

# Equality and Diversity Policy 2016

## Introduction

A clear commitment to equality runs through the Council and its services. Our corporate values and behaviours place the customer at the heart of everything we do and state that we will treat everyone with respect.

We have a good record of achievement in delivering services which benefit and are accessible to all sections of the community. We take our role as community leader seriously and recognise that we can set an example of fairness and acceptance for others in our community.

We comply with [equality legislation](#) and seek new ways to take forward the proactive expectations of our [public sector equality duties](#).

## Our district

The Epping Forest District is a mixture of rural and urban areas and stretches northward from its boundary with Greater London right into the heart of rural Essex, covering an area of 131 square miles and over 92% of this being Green Belt. The district has key issues which impact on the demand for services:

- An ageing population is placing an increasing demand on services
- We have some pockets of deprivation with poor health, unemployment and child poverty
- A higher number than average of economically inactive adults
- High house prices together with an increasing demand for homes
- Increasing numbers of homelessness and a high number of people on our housing waiting list
- Accessibility to jobs and services for some in outlying villages without private transport

## Equality through our high level 'Aims and Objectives'

These issues are the areas of focus for our highest level aims over the coming years, and therefore issues affecting our population and its health and wellbeing are at the forefront of our work. In 2015 we adopted the following 3 Corporate Aims:

1. to ensure we have enough money and other resources to fund our statutory and discretionary services whilst keeping Council Tax low
2. To publish a Local Plan which meets the needs of our communities whilst minimizing the impact on the district's Green Belt
3. To make sure our approach to the delivery of our services is modern, efficient, effective and fit for purpose.

Through these aims we will be using our land and assets to generate money to support our services and provide stimulus to the local economy. Our district requires additional homes and sustainable economic development and employment to meet the needs of local people. We will seek to achieve the right balance between the

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employment, housing and leisure needs of our residents whilst protecting the special character of our district and the Green Belt in particular. We need modern ways of working and efficient arrangements in place to support these aims. We are focusing on information technology to support our working practices allowing for more efficient use of resources.

## Our Commitment to Equality

### Short Statement

Epping Forest District Council is committed to treating everyone equally and fairly according to their needs

### Full Statement

- Epping Forest District Council is committed to ensuring that all individuals and groups are treated with respect and are valued equally
- We will endeavour to make our services accessible to everyone
- We will endeavour to eliminate unlawful discrimination through our services and employment opportunities
- We will consult and involve people from our community where appropriate in the design of our services
- We will collect information about our customers where necessary to ensure our services are accessible and that we are providing the right services
- We will endeavour to promote understanding and good relations between communities
- We will consider taking positive action to address under-representation and promote diversity in our workforce profile
- We will publish information about our equality work
- We will use our procurement opportunities to drive equality
- We will ensure appropriate resources are available to meet our statutory equality responsibilities;
- We will make sure that appropriate equality and diversity training is provided for all elected members and staff of the Council.

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## Responsibilities

We have a clear structure to deliver equality and diversity throughout the Council:

- *Executive responsibility* for equality lies with the Governance and Development Management Portfolio Holder, whilst operational responsibility for equality lies with the Director of Governance. Together they ensure that the Council complies with all aspects of equality legislation.
- The *strategic direction* for equality and *monitoring* of strategic equality work, lies with the Council's Management Board of senior managers.
- *Day to day responsibility* for compliance with this policy lies with Service Directors who ensure equality is delivered throughout their services.
- *Day to day responsibility for the implementation of this policy* lies with service managers.
- *All officers and members* have a responsibility for ensuring that they act within the requirements and spirit of equality legislation, with also within the requirements of Council policies relating to equality.
- *The coordination* of the Council's equality work is undertaken by an officer group of representatives from across the Council's services. This group of *equality champions* is called the Corporate Equality Working Group.
- *Scrutiny of equality work* is undertaken by an elected members group called the Governance Select Committee routinely every 6 months, and additionally whenever necessary.

## Our equality objectives

We plan and organise our work to progress the public sector equality duty through the identification and development of equality objectives. In April 2016 we adopted a new set of equality objectives to take us through to March 2020. These objectives build on the work achieved through our previous set of equality objectives during 2012 to 2016, and extend the scope of activities into our work with our partners, and our procurement and commissioning activities. They are challenging, address our dual role as service provider and employer and are designed to bring about real benefit for service users.

Our equality objectives for 2016 - 2020 are:

1. To integrate the Council's public sector equality duty into our partnership working
2. To apply robust equality requirements in commissioning, procurement and contract management

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3. To develop our capacity so that our employees have the knowledge, skills and confidence to deliver our plans
4. To improve and develop equality in our business activities

Work to deliver these objectives is progressed through an action plan [link] identifying timescales and responsibilities. A report of our progress is published on the Council's website bi-annually after appropriate monitoring and scrutiny processes have concluded.

## Knowing our customers

It is important that we understand who our customers are and what they need from us. We carry out an extensive range of [consultations and surveys](#) on our activities and services every year. We also use research, surveys and consultations undertaken by partner organisations and have an equality information sharing protocol in place to manage this process.

We must also understand how the work we do impacts upon people. To develop this understanding we undertake equality analysis on our services and activities. If activities relevant to equality undergo significant change we analyse them to ensure we understand the impact of those changes. Similarly if new activities are developed we analyse them at key stages of their development. We publish our evidence based analysis reports on our [website](#).

## Equality monitoring

We will only collect information about our customers where that information is needed to improve services or to help determine whether our services are reaching the right people. We have an [Equality Monitoring policy](#) and a [Data Quality Strategy](#) in place and comply with the Data Protection Act 1998.

## Equality in decision making

For equality to be implemented at all stages of our work we must take equality into consideration when making decisions about our services. We pay due regard to the aims of the public sector equality duty when decisions are made at Executive level by our Cabinet, Full Council, and Portfolio Holders, and we are developing a formal process for our licencing and planning committees. Relevant equality information is generated via the evidenced based equality analysis process, and either forms part of the report or is accessible to members of relevant committees and who are informed as to its location.

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## Equality information

We publish information annually to show the progress we've made to deliver the aims of the public sector equality duty. In July every year we publish a [report](#) on our website setting out the work undertaken within the previous 12 months.

## Training and understanding equality

It is important that our staff and elected members have appropriate training in equality and diversity to enable them to implement relevant legislation and the Council's policies and procedures, and respond appropriately in all circumstances.

An e-learning equality programme is mandatory for all staff, whilst front line staff and staff without supervisory responsibilities have additional training to understand relevant concepts including fairness, prejudice and stereotyping. Training for managers includes managing a diverse workforce and institutional discrimination.

Equality training is provided to elected members annually and includes understanding the public sector equality duty and equality in decision making.

## Reporting equality complaints or concerns

**For staff:** The Council is committed to creating a working environment where employees do not suffer harassment, bullying or intimidation on any grounds from colleagues or members of the public. Complaints of harassment or bullying will be taken seriously and as far as possible managed speedily and confidentially.

Concerns about inappropriate behaviour should be addressed to Human Resources and are managed through the Dignity at Work Policy and associated Human Resources policies.

**For customers:** We understand things can sometimes go wrong with the way we provide our services. Any concerns about equality relating to our services should be addressed to [ContactUs@eppingforestdc.gov.uk](mailto:ContactUs@eppingforestdc.gov.uk)

More information about equality at the Council can be obtained by emailing [equality@eppingforestdc.gov.uk](mailto:equality@eppingforestdc.gov.uk)

## Policy review

This policy will be reviewed in 3 years (2019) or sooner if significant changes are made to equality legislation or we alter the ways we address our public sector equality duty.