

# **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy**

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## Background and purpose

As a Council, we are committed to challenging discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity in all aspects of our work. Our approach to Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) outlines our commitment as an employer, as a service provider, and as a community leader.

The Council is committed to promoting a community and organisational culture that fully respects and values everyone's differences and needs. We aim to look at an individual's whole identity whilst recognising and valuing that each individual resident, visitor, partner, service provider, service user and employee is unique.

The purpose of this policy is to set out the Council's commitment to EDI, who is responsible for EDI, how we consider EDI in what we do and how we will monitor our progress and the effectiveness of our approach.

### Legal background

The Equality Act 2010 brought together over 116 separate pieces of legislation into one single Act that provides a legal framework to protect the rights of individuals and advance equality of opportunity for all.

The Council has a legal duty under the Equality Act 2010 to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

These are sometimes referred to as the three aims or arms of the general equality duty. The Act explains that having due regard for advancing equality involves:

- Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics.
- Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people.
- Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.

The equality duty covers nine protected characteristics:

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

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) is supported by "specific duties" to assist public bodies to achieve the aims of the general duty. Under these specific duties, the Council must:

- Publish equalities information to demonstrate its compliance with the Equality Duty (by 31st January each year); and
- Develop and publish equality objectives (at least every 4 years).

In addition equality issues must influence the decisions reached by public bodies - in how they act as employers; how they develop, evaluate and review policy; how they design, deliver and evaluate services, and how they commission and procure from others.

## Our Equality Objectives

Since our first equality objectives were published in April 2012 the Council has based them on the strategic objectives set out in our Council Plan. By doing this the Council demonstrates that equality and diversity is a core part of what we do as an organisation and not an add on activity. The Council's vision is made up of 6 priorities and these are also our equality objectives. As set out in our Council Plan 2021/22 – 2023/24 our vision is that:

Hartlepool will be a place...

... where people are enabled to live healthy, independent and prosperous lives.

... where those who are vulnerable will be safe and protected from harm.

... of resilient and resourceful communities with opportunities for all.

... that is sustainable, clean, safe and green.

... that has an inclusive and growing economy.

... with a Council that is ambitious, fit for purpose and reflects the diversity of its community.

# Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy Statement

Hartlepool Borough Council is committed to promoting a community and organisational culture that fully respects and values everyone's differences and needs. Equality, diversity and inclusion is integral to our core business, our staff and our service users.

In working towards our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion we will:

- Work towards providing services which meet the needs of all sections of our communities.
- Ensure that respect and dignity is valued as a core principle for all.
- Promote equality, fair treatment and equal access to our services and those services commissioned by us.
- Provide straight forward, easily accessible information about our services.
- Offer a range of translation and interpretation services for those whose first language is not English and also provide information in other accessible formats on request.
- Actively seek the views of our customers and communities across Hartlepool and allow a reasonable timescale for consultations.
- Consider the comments, compliments and complaints we receive and how we can use them to improve services.
- Assess and monitor the impact on equality groups of new policies and plans and changes to existing policies and plans.
- Publish annual reports that outline how we are meeting our Public Sector Equality Duty.
- Strive for a workforce that understands and reflects the diversity of the population of Hartlepool.

## Responsibility for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion is the responsibility of every Councillor and every employee of the Council, as well as volunteers and any other person or organisation who provides services on behalf of the Council. This includes our contractual and commissioning arrangements.

Our customers also have a responsibility to treat our staff with dignity and respect, and to tell us if they require assistance or adjustments to enable them to access our services. We will do what we can to remove barriers to access.

Overall responsibility for ensuring that our decisions are compliant with equality legislation lies with the Council's Managing Director, who is supported by the Executive Leadership Team and their Departmental Management Teams. We will follow a robust process to ensure we consciously think about the equality duty as part of our decision-making process. We will include a tackling inequalities and poverty section and detailed Impact Assessments in our reports to Council Committees to ensure that elected members can make informed decisions.

## How we consider Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

We are clear that EDI should influence how we act as an employer; how we develop, evaluate and review our policies; how we design, deliver and evaluate services, and how we commission and procure from others. Impact Assessments form an integral part of our decision making process and reports to Council and all Council Committees must demonstrate how EDI has been considered in the proposals being brought forward so that Elected Members can make informed decisions. Our procurement and commissioning activities also require consideration of EDI as a matter of routine.

In addition to the nine protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act our approach to EDI will also give consideration to those who are care leavers and the Armed Forces Community (as established in our Armed Forces Covenant). We will also consider inequality related to poverty and disadvantage recognising that this relates to individuals as well as children

and families. We will develop a single impact assessment process for EDI by bringing together the existing Equality Impact Assessment and the Child and Family Poverty Impact Assessment.

As a Council we take all complaints seriously and they are responded to following the Council's agreed Corporate Complaints, Comments and Compliments Procedure. The outcome of complaint investigations and lessons learned from complaints are actioned and monitored. Any complaints relating to equality characteristics are considered by senior managers.

We are also keen to understand the views of our local community and to involve them in shaping our services through our consultation and engagement activities. We recognise that some people may have difficulties accessing traditional consultations and we endeavour to be as open and inclusive as possible. Where individuals face barriers to being involved we are keen to work with them to identify alternative methods for engagement or provide additional support to enable them to be involved e.g. sign language interpreters or easy read formats of documents. The information collected through consultation helps to inform the Council when it is thinking about things like changing services, checking on how well services are performing and deciding what should be the Council's priorities in the future. People can access consultations through the Council's [Your Say, Our Future site](#).

EDI will be considered in all Council policies including those within our Budget and Policy Framework.

## Monitoring Progress

So that we can find out if our approach to EDI is working we will assess and monitor our progress. Each year we will produce the following reports:

- Equality Report which will focus on demonstrating the Council's progress made in EDI as a service provider and community leader during the year; and
- Workforce Equality Report which will provide a summary and analysis of our workforce and demonstrate the activities that we have completed to fulfil our responsibilities as an employer.

Both reports will include a set of actions that will be prioritised in the following year to ensure that the Council continues to improve its approach to EDI.



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