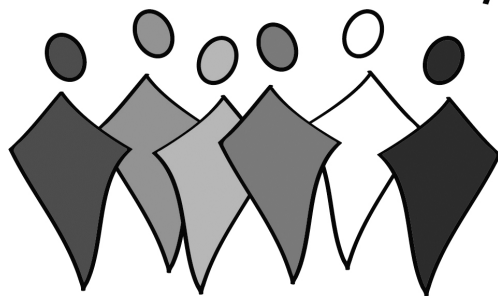


Valuing Diversity



Promoting Equality

**Comprehensive Equality Policy
2007-2010**



Comprehensive Equality Policy 2007-2010

Introduction

Sevenoaks District Council believes that diversity is a strength. We are committed to eliminating discrimination on the grounds of race, disability, gender, age, religion and belief and sexual orientation.

This policy, together with our Comprehensive Equality Scheme sets out how the Council will eliminate discrimination and promote equality in our roles as community leader, service provider, employer and purchaser of goods and services.

As a community leader the District Council is uniquely placed to lead by example, promoting equality, valuing diversity and combating unfair treatment. The District Council will:

- Work in partnership to improve the quality of life for all who live, work and enjoy leisure time in the District;
- Develop safe and caring communities, in line with our priorities;
- Treat all people with dignity and respect;
- Seek to eliminate discrimination and promote community cohesion and social inclusion;
- Encourage and support people to exercise their democratic rights;
- Listen to and respond to the views of our communities through public consultation and participation; and
- Maintain our commitment to equality when working with our partners and contractors.

As a service provider the District Council believes that all our customers have a right to expect and receive high quality services that are appropriate and relevant to their needs. In order to ensure that services are independently accessible, the District Council will be proactive in considering what barriers may exist to users and seek to eliminate those barriers. The District Council will:

- Continuously strive to improve customer service and satisfaction;
- ensure that our services (including those delivered on our behalf) are equally accessible to all residents and customers; and
- Work with partners in consulting with all sections of the community on service needs and provision.

As an employer the District Council is committed to the establishment, maintenance and promotion of equal opportunities for all of its employees. The District Council will:

- Employ a workforce that reflects the community we serve;
- Provide fair and independent access to learning and development opportunities;
- Encourage all staff to develop and fulfil their potential;
- Provide a safe, accepting, respectful and independently accessible working environment; and
- Provide fair and transparent pay and reward systems.

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Why have a policy?

Discrimination and inequality still occur in our society and it is important to find ways to tackle discrimination and promote equality. Exclusion from opportunities not only disadvantages those who experience discrimination and harassment but also deprives the wider community of the full contribution of their talents and energies. The District Council recognises that empowering people to contribute positively to the community enriches that community.

Among those groups most at risk of social inclusion are children and young people, ethnic minorities, disabled people and older people. By eliminating discrimination and promoting equal opportunity for these groups, the Council will develop safer, stronger and more inclusive communities.

How will we deliver the policy?

We will:

- Test all our key policies, strategies, projects and initiatives against this policy to ensure that we are upholding its principles through assessment, consultation, monitoring, scrutiny and audit;
- Champion and promote good practice;
- Identify and eradicate any poor practice;
- Not tolerate inappropriate or offensive language or behaviour from or to our Councillors, staff and customers;
- Provide training and development opportunities for all our staff and Councillors to ensure that they are equipped with the skills to provide services appropriately and respond positively to a diverse range of needs and include the policy in the staff handbook;
- Monitor recruitment processes to ensure that they are fair;
- Monitor take up of and evaluate services to identify and remove any practices which discriminate against or exclude people; and
- Deal with breaches of the policy through the District Council Complaints procedure, the staff Bullying and Harassment Procedure and the Code of Conduct for Councillors.
- Work with our partners and our own employees to ensure this policy is implemented.

The District Council is developing a Comprehensive Equality Scheme that outlines the District Council's plans for promoting fair treatment and equal and independent access to services and employment opportunities for everyone. The scheme will include detailed action plans of how we will strive to eliminate discrimination and promote equality in relation to race, disability, gender, age, religion/belief and sexual orientation.

Key Targets and Initiatives

In line with Government guidance, the District Council has adopted the Equality Standard for Local Government which provides a framework to help local authorities introduce a comprehensive and systematic approach to dealing with equality issues. We will publish a Corporate Equality Plan

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showing how we will work towards the levels of achievement set out in the Equality Standard for Local Government by monitoring ourselves and demonstrating measured outcomes.

The District Council will be developing its Comprehensive Equality Scheme in stages:

- The scheme, including action plans for race and disability will be published, and implementation will start, in April 2007
- An action plan for gender and our Corporate Equality Plan will be published in draft format for consultation in April 2007 and implementation will commence in July 2007
- Action plans for age, religion/belief and sexual orientation will be produced later in 2007.

Responsibilities & Resources

The elected District Council Members, acting through Full Council have overall responsibility for this policy. The policy will be championed by the Portfolio Holder for Safe Communities.

The Head of Policy and Performance, acting on their behalf, has overall responsibility for its implementation.

Line managers will ensure that areas under their control are run in accordance with the principles set out in this policy. Each member of staff and each District Councillor has responsibility to read, understand and implement this policy and to take responsibility for their own behaviour.

Equality in Practice

Some examples of what the District Council does already:

- The District Council subscribes to a Language Line which provides a phone line interpretation service for customers who do not speak English or for whom English is not their first language;
- Surveys have been carried out with Gypsies and Travellers to identify sites across the district and ensure they are sufficient to meet their needs;
- The District Council has special equipment enabling deaf, deafened, hard of hearing and speech impaired customers to communicate by telephone with the District Council;
- A back door collection service of refuse and recycling is provided to residents with disabilities;
- Separate toilet cubicles are provided at public conveniences specifically designed for people with disabilities accessed via the RADAR national key scheme;
- A minibus service is provided for elderly residents who cannot readily access public transport. This is undertaken in conjunction with age concern and provides trips for shopping, luncheon clubs, day centres and days out.

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Legislation and Guidance

The District Council complies with both the letter and the spirit of EU and UK legislation against discrimination, including:

Disability Discrimination Acts 1995 and 2005
Human Rights Act 1998
Race Relations Act 1976
Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000
Sex Discrimination Act 1975
Sex Discrimination Act (Gender Reassignment) Regulations 1999
Equal Pay Act 1970
Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003
Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003
Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006
The Protection from Harassment Act 1997
Equality Act (2006)
European Regulations and Directives on race and equal treatment in employment
Codes of practice

Racial and homophobic incidents

Sevenoaks District Council jointly funds, with most Kent districts, two freephone reporting lines, one for racial incidents and one for homophobic or transphobic incidents. The two lines are manned 24 hours a day, seven days a week by trained staff from Lifeline, which is based in Shepway.

The telephone numbers for the two lines are:

- Kent Racial Incident Reporting Line 0800 138 1624
- Kent Homophobic Incident Reporting Line 0800 328 9162