

Equality of Opportunity and Diversity Policy Statement

1. 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.
2. We will challenge unlawful 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.

Our Commitments

3. The 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

Principles and drivers

4. 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.
5. In supporting equality of opportunity and fair access 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.
6. 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 we attract people to work for us who have other needs and desires such as: working parents; carers; community workers; people studying or wanting to expand their experiences outside work.

The duty to promote equality

7. Under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 (RR(A)A) we have a duty to promote race equality. This means we must tackle unlawful racial discrimination, improve equal opportunities, and encourage good race relations in all aspects of our work.

8. Equality for all - our Equality Scheme sets out how we will meet the duties with respect to race. Importantly, it explicitly extends the scope of our commitment to all people covered by current and anticipated equality legislation - that scope includes:

- race
- gender - including transgender
- disability
- sexual orientation
- religion or belief
- age

9. We have published on our web-site a sample of initiatives started since the Scheme was introduced in 2002. We will revise the Scheme annually with a full review every three years.

Our Performance

10. Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) - our performance is assessed against a range of equality and diversity related BVPIs. We aim to improve our performance against these to ensure that we continue to follow, and further to develop, good practice.

Equality Standard

11. The Equality Standard is a key performance indicator. It is a framework for delivering equality in service delivery and employment. We have assessed our performance against the Standard as being at Level 2 and we aim to move steadily up through the levels. Through the Standard we ensure that equality and diversity issues are promoted through every aspect of our work.

12. 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.

13. We have appointed a Corporate Equality and Diversity Manager in our Chief Executive's Department, Equality Officers in our Social Services Department and an Equalities Advisor in our Education and Libraries Department. In our Corporate Resources and Transport and Environment Departments the management and promotion of equality and diversity is the responsibility of named managers.

14. Through the Corporate Equality Group these officers, together with officers in Personnel and Training and Communications develop and refine the policy and its application across the County. The Group reports to the

Chief Officer Management Team, Cabinet and the full Council. The Group provides good practice advice in terms of service delivery and employment.

15. 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 to 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.

16. The RR(A)A, and a number of BVPIs require monitoring of statistical information on the employment of staff. 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 web-site.

17. Within the Council itself we also seek the views of our staff on the experience of working for the Council - we assess comments by race, gender and disability and seek to address concerns and make the most of opportunities. Accordingly we recognise the value of full and constructive engagement with the Trades Unions and we also aim to support focus groups with particular interests in equality issues.

18. Procurement and contracts - our influence extends to our responsibilities to ensure that organisations that deliver 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 an equal and fair basis and to have, and implement, equality and diversity policies that are compatible with ours.

19. 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.

20. Our priorities are to:

- continue to improve services to older people
- minimise council tax rises by focusing on core services
- raise the economic performance of East Sussex
- further reduce crime and the fear of crime
- provide safer and better maintained roads and repair street lights
- support teachers in continuing to raise standards in our schools
- promote active local people.

21. We will work towards these priorities in a way that benefits all and does not unreasonably, or unlawfully, disadvantage any group of people.

22. 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.

23. 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 direct discrimination, intentional or unintentional, and have policies in place both to educate staff to develop their understanding of our policies and how to put them into practice, as well as to take disciplinary action when necessary.

24. 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 - for example about, men and women, black or white, disabled or non-disabled. Those expectations influence our attitudes and behaviour and tend to become embedded within policies and working practices. Institutional discrimination occurs where those expectations, policies and practices offer advantages to some or where they disadvantage others. We aim to identify, assess and address institutional discrimination.

25. 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. We assess the impact on all staff of our terms and conditions of employment and other Personnel policies - for example, in 2005/06 we will undertake an equal pay audit.

Future Development of the Policy

26. 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 does exist and that more needs to be done to ensure that we always deliver our services fairly to all, and that we always make the most of all staff. We are committed to tackling these issues and to making steady, assessable, improvements.