



**Comprehensive Equality Scheme
2007-2010**

Overview



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Contents

	Page number
1. Welcome	3
2. Introduction	4
3. Our Priorities & Strategies	4
4. Legal Responsibilities	5
5. How the scheme will be developed	7
6. Corporate Equality Plan (to be added)	

Comprehensive Equality Scheme 2007-2010

Welcome

Welcome to Sevenoaks District Council's first Comprehensive Equality Scheme. This scheme, together with our Comprehensive Equality Policy, sets out how the District Council will eliminate discrimination and promote equality in our roles as community leader, service provider, employer and purchaser of goods and services.

By promoting equality, valuing diversity and combating unfair treatment of people based on their race, disability, gender, age, religion/belief or sexual orientation, we aim to improve the quality of life for people who live in, work in and visit the District. This scheme contributes to our commitment to developing safe and caring communities. As well as complying with our legal duties, we have set out actions that will make lasting, positive changes to the lives of people in the District.

In our first three-year scheme, we aim to build on what we know about the characteristics of people who live in the District and the discrimination some may face. This scheme will, therefore, start the process of integrating equality issues into all our policies, service planning arrangements and performance management frameworks. Every member of our staff has a responsibility to apply our equality aims to their daily work. As the scheme develops and our knowledge grows, we will be able to put more actions in place to tackle discrimination.

We are keen to ensure that this scheme is owned by and reflects the changing needs of people who live in, work in, and visit the District. With continued involvement from stakeholders, partners and staff, we can assess ourselves to see if we are meeting the needs of local communities and achieving our aims. To ensure that everyone can monitor our progress, the results of our assessments will be made available to the public annually.

We welcome comments and suggestions throughout the development of the scheme. Details of how to contact us are on the back cover.

Cllr Keith Loney

Portfolio Holder for Safe Communities

Introduction

What is a Comprehensive Equality Scheme?

The scheme supplements our Comprehensive Equality Policy, which sets out our commitments as a community leader, service provider, employer and purchaser of goods and services.

This document sets out Sevenoaks District Council's plans for promoting equality, and countering disadvantage or discrimination and, as guided by government, is divided into the following equality themes:

- Race
- Disability
- Gender
- Age
- Religion/Belief
- Sexual Orientation

This scheme is centred on putting robust action plans in place showing how we will take steps to ensure people are treated fairly. Within each theme, you will find details of our legal responsibilities, statistics for the District (where available) and a detailed action plan.

Community Plan – Making It Happen – Together

The District's **Community Plan**, 'Making it happen – together', is a long-term strategic document developed by District and local partnership groups, which sets the vision for the future of the District and underpins the Council's work.

One of the central aims of the Community Plan is encouraging inclusive communities. Furthermore the Partnership recognises that we must address inequalities in terms of aspirations, opportunities and outcomes for all parts of our community. This scheme works towards the aspirations in our Community Plan.

Our Priorities & Strategies

The Comprehensive Equality Scheme will support and supplement the District Council's corporate priorities set out in our Community Strategy and Corporate Performance Plan, which are:

- **Safe and caring communities** – a District where people can feel safe and where people can be supported to lead independent and fulfilling lives
- **Green and healthy environment** – a District where people can enjoy high quality rural and urban environments, have healthy lifestyles and receive good support when then need it
- **Dynamic and sustainable economy** – a District where people can live, work and have fair and equal access to travel to and from their destination, where businesses can thrive and are able to utilise the skills of local people

Comprehensive Equality Scheme 2007-2010

- **Effective management of Council resources** – a District Council that is open and honest in its decision making, prudent in its financial management and offers value for money for the services it provides

The Comprehensive Equality Scheme will support and supplement the District Council's corporate priorities. It will help us to ensure that we focus more on the outcomes that matter to the community and people who use our services; and that our services are more accessible and delivered effectively.

As the scheme develops, it will also influence and complement other corporate strategies and policies.

The District Council's **Social Inclusion Framework** recognises that, among those groups most at risk of social exclusion are older people, minority ethnic groups, people with disabilities and children and young people. The framework has a series of guiding principles to ensure that consideration is given for all residents to have appropriate access to information, services and benefits; these are that:

- All residents are entitled to equal access to services;
- District Council officers should take reasonable actions to ensure that no individuals or groups are discriminated against in the provision of information, services and benefits; and
- The District Council is committed to positive action, in partnership with other agencies, to help reduce the number of residents that are at risk of becoming, or who are, socially excluded.

The development of this Comprehensive Equality Scheme will involve and promote equality for those groups most at risk from social exclusion and will incorporate all aspects of our Social Inclusion Framework.

Legal Responsibilities

The District Council must comply with its legal responsibilities in respect of race and disability equality. In developing this scheme, the District Council has applied the principles of these responsibilities across all equality themes. In summary, the District Council's legal responsibilities for the development of equality schemes in relation to race and disability are:

Race

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 requires local authorities to set out those 'functions' and 'policies' that are relevant to race equality and to monitor their employment procedures and practices. The Act places specific duties on the District Council to:

- Assess and consult on the likely impact of our policies or proposed policies;
- Monitor our policies for any adverse impact;
- Publish results of assessments and consultation;
- Ensure public access to information and services;
- Train staff in connection with the duties imposed by the Act; and

Comprehensive Equality Scheme 2007-2010

- Review the relevance of our functions and policies to race equality every three years.

Disability

The Disability Discrimination Act (2005) requires the District Council to:

- Involve people with disabilities in the development of the scheme;
- State our methods for assessing the impact of our policies and practices, or the likely impact of our proposed policies and practices, on equality for disabled persons;
- Provide an action plan to show how we will meet our duties imposed by the Act;
- State our arrangements for gathering information in relation to employment and delivery of functions;
- State our arrangements for putting the information gathered to use, in particular in reviewing the effectiveness of our action plan and in preparing subsequent schemes; and
- Within three years of the scheme being published, take the steps set out in our action plan and publish a report containing a summary of steps taken under the action plan, the results of our information gathering and the use to which we have put the information.

The District Council must also comply with legislation relating to gender, age, religion/belief and sexual orientation. More information about our specific legal responsibilities for these equality themes will be published in 2007.

How the scheme will be developed

Relevant Functions and Policies

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 places a general duty on the District Council to:

- Eliminate unlawful racial discrimination;
- Promote equality of opportunity; and
- Promote good relations between people of different racial groups.

The District Council has considered this duty across all equality themes. We have, therefore, checked our functions and policies to see how relevant they are to eliminating discrimination, promoting equal opportunity and promoting good relations for members of the public and our employees. We have checked our full range of duties and powers (including statutory and non-statutory) and internal and external functions. We have also checked our District Council policy documents, which set out the basis for making future decisions.

Equality Impact Assessments

Those functions and policies that have been checked and identified as relevant to promoting equality, will be assessed to find out whether they take into account the different needs and experiences of people in relation to their

Comprehensive Equality Scheme 2007-2010

race, disability, gender, age, religion/belief and sexual orientation. This process is known as Equality Impact Assessment. These assessments will help us to take account of different needs and experiences and to identify and respond to actual and possible differences. As well as assessing our existing functions and policies, all new policies will be subject to the process.

Consultation and Involvement

The scheme and the individual action plans for each equality strand have been developed in consultation with the public, voluntary and community organisations and our own employees. Further consultations will take place as part of the Equality Impact Assessment process, once the scheme is established.

Monitoring and Reviewing

This scheme and progress against the action plans will be monitored and reported on annually. The action plan outcomes will be available on the District Council's website (www.sevenoaks.gov.uk) and in other formats. We will also publish the results of our Equality Impact Assessments annually.

The scheme and action plans will be reviewed and revised every three years.

Performance Management

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. The Equality Standard for Local Government sets out five levels of achievement:

- Level 1: commitment to a Comprehensive Equality Policy
- Level 2: assessment and consultation
- Level 3: setting equality objectives and targets
- Level 4: information systems and monitoring against targets
- Level 5: achieving and reviewing outcomes

Our Corporate Equality Plan shows how we will work towards these levels of achievement by monitoring ourselves against targets and by demonstrating measured outcomes.

Training

We will ensure that our staff and District Councillors receive appropriate training. We will develop a training programme, which will reflect our duty to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and promote good relations. This will include awareness training focusing on the legislation and our responsibilities in relation to each of the equality themes. Staff from each of the District Council services will also be trained on how to carry out impact assessments.

Comprehensive Equality Scheme 2007-2010

Integrating Equality

Our first Comprehensive Equality Scheme will start the process of mainstreaming equality issues by:

- Integrating equality issues into all our key policies, service planning arrangements and performance management framework;
- Ensuring that the District's Community Plan and our Corporate Priorities contribute towards this scheme;
- Ensuring that arrangements are in place to monitor and report on our progress against our action plans as well as our progress on integrating equality issues; and
- Ensuring that we engage effectively with stakeholders and local communities in developing and monitoring the scheme.

The Council's Corporate Equality Plan shows the steps we will take to achieve these aims.