

## **Equality and Diversity Policy**

### **Introduction**

This policy sets out Solihull Council's overarching commitment to equality and diversity.

'Closing the gap of inequality' is one of our key aims and ambitions for Solihull. It reflects our commitment to providing services that are driven by people's needs and choices and grows from our recognition of the benefits, opportunities and challenges that our increasingly diverse community brings. It is also evidence of our central commitment to promoting equality of opportunity for our employees.

The borough's increasingly diverse community is one of our greatest assets, and all members of our community should have an equal chance to contribute to and benefit from society.

We know we can only achieve our aims and close the gap of inequality by working in partnership with people and other organisations. We will continue to work closely with the Solihull Partnership. We will further develop our links with the community and voluntary sector, including those organisations representing people from vulnerable groups and our diverse communities. We will listen to and engage with local people at every opportunity: our plans must be informed by peoples' experience of living, working, studying and visiting the Borough.

### **Our commitment to equality**

We are committed to promoting equality of opportunity and equality of access that is free from discrimination, prejudice, harm, stereotyping, harassment, victimisation, and any other form of discrimination.

This commitment is in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 which offers legal protection based on a number of characteristics. These protected characteristics are

- age,
- disability,
- gender reassignment,
- marriage and civil partnership,
- pregnancy and maternity,
- race,
- religion and belief,

- sex, and
- sexual orientation.

Any form of behaviour that discriminates against individuals or groups of people based on these protected characteristics will not be tolerated. We recognise that other people experience discrimination or disadvantage because of other characteristics and factors (including political beliefs, trade union status, criminal record, employment status, social class, home address, culture, language, HIV status, or responsibility for dependents) and will work to minimise discrimination on these basis.

The Equality Act 2010 simplifies and harmonises existing discrimination and equalities law, and strengthens legislation to further advance equality. The Act widens the scope of when discrimination is unlawful and clarifies that protection extends to those discriminated against even if they do not have the protected characteristic themselves. So if a complainant is discriminated against because they are perceived to have a protected characteristic (e.g. if they were thought to be gay but are heterosexual) or because they are associated with someone who has the protected characteristic (e.g. a parent of a disabled child) then they are protected under the legislation. Protection from harassment is widened, and now includes behaviour not directed at the complainant (e.g. witnessing offensive or intimidating behaviour) and harassment by third parties (such as suppliers, parents/carers, children and young people or customers). People are now protected from victimisation (being treated badly following making a complaint under the legislation) without having to make a comparison to someone else.

We welcome the simplification and clarification of equalities legislation through the Equality Act 2010 and positively embrace the enhanced protection it gives people.

## **Our ambition**

Our vision of “Solihull in 2018: where everyone has an equal chance to be healthier, happier, safer, and more prosperous” can only be realised if it includes all of Solihull’s people. We have a population which is growing and changing so our success as a council will depend on how we embrace diversity in helping to build a strong and cohesive community based on fairness, dignity and respect.

Implementation of this policy will support the Council to achieve its overall ambition and priorities, and is an essential element of our business transformation programme known as ‘Shaping Solihull’. Through this programme, our organisation is delivering a culture that recognises and positively responds to equality and diversity; making sure that we are fit for purpose and are able to deliver our outcomes and vision.

We recognise that ‘equal opportunities’ does not mean treating everyone the same. Delivering equal opportunities may involve adjustments for some individuals or groups of people to ensure that they are protected from discrimination and have equal access to the Council services they require and employment opportunities.

We will lead by example and promote equality and diversity, good community relations and proactively challenge prejudice, discrimination and harassment through our role as a service provider, employer and community leader.

### **As a service provider/commissioner we will:**

- Provide services in a responsive, fair and appropriate manner ensuring services are accessible for everyone
- Use monitoring systems, when appropriate, to ensure that we are meeting these aspirations
- Create an environment which opposes discrimination and disadvantage and the best quality of life for the people of Solihull
- Encourage better involvement and engagement with all sections of our community, particularly vulnerable and under-represented groups
- Address any identified inequalities through the development of specific actions
- Make decisions based on 'due regard' to the aims of the public sector equality duty
- Meet our legal obligations and use guidance and Codes of Practice to inform our approach to promoting equality and diversity
- Ensure that partners and organisations delivering services on our behalf are aware of our commitment to equality and diversity, and their own obligations under the public sector equality duty
- Communicate using simple, clear language and provide information in alternative formats when the need arises
- Ensure that complaints, queries and comments are dealt with in a fair, sensitive and consistent manner and in line with appropriate policy
- Promote a climate where people feel comfortable to make suggestions without fear of victimisation or recrimination

### **As an employer we will:**

- Strive to ensure that the workplace is free from harassment and discrimination and that everyone is treated with dignity and respect
- Ensure all employment policies, procedures and guidelines reflect and reinforce the Council's commitment to equality.
- Seek to recruit and retain a workforce that reflects the diversity of our community by encouraging applicants from all backgrounds to apply for jobs in the council
- Train and support those involved in recruitment to ensure that applicants are not discriminated against, and recruit on merit the best person for the job
- Seek to tap into the widest possible source of talent that will enhance our ability to serve the whole community
- Be an employer of choice for all sectors of our community
- Ensure that all employees have equal access to training and development opportunities
- Value and respect the views and opinions of all of our employees

- Ensure that all our employees are made fully aware of their responsibilities under relevant legislation and this policy and adhere to its requirements
- Ensure that all our employees are made fully aware of the Council's Dignity at Work, Grievance and Disciplinary Policies which may be used to support and protect employees from issues of discrimination, harassment and victimisation.
- Guarantee an interview to all disabled applicants who meet the minimum criteria for job vacancies as a 'Positive about Disabled People' employer

### **As a community leader we will:**

- Foster the development and support for strong leadership in the voluntary, community and faith sectors of the community
- Work with partner organisations and businesses to improve equality practice across the borough
- Promote common ownership and commitment to the Sustainable Communities Strategy
- Promote awareness of our equality and diversity objectives
- Promote tolerance and inclusivity to counteract common stereotypes which lead to the exclusion of certain groups
- Work with all communities to strengthen good community relations

### **To support this policy we aim to create an organisation where:**

- There is a culture that recognises and positively responds to equality and diversity
- There is the political and managerial leadership, particularly at a senior level, on equality and diversity issues
- Consideration of equality and diversity issues are an essential part of all of the Council's business. We will use our Fair Treatment Assessment tool to understand the practical effects of our policies, services and decisions on our communities
- We consult fully with service users, the community and voluntary sector and other stakeholders to ensure we address equality to the best of our ability
- Positive and practical action is taken to ensure we achieve these aims

## **Our Equality and Diversity Objectives**

The Equality Act 2010 established a new public sector equality duty (PSED). It covers the protected characteristics of age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion and belief, sex, and sexual orientation and requires public bodies to have 'due regard' to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;

- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

(only the first aim applies for the characteristic of marriage and civil partnership)

Our specific duties under the Equality Act 2010 require us to publish relevant, proportionate information to show compliance with the equality duty, and to set equality objectives. This will help us to be transparent about how we are responding to the equality duty.

In accordance with the Equality Act 2010, we will:

- Publish information by 31 January 2012. This will include:
  - information relating to our employees who share protected characteristics, and
  - information relating to people who are affected by our policies and practices
- Publish one or more equality objectives by 6 April 2012 that will help to further the three aims of the equality duty

Our commitment to equality is reflected in our Council Plan 2009-12 and Sustainable Communities Strategy 2008-18 and underpins our priority outcomes. Within the Sustainable Communities Strategy the priority outcomes are:

Increased economic growth, supported by:

- Ensuring the right 14-19 education to meet the future skills and employment needs
- Tackling worklessness and housing stress to reduce inequality through poverty and social exclusion

Creating involved & inclusive communities, where there is:

- Greater community involvement through volunteering;
- anti social behaviour is addressed and fear of crime reduced; and
- vulnerable adults and young people are kept safe from harm

Improved Ill health prevention, through:

- Providing the best start in life, particularly for those families that coping with the most complex needs; and
- Reducing substance misuse

The pace of change against these outcomes will be measured using a scorecard to monitor progress, this will include publication of disaggregated information by protected characteristic where most relevant.

## The frameworks will we use to implement this policy

**Elected Members** are responsible for agreeing the strategic direction of our equality and diversity agenda and ensuring that adequate resources are made available. They are also responsible for checking the level of progress made in implementing this policy, our equality and diversity objectives and any associated action plans.

**Corporate Leadership Team** is responsible for ensuring that our Equality and Diversity Policy is implemented.

**The Corporate Equality and Diversity Group** is responsible for developing the strategic direction of equality work, for corporate co-ordination of our work on equality and diversity and for monitoring progress against these action plans.

**The Directorate Leadership Teams** are responsible for implementing the policy in their service areas. They will also make sure there are measurable targets relating to equality and diversity in their performance management plans. Directorate Equality and Diversity Group's will co-ordinate and support work on equality and diversity.

**The Equality and Diversity Team** is responsible for providing the strategic advice to the Corporate Leadership Team as well as providing support and guidance across the Council to enable the Equality and Diversity Policy to be implemented.

**The Human Resources Division** is responsible for leading on equality and diversity issues in employment throughout the Council.

**All employees** are required to observe this policy and ensure fairness towards customers, colleagues and other members of the community when carrying out their work.

**Unions and employee network groups** have responsibility for representing the views and concerns of employees on equality and diversity issues.

## Implementation, monitoring and review

The impact of this policy will be subject to monitoring, evaluation and review through our performance monitoring frameworks. This policy will be reviewed annually and consulted on as appropriate in the event of any legislative changes or otherwise.