

February 2021



Draft Equalities Strategy and Action Plan 2021-2025



Equalities Strategy and Action Plan 2021-2025

Foreword

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Events over the past year have highlighted the inequalities that exist in our society be that a black man’s experience of the criminal justice system; a child falling behind in their learning through digital exclusion or a disabled person having a far greater risk of death from Covid-19. Tackling these inequalities is recognised as being a key strategic issue for governments, health and education services and public bodies, as a matter of social justice.

Whilst we all have our part to play in creating a more just society Eastleigh Borough Council recognises that as a community leader it must do more to tackle structural inequality; to promote diversity and to provide services in such a way that enable all its citizens to participate in civic life and have an equal opportunity to flourish.

This Equality Strategy sets out how the Council will not only fulfil its legal duties under the Equality Act 2010 but will work towards embedding an inclusive mindset within all its services, processes and culture in order to create an approach that values every individual regardless of their background and characteristics. Thus enabling greater equality and minimising the risk of unintentional institutional bias.

This strategy aligns with the Council’s mission of ‘Supporting Communities, Improving Lives’. The Council’s values of ‘Fairness, Empowerment and Ambition’ underpin the actions in this Strategy and Action Plan and will help to shape the Council’s inclusive culture.

(February 2021)

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Legal duties

1. The Council has a general duty under the Equality Act 2010 requiring public bodies to have due regard to the need to:
 - (a) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act;
 - (b) advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it; and
 - (c) foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.
2. Having due regard means consciously thinking about the three aims of the Equality Duty as part of the process of decision-making and carrying out our functions and day to day activities. This means that consideration of equality issues must influence: how public bodies like the Council act as employers; how they develop, evaluate and review policy; how they design, deliver and evaluate services, and how they commission and procure from others; how they work with communities and respond to customers.
3. Having due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity involves considering the need to:
 - (a) remove or minimise disadvantages experienced by people due to their protected characteristics;
 - (b) meet the needs of people with protected characteristics; and
 - (c) encourage people with protected characteristics to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is low.
4. Fostering good relations involves tackling prejudice and promoting understanding between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.
5. Complying with the Equality Duty may involve treating some people differently to others and providing a more suitable service as far as this is allowed by discrimination law. For example, it may involve making use of an exception or the positive action provisions in order to provide a service in a way which is appropriate for people who share a protected characteristic – such as providing computer training for those older people who need help to access information and services.
6. Under the Equality Act all public sector bodies also have a specific duty to:
 - (a) Publish information to demonstrate compliance with the general Equality Duty annually. This information must include, information relating to people who share a protected characteristic who are:
 - (i) its employees, and

- (ii) people affected by its policies and practices.
 - (b) Prepare and publish, at least every four years, one or more objectives that it thinks it needs to achieve to further any of the aims of the general Equality Duty. The objectives must be specific and measurable.
7. The following characteristics are protected in the Equality Act 2010
- (a) age
 - (b) disability, including hidden disabilities, autism, learning disabilities, mental illness
 - (c) gender reassignment
 - (d) pregnancy and maternity
 - (e) race – this includes ethnic or national origins, colour or nationality, including Gypsy Roma and Traveller communities
 - (f) religion or belief – this includes lack of belief
 - (g) sex
 - (h) sexual orientation
 - (i) marriage and civil partnership (in respect to the need to eliminate employment discrimination).
8. The Council recognises that socioeconomic deprivation is also a characteristic which often leads to exclusion and inequalities. Socioeconomic factors play a large part in determining health and other outcomes.
9. Digital exclusion is not itself a protected characteristic although it has a correlation with age, socio-economic deprivation, disability and race. The Council will encourage further use of digital technologies for those who are able to use them but will continue to protect non-digital forms of contact and communication, helping residents to become more digitally enabled where possible.

Previous Equalities actions 2016-2020

10. During the last Equalities Plan period the Council has carried out a number of initiatives in relation to equalities:
- a) Disability Facilities Grants – over £1m spend annually
 - b) Improving the consideration of equalities issues at the early stages of project planning
 - c) Improving the quality and quantity of Equality Impact Assessments for committee decisions

- d) Continuing to support the annual Mela event in Eastleigh and establishing a new annual Pride event
- e) Support to Asian and Nepalese communities
- f) Joint work with West Hampshire CCG to improve access to health services by highlighting the need for NHS-funded interpretation/translation services
- g) Adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism
- h) Adoption of Modern Slavery policy
- i) Breastfeeding welcome and Safer Places campaigns to make venues e.g. shops, cafes, restaurants and public buildings safe and welcoming for people with protected characteristics
- j) Dementia awareness campaign to support dementia friendly places, raise awareness and support local dementia groups
- k) Financial support for the shopmobility service
- l) Funding for youth services including LGBTQ+ service, mental health and teenage pregnancy support
- m) Funding of a range of voluntary and community organisations that support and enable people with protected characteristics
- n) Marking, celebrating, commemorating a range of calendar events that raise awareness of equalities issues
- o) Promoting good mental health among staff with information, advice and mental health champions. Wellness plans for all staff. Signatory to the 'Time to Change' pledge
- p) Targeting certain services towards particular groups that experience unequal opportunities e.g. This Girl Can to increase female participation in physical activity
- q) Promotion of the EU Settlement scheme
- r) Support to foodbanks and coordination of Local Covid19 Response including support to care homes and people shielding
- s) Inclusive Arts and Culture programme including people with Learning disabilities
- t) Providing discounts for individuals experiencing socio-economic deprivation for services such as garden waste, bulky waste, pest control and leisure access
- u) Training for Councillors and staff on general equalities awareness, the Equality Act and Equality Impact Assessments.
- v) Staff awareness session on the menopause
- w) Policy to reduce Council Tax for Care leavers
- x) Assisted waste and recycling collection
- y) Accessible communications including large print and audio versions of Borough News and meeting new Accessibility regulations (2018).
- z) Formation of staff Equalities Focus Group to help review and champion equalities work across the Council.
- aa) Formation of LGBT+ staff network.

bb)Mandatory staff training on digital accessibility (to make all documents published online accessible for people with visual impairments and using screen-readers).

11. Eastleigh borough's residents have a range of diverse and different characteristics. Some of these differences are more apparent than others. Many protected characteristics such as disabilities, however are not always visible, which means the level of diversity is not apparent. Some protected characteristics are shared by relatively small numbers of people; the Equality Act affords protection to certain groups regardless of their size in the population. Further information about outcomes, forms of exclusion and how the Council can address them will be gathered and shared with staff in the Council to assist in assessing equalities impacts.

Objectives

12. The longer-term aim of the Council is to **embed within its services, processes and culture an inclusive mindset and approach that values every individual**, no matter their background and characteristics, and enables greater equality. This will help to minimise or remove any unintentional institutional bias.
13. The first objective of this new Strategy and Action Plan is to consolidate and refresh the Council's approach to Equalities, firstly **to fully deliver the Council's duties under the Equality Act 2010**.
14. The Council will also undertake further actions **to build better links with people with protected characteristics and be more responsive to the diversity of needs across the Borough**. In particular we want to understand better the different needs of people in relation to the services that our Council carries out.
15. The Council remains committed to being an inclusive and fair employer and will take further steps to **recognise and value the diversity of its workforce**.
16. Completion of actions in the Action Plan below will be one measure of the achievement of these objectives. Staff surveys, resident feedback, annual reviews of EqIAs and feedback from people with protected characteristics will also provide useful information to gauge progress. Following consultation with residents and groups with protected characteristics (in the first year of the Plan), actions and measures may be reviewed and amended.

Strategy

17. Factors that create and perpetuate inequalities are complex and no single organisation is able, on its own, to eliminate those inequalities. The Council carries out a number of functions, where it has the opportunity to address inequalities:

a) As a community leader, representing and serving the local population

- b) In delivering services that benefit some or all residents
 - c) In delivering short-term projects
 - d) In shaping the places where people live, work, visit and take recreation
 - e) In regulating certain activities and enforcing rules to protect people and businesses
 - f) In the information and data it collects and analyses
 - g) In communicating with residents, businesses and organisations
 - h) In its work in partnerships with other agencies.
18. The approach to achieving equalities objectives in the short and long term is therefore to increase awareness within the Council and improve processes so that there are positive outcomes for all residents. In some cases, this may involve enhancing a service or project, or going the extra mile, in order to achieve a truly inclusive benefit for residents.
19. Being responsive to the needs of people with protected characteristics means listening to the voices of those people or groups. By achieving this objective we will have a better sense of issues and areas where the Council can focus its equalities actions and efforts in the future. Such actions will be incorporated into this action plan through annual reviews.
20. Equalities issues are sometimes contentious and complex. The Council will promote a supportive environment where it is safe for people to discuss equalities issues, in order to help people to learn, understand the issues and agree a positive shared way forward.

Actions

Objective	Action
Carry out duties under the Equality Act 2010	Improve consideration of Equalities issues in service and project planning and for key decisions, including further improvement of Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs)
	Carry out annual reviews of Equality Impact Assessments and make recommendations
	Publish objectives and provide an annual equalities review of the objectives and action plan
Build better links with people with protected characteristics and be more responsive	Carry out detailed engagement with groups and organisations representing people with protected characteristics.
	Build up resources and material to help inform EqIAs and the Council's understanding of Equalities issues
	Increase engagement with such groups on specific key issues to inform assessment of Equality impacts
Recognise and value the diversity of the workforce	Improve monitoring of applicants and staff characteristics
	Review existing Equality and Diversity policy.

Objective	Action
Embed an inclusive mindset across the Council	Use the newly-formed established Equalities Focus Group to consider and champion equalities issues across the Council.
	Ensure communications are accessible, ensuring translation and interpretation is accessible when needed
	Provide training for staff and Councillors in relation to the Equality Act and awareness of protected characteristics
	Provide more detailed training for staff with particular roles and responsibilities in championing equalities issues within the Council and undertaking Equality Impact Assessments
	Support key services to ensure equality of access and positive equalities impacts
	Protect communications and customer service channels for people who are digitally excluded
	Adapt Customer Care policies and processes to ensure there are no unfair barriers to resolving service issues
	Embed equalities considerations within Local Area and Corporate service planning