- 2.1. We aim to maintain and develop a workforce with a broad range of skills and experience that match the needs and interests of our community.
- 2.2. By supporting equality of opportunity we will address unequal access to services and employment through our influence across the County. Our policies are designed to ensure that we make the most of the diverse experiences, skills and talents of everyone living and working in East Sussex.
- 2.3. We want East Sussex to be a good place to live, work and visit. In employment, we will work to ensure that everyone has equal access to opportunities and that the attributes, talents and skills of our workforce reflect those of the communities we serve.

3. The duty to promote equality

- 3.1. We recognise that we have a particular responsibility to ensure that equality is central to the development of our policies and practices in respect of race, gender, disability, religion and belief, sexuality and age. This means we will tackle discrimination, encourage understanding and promote equality of opportunity in relation to each of these strands in all aspects of our work.

3.2. Our Council Plan sets out how we will meet our public duties and includes actions and commitments relating to all areas of equality. We will regularly review our progress and annually publish equality monitoring data and analysis.

4. Our performance

- 4.1. The **Equality Framework for Local Government** – This is a key performance indicator. It is a self assessment framework for delivering equality in service delivery and employment and helps us to ensure that equality and diversity issues are embedded in and promoted through every aspect of the work we do. Our performance against the standard has been externally assessed as reaching Level 2 – ‘Achieving’. This is the second of three levels within the framework. Our target is to move steadily towards reaching Level 3 – ‘Excellent’. This is the highest level which can be attained.
- 4.2. **Representing the people of East Sussex** – Members of the Council are active in promoting equality. The Leader of the Council is lead member with responsibility for equality and diversity issues, and all Cabinet members have responsibility for ensuring that services are delivered effectively to everyone in the community. Councillors are expected by the Equality Scheme, and under the terms of the Code of Conduct for Members, to promote equality and good relations between everyone in the community.
- 4.3. A group of Assistant Directors with corporate responsibility for Performance Management oversee the development and implementation of the council’s equality agenda, providing leadership to departments and integrating equality into mainstream activity and processes. They are also responsible for ensuring scrutiny and providing corporate and departmental quality assurance of Equality Impact Assessments.
- 4.4. **Consultation Communications and monitoring** – through consultation and our contacts with the community we seek to understand how effective our services are at meeting the needs of the community, and with their support, we promote good relations between everyone in East Sussex. We encourage our partners to share, and help us to shape, our principles and policies – we expect to learn from their experience of working in the community and we will help, where we can, to develop and make them sustainable.
- 4.5. We monitor statistical information on the employment of staff and have extended this monitoring to include the collection of data in relation to sexual orientation and religion and belief. We use that information to assess the effectiveness of our equality and diversity policies and consider how to improve our performance. Statistical information is published on our website.
- 4.6. Within the Council itself we also seek the views of our staff on the experience of working for the Council – we assess comments against all equalities strands and seek to address concerns and make the most of opportunities. Accordingly we recognise the value of full and constructive engagement with the Trade Unions and we also aim to support focus groups with particular interests in equality issues.
- 4.7. **Procurement and contracts** – our influence extends to our responsibilities to ensure that organisations delivering services on our behalf, or from whom we purchase goods and services, do so in accordance with our policies. We expect all organisations with whom we have a contract to deliver services as required on policies that are compatible with ours.

4.8. **Delivering services** – the Council is a significant service provider in the County. We aim to deliver those services effectively to all members of the community on the basis of equal access in recognition of the diverse needs of different members of the community. We assess the impact of new and existing processes, strategies and policies on our residents, communities and visitors to East Sussex. One of the ways in which we do this is through conducting Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs) to ensure that equality of opportunity is central to our work and that any adverse effects on a particular group or groups are identified and addressed as required. We have developed a structured action plan to ensure that all EqIAs are conducted in a timely and prioritised way across all Council departments.

5. Our promise

- 5.1. We will be an efficient, customer focused, accountable authority, working with partners and local communities to:
- Make a positive difference to local people's lives;
 - create a prosperous and safe county;
 - provide affordable, high quality services at lowest possible council tax.
- 5.2. We set out how we are going to meet this vision in our Council Plan. We will work towards this promise in a way that benefits all and does not unreasonably, or unlawfully, disadvantage any group of people.
- 5.3. **Equality of opportunity and valuing the diversity of staff** – equality of opportunity and diversity for staff in East Sussex is supported by our [Promoting Diversity and Equality in Employment](#) policy.
- 5.4. Our staff are East Sussex County Council's most significant and valuable asset. We make the most of the potential of staff by recognising, supporting and valuing the diversity that we all bring into the workplace. We will challenge discrimination, intentional or unintentional. We have policies in place to educate staff to develop their understanding of our equalities duties and enable them to put this learning into practice. We have an Equality and Diversity E-Learning training package which is available to all new staff as part of their formal induction to employment with us. We also have policies enabling us to take disciplinary action when necessary.
- 5.5. We recognise the range of cultural experiences that we all bring into the workplace and that our beliefs and expectations about how people behave and perform are often deep seated. Those expectations influence our attitudes and behaviour and tend to become embedded within policies and working practices. We aim to identify, assess and challenge discrimination wherever it arises.
- 5.6. We aim to ensure that we meet the needs of all our staff and in turn we expect staff to work effectively, diligently and responsibly to meet the business needs of the Council.
- 5.7. We assess the impact on all staff of our terms and conditions of employment and other Personnel policies. We do this through consultation and by conducting Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs).

6. Future development of the Policy

- 6.1. Our Equality and Diversity policy is not static, it is updated and modified as new legislation and codes of practice are introduced and our understanding develops of the needs of everyone living, working and visiting East Sussex. We are aware that inequality can exist and recognise the continual need to ensure that we work hard to deliver our services fairly to all, and that we always make the most of all staff. We are committed to tackling inequality and to making steady, assessable, improvements.