
Comprehensive Diversity and Equality Policy

Policy

This policy is for all officers and Elected Members in all their activities on behalf of Essex County Council.

Essex is an area enriched by the many diverse communities within it. Essex County Council values the communities it serves and will help develop strong, inclusive communities, free from unlawful discrimination. We are committed to enabling all Essex residents to achieve their potential by removing barriers that prevent fair access to services, to participation in public life, and to employment with the Council itself. We will do this to promote the well-being of our citizens and improve the quality of the services we provide to our community.

This policy sets out our responsibility to ensure that these principles underpin our community leadership, the services we commission and provide, and how we recruit and manage our staff.

The agreed outcomes for this policy can be found on page 2.

Policy agreed by Members on 22nd January 2008

Policy effective from 29th January 2008

Policy updated on 10th October 2011

Policy review due by December 2012

Agreed Outcomes

Essex County Council will uphold our public duty to promote equality of opportunity. No member of the public, service user, elected member, employee, volunteer, agency worker, contractor or staff working with partner organisations will be unlawfully discriminated against because of

- race,
- gender,
- gender reassignment
- pregnancy and maternity
- disability (including mental ill health),
- religion or belief,
- sexual orientation,
- age, or
- marriage and civil partnership.

Essex County Council achieved Level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government in November 2008, and continues to work towards achieving 'Excellent' within the Equality Framework for Local Government in 2012 .

The County Council, its elected members and its officers will work to:

- recognise and take account of people's differences
- eliminate unlawful discrimination
- eliminate harassment
- encourage good relations between different groups in the community
- promote inclusion and equality of opportunity.

All employees, commissioned services, contractors, partners and elected members are responsible for the promotion and delivery of this policy.

The approach that will be adopted to implement this policy is detailed in appendix 1, 1.1.and 1.2

Approach

To deliver this policy in the undertaking of all Essex County Council activities including the delivery of services, all employees, commissioned services, contractors, partners, elected members, and employees will be responsible for operating in the following way:

- Engage with, listen to, and respond to the views of our local communities when developing and providing services, including citizens' panels, surveys and forums;
- Treat members of the public, customers and colleagues with respect and dignity, providing support and recognition, and promoting access and fair treatment;
- Recognise that treating people fairly sometimes means treating people differently, in order to remove disadvantage in accessing services or employment – examples of this may include providing tailored services as appropriate, and making reasonable adjustments for disabled customers or employees;
- Work to ensure all public council buildings and open spaces are fully accessible, through a prioritised programme of works. We recognise our responsibility under the Equality Act to take reasonable steps to provide and adapt buildings and facilities, and will provide alternative access to services while we are working towards this;
- Provide information in a variety of formats and methods, including other languages, where required, to meet customer and employee needs;
- Ensure contractors, staff and organisations working in partnership with the council uphold the principles stated in this policy, working with them to support them in achieving this;
- All contractual arrangements engaged in by the authority will reflect the equality principles contained within this policy;
- Ensure equality and diversity is a key component of all our partnerships;
- Not tolerate any form of harassment, bullying or victimisation and will take action through appropriate channels where it occurs.

Essex County Council aims to employ a workforce that is representative of the communities it serves. Whilst monitoring progress, it will work to identify and remove barriers to employment. Our action Plan identifies ways we will work towards this.

Essex County Council will continue working with Trade Unions to improve its approach to equal pay, ensuring pay systems are fair and transparent, and identify and address any unfair, unjust or unlawful pay practices.

The Equality and Diversity Governance Structure, and Roles and Responsibilities of all officers and elected members are detailed in Appendix 1.1.

Meeting the Equality Framework for Local Government

In order to embed good practice in all we do, the Council is committed to implementing the Equality Framework for Local Government as a standard for planning and action. The Equality Framework for Local Government Actions and Targets are detailed in Appendix 1.2.

Cross references to other policies

This policy will impact on how all current policies held by Essex County Council are implemented and in addition how future policies will be formulated. The Equality Framework for Local Government requires an equality impact assessment (analysis) to be undertaken during the formulation or review of all policies.

Roles and Responsibilities

All staff	All take individual responsibility for ensuring all actions and behaviours are aligned to the approach above in order to deliver accessible and inclusive services, and contribute to improving what we do through input to the Equality Impact Assessment process (analysis), as required.
Equality and Diversity Function	The Head of Diversity of Diversity and Equality will lead in the strategic achievement of diversity & equality objectives and targets and the Local Government Equality Framework principles and lead by example, building confidence and challenging directorates to achieve their equality goals.
All Directors and Senior Managers	<p>All Directors and members of their Management Teams take responsibility for ensuring that the outcomes contained in this policy and the targets and objectives detailed in the Comprehensive Policy and the Equality Framework for Local Government underpins all service planning and delivery.</p> <p>They will also ensure the 3 year rolling programme of Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) within their Directorate is delivered, including EIAs for all new or modified services, contracts, processes and functions.</p>
Directorate Steering Groups	The steering groups identify equality priorities for their directorates and promote and support the delivery of the programme reporting to their directorate management teams. The groups also monitor progress against their directorate equality impact assessment programme.

Corporate Equality Group Chaired by the Head of Diversity and Equality this groups provides a forum for the Chairs of steering groups to share best practice and help drive the Council's equality agenda, reporting to the Corporate Diversity and Equality Board biannually.

Corporate Equality and Diversity Board The Board's role is decision making: e.g. direction of travel, key policies and documents; Assist in the removal of blocks if necessary; and support embedding of principals within directorates. The reports regularly to CLT and Cabinet on specific issues and progress.

Executive Director of Adult Health and Community Wellbeing The Executive Director is responsible for driving the implementation of this policy across the County Council as the Corporate Leadership Team's lead Director

Elected Members Members will ensure all scrutiny activities include consideration of the diverse communities, including the 9 groups often discriminated against listed above.

Lead Members for Diversity and equality These Members will manage the delivery of this policy and its outcomes across the political spectrum within the County Council

Equality and Diversity Scrutiny Panel The panel will provide confirmation that our progress is making a real difference. It will include members of the public, representatives of community and stakeholder groups, officers and elected members.

Leader of the Council The leader's responsibility is to set direction and policy, and to ensure that the Council operates and delivers its services in ways that will deliver the outcomes of this policy

Appendix 1.2

The Equality Framework for Local Government Actions and Targets

An 'excellent' authority has the following characteristics:

- Councillors and officers have a reputation for championing equality issues and ensure that the equality issues relevant to their communities are embedded in their sustainable community strategy, strategic plans, local area agreements (LAAs) and local delivery plans.
- It works with all strategic partners and the voluntary and community sector, acting as an advocate to achieve defined equality outcomes.
- It has good evidence of the equalities profile of the community based on national and local data that is regularly reviewed.
- It is measuring progress on equality outcomes, is able to disaggregate data on relevant performance indicators and can demonstrate real outcomes that have improved equality in services and employment.
- It identifies the changing nature of its communities and their expectations and then prioritises its activities and explains its decisions.
- It provides good customer care by ensuring that services are provided by knowledgeable and well-trained staff who understand the needs of their communities.
- It has improving satisfaction and perception indicators from all sections of the community and staff.
- Equality groups are integrally involved in community engagement programmes.
- There are forums for all equality stakeholders to share experiences and evaluate the authority's progress.
- All parts of the authority can show tangible progress towards achieving outcomes which address persistent inequalities and narrow the gaps.
- It has implemented action for equal pay outcomes and demonstrates progress on under-representation, flexible working, access to training and development. It promotes an inclusive working culture based on respect.
- It reviews its equality strategy and public duty equality schemes every three years and seeks innovative improvement challenges.
- Through its achievements, it is an exemplar of good practice for other local authorities and agencies and works with others to share best practice.