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# Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy

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2021 – 2025

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## **FOREWORD – Group Leaders & CEO**

Over the past year, the Covid-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement have brought inequality and discrimination into sharp focus. This is an opportune time for us to review our policy to respond to the issues raised. We are passionate about promoting equality, diversity and inclusion for everyone who lives in, works in or visits our district. We are committed to championing this policy with our elected Members and staff who serve our communities, and to ensuring that Stroud District Council is an inclusive workplace which celebrates diversity and creates equality of opportunity.

### **1. Introduction**

Stroud District Council is committed to promoting equality and tackling discrimination. This means treating people fairly, valuing differences and removing the barriers that prevent people from fully participating in public life and realising their full potential. As a Council we have worked extremely hard to reduce inequality, yet we know that some people still experience disadvantage and unfair treatment simply because of their personal characteristics or circumstances.

This Policy sets out how we will make equality integral to the way we reach decisions, provide services, recruit and support our employees, work with other organisations and involve local people. Our aim is to make Stroud District Council a fully accessible and inclusive organisation that welcomes and respects the diversity of its residents, service users, elected members, staff and visitors to the district.

### **2. Scope**

This policy applies to all who represent Stroud District Council in any capacity including elected members (councillors), employees, volunteers, agency workers and consultants. The policy also applies to suppliers, sub-contractors and partners in our supply chain and to all those who live and work in or visit our district.

We all have a right to be treated fairly and with dignity and respect. We are also responsible for ensuring that our own actions and behaviours are fair and that we respect the dignity of others.

### **3. Understanding equality, diversity and inclusion**

- Equality is not about 'treating everyone the same' but recognising that everyone is different, and that people's needs are met in different ways. We would define equality as essentially being about fairness and ensuring that we all have the best possible chance to succeed in life whatever our background or identity.
- Diversity is about understanding that everyone is unique, recognising, respecting and celebrating the added value that differences bring.
- Inclusion is where difference is seen as a benefit and where perspectives and differences are shared, leading to better decisions. An inclusive working environment is one in which everyone feels valued, that their contribution

matters, and they can perform to their full potential, regardless of background, identity or circumstances. An inclusive workplace enables a diverse range of people to work together effectively.

#### **4. Our legal responsibilities**

The Council, as an employer and service provider, will meet all legal duties in respect of equality and diversity. The key piece of legislation is the **Equality Act 2010**, which protects people from discrimination on the basis of the following nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage & civil partnership, pregnancy & maternity, race, religion & belief, sex and sexual orientation.

The Act contains an integrated **Public Sector Equality Duty**, which requires all public bodies and private bodies that deliver a public function, to consider the needs of protected groups when designing and delivering services.

Under the Act, the Council must have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; and
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

Having due regard for advancing equality involves:

- Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to protected characteristics
- Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people
- Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low
- Tackling prejudice and promoting understanding between different communities.

*Section 1* of the Equality Act, the Socio-economic duty, requires public bodies to adopt transparent and effective measures to address the inequalities that result from differences in occupation, education, place of residence or social class (the additional characteristics not explicitly covered by the Public Sector Equality Duty).

Although implemented in Scotland, the UK Government has not commenced the duty in England – so local authorities are not bound by it. However, the Council believes the socio-economic duty offers a useful tool for public authorities to actively consider the way in which policies and strategic decisions can address inequalities, within the wider Public Sector Equality Duty requirements. This piece of work has been included in the year one action plan.

The Council will also comply with the Conventions contained within the **Human Rights Act 1998**, which sets out the fundamental rights and freedoms that individuals in the UK have access to.

## **5. Our commitment**

Stroud District Council is committed to ensuring equality, fairness, inclusion and good relations are at the heart of everything we do - be it policy-making, service delivery or employment practice.

This is key to delivering our vision of **“Leading a community that is making Stroud District a better place to live, work and visit for everyone”**

To support our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion, the Council will:

- a. Comply with and embrace equality law and good practice, which includes carrying out our public sector duties to promote equality
- b. Regularly monitor and assess the impact of our policies, services and functions to ensure they are fair and reflect people's different needs and opinions
- c. Use our influence with our partners and businesses to generate opportunities in the district
- d. Celebrate diversity and support campaigns for greater equality and awareness
- e. Make equality and consideration of diversity a part of our everyday business. To do this we will expect all of our Councillors, employees and contractors to:
  - Treat everyone with courtesy, dignity and respect at all times
  - Provide the best possible standards of service and value for money to residents and communities
  - Consider the needs and opinions of every community.
- f. Promoting diversity, preventing inequality and tackling discrimination is not solely the responsibility of the Council. We will also work with wider partnerships to promote an equal and inclusive approach across the whole of the District.

### **5.1 Specific commitments in procurement**

When we procure or commission services, we will aim to:

- Consider equality of access in service delivery
- Ensure contractors, suppliers and partners are aware of what the authority expects in relation to equality and diversity and understand that they must provide services that are free from harassment, discrimination or victimisation
- Ensure that the tendering processes include EDI as part of the selection criteria
- Provide guidance to employees about how to include EDI in procurement and commissioning processes.

## **6. Employing, supporting and developing our workforce**

Our employment practice is guided by the principles of equality and fairness. This includes recruitment, terms and conditions, appraisals, learning and development, promotion and when ending employment. Our activities and approach to achieving this

are set out in our [Employee Handbook](#), which contains our suite of HR policies (this link is to the Council's internal intranet. Please contact us if you would like copies of any of the policies).

To help us ensure that equality is an integral part of our employment practices the Council is a member of the Employers Network for Equality and Inclusion <https://www.enei.org.uk/>.

### **6.1 Specific commitments in employment**

Stroud District Council is committed to being a fair and supportive employer, developing the skills and talent within our workforce so that employees are able to deliver high quality services to everyone. To achieve this we will:

- Carry out recruitment fairly
- Provide training to employees so that they can implement this policy
- Treat all employees fairly, with dignity and respect at all times
- Tackle unacceptable behaviour in the workplace
- Provide employees with opportunities to influence the development of our policies and practice
- Reward all employees fairly and provide employment conditions which support them to do a good job
- Promote a good work-life balance and opportunities to work flexibly
- Support disabled employees by making reasonable adjustments
- Monitor and publish the make-up of our workforce as required by the specific public sector equality duty.

As stated in our specific commitments, all employees and elected members should be treated with respect and dignity in the workplace. The Council will not tolerate unacceptable behaviour in any form, and the [Bullying and Harassment Policy](#) (2.6.2) sets out how individual members of staff should raise concerns they have about the workplace.

## **7. Who is responsible for equalities?**

Equality is the responsibility of every Councillor, employee of Stroud District Council, and any other person or organisation employed by the Council to work or to deliver services on its behalf, including those employed through contractual, commissioning or grant-aided arrangements.

We will use all available routes to communicate and promote this policy:

- Elected members will promote our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion in their day-to-day work
- Strategic Leadership Team will be responsible for overall management and direction of EDI commitments

- the Equality Working Group, comprising cross party councillors and officers, will oversee this policy and monitor the extent to which we are achieving our commitments
- Managers will make sure EDI is core to service delivery and employee management
- All employees will ensure they are aware of this policy and take responsibility to promote EDI and challenge discrimination
- Contractors, suppliers and potential suppliers will be advised of this policy through the tendering and contract review processes and will be expected to adhere to the policy
- Our service users and tenants also have a responsibility to treat our staff with dignity and respect, and to let us know if they require assistance or adjustments to enable them to better access our services.

## **8. Equality Analysis - making fair decisions**

Every day, decisions are made within the council that affect the lives and relationships of local people, service users and employees. Equality analysis will be used as a tool to help us make fair, sound and transparent decisions that are based on a robust understanding of the needs and rights of the groups and individuals who may be affected.

The Council's assessment process ensures that equality analysis is exercised in such a way that influences the final decision. It will also be used to identify positive actions that will mitigate any negative effects of our decision, or enhance any benefits for protected groups and others at risk of disadvantage.

## **9. Equality information**

Whenever relevant to do so we will collate, analyse, interpret and publish information about equality and diversity in the workforce, service delivery and our communities.

This information will be used in equality analysis to:

- Inform our service planning, policy development and decision making process,
- Understand the impact of policies, practices and decisions on people with different protected characteristics, and to plan them more effectively
- Help identify key equality issues
- Develop and monitor our equality objectives
- Identify ways of improving performance
- demonstrate compliance with the Equality Duty

When we ask staff and service-users to provide information about their personal characteristics, this will only be done where the information is relevant to the aims of the equality duty – for example if there are known inequalities in relation to a particular outcome or service. The Council will always make it clear that disclosure of sensitive information (eg sexual orientation, gender orientation or religion or belief) is optional and not compulsory.

However, without gathering some form of evidence, it may be difficult to monitor the impact of policies and procedures on certain protected groups. The Council will aim to overcome this by creating a culture of trust whereby individuals are comfortable disclosing such information.

The Council will uphold its duty to protect an individual's right to privacy, and will not publish information that could identify an individual. Nor will the information be used to identify an individual or make a decision about them purely on the grounds of the information that has been provided in relation to their protected characteristics. All personal data will be processed in accordance with the [Data Protection Act](#) and in compliance with our [Data Protection Policy](#).

### **9.1 Stroud District – equality data**

[Inform Gloucestershire](#) provides a valuable source of information about the people of the Stroud District. It has an interactive website designed to provide a 'one stop shop' of information about the District and holds information profiles for the whole of the District and snapshots of each of the electoral wards including [protected characteristics of the district](#). The protected characteristics for the Stroud district can be found at:

<https://inform.gloucestershire.gov.uk/equality-and-diversity/interactive-report/>

## **10. Making our services accessible and easy to use**

We constantly strive to deliver services that are easily accessible by all who need them, and to support people to participate in public life. This in turn will help us achieve our duty to foster good relations between different groups and individuals. We are committed to listening to our residents, service users and customers to develop an understanding of how we can break down barriers and better meet their needs. This may involve making adjustments to the way we deliver services where it is reasonable to do so.

We will make sure that everyone has the information they need about our services. We will aim to provide all information in plain English and alternative formats on request.

We are committed to engaging effectively with local people, community groups and other stakeholders. We will actively seek their views about the Council and the services they receive, as well as involving them in shaping services and local decision making.

## **11. Protecting people**

Safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults is everybody's business, wherever they work and whatever they do for the Council. This includes staff, elected members and people who work for organisations that provide services on behalf of the Council. We will endeavour to ensure all staff and elected members are aware of our

[Safeguarding responsibilities](#) and receive the appropriate training in safeguarding awareness.

The Council is committed to working in partnership to ensure that [hate crime](#) is not tolerated within our communities and neighbourhoods. Hate crime is motivated because of prejudice, hostility or hatred towards a person, family or groups because of their sexuality, gender identity, disability, ethnicity, religion or faith. It can include physical attacks to either a person or their property, threats, verbal abuse and insults. Nobody should suffer because of who they are, and nobody should put up with it.

We are also working with our partners to tackle [domestic abuse and sexual violence](#), and have developed a county wide strategy to ensure that all residents in the District have a fundamental right to live their lives in an environment which will not tolerate domestic violence, will support victims/survivors and will hold perpetrators accountable for their actions.

## 12. Implementing this Policy

The Council recognises that leadership, ownership and commitment by elected members and staff, with adequate resources allocated, are essential for this policy to be effective.

Our work will be guided by the codes of practice and guidance published by the Equality and Human Rights Commission. We will share best practice through membership of equality networks; working with communities and partnerships; and internally through the Equality Working Group.

We plan to use the Local Government Association Equality Framework. This helps councils, in discussion with local partners and local people, to review and improve their performance for people with protected characteristics, defined by the Equality Act 2010.

This Framework has four parts:

1. Understanding and Working with your Communities;
2. Leadership and Organisational Commitment;
3. Responsive Services and Customer Care;
4. Diverse and Engaged Workforce.

Looking at this framework, reflecting on our past actions and building on our vision will help us to think further about what we want to do better and what our equality objectives could be for the coming years.

We understand that identifying and taking action is a key to mainstreaming equality and we will therefore deliver our commitments through our **Equality Action Plan**.



## **12.1 Progress made during 2020/21**

### **Working with our Communities**

- To ensure we have an up to date profile of the district's population, the Council has an annual agreement with Gloucestershire County Council to provide equality information at a district, ward and parish level which is readily available and used by services. See: <https://inform.gloucestershire.gov.uk/equality-and-diversity/>
- The Council has long established interfaces, such as our Local Strategic Partnership, Youth Council, Parish and Town Councils forums, Community hubs and Neighbourhood Wardens to help us capture, understand and meet the needs of our communities. These links have proved vital in helping us to positively respond and provide the appropriate support during the Covid Pandemic.
- To celebrate the different communities that live in our district we work with partners and use our website and social media platforms to publicise notable dates such as Holocaust Memorial and International Women's days; LGBT and Black History months; and Mental Health awareness and Carers weeks. (See appendix for full list of notable dates).
- We have embarked on an ambitious Modernisation programme to help improve digital access to Council services. This will enable us to more readily respond to the diverse needs of our communities at a time and in the way that best suits every individual.

### **Effective Governance**

- Mandatory equality, cultural awareness and unconscious bias training has been provided for all Members and staff during 2020. An enhanced Member Development Programme will be introduced following the elections in 2021 which will include further Equality and Diversity training.
- We have improved our equality assessment process so that Council decisions are made taking full account on the impact on all relevant protected characteristics.
- We have established an Equality Working Group comprising of Members and officers to drive and monitor our progress in meeting our equality commitments.

### **Leadership and Organisation Commitment**

- The Council's Chief Executive is now the overall lead and sponsor for equalities which will ensure it is kept high on the corporate agenda. We have also begun

to identify 'equality champions' within each service area to share learning and embed good practice across the organisation.

- Working with the Employers Network for Equality and Inclusion, we have enhanced our equality training, rolling out a programme '*Inclusive Culture and the Role we play*' in November 2020 to all staff, with an additional Leadership element for managers and senior officers.
- All our job adverts now have a statement encouraging applicants from BAME communities and also from women in senior roles. Additionally, we have signed up to BAME, LGBTQ and disability job boards so that all our vacancies automatically appear on these sites.

### **Our response to the Covid pandemic and Black Lives Matter Movement**

- In June 2020 the Council committed to undertake a review and community consultation, in conjunction with Town and Parish Councils, of any street and building names, statues and architectural features that may be considered offensive. This process has started with a review of Black Boy Clock with its sculpture in Stroud Town.
- The principles of equality and meeting the needs of the most vulnerable in our community are embedded in the Council's Recovery Strategy 2020/21 which sets out a framework for how we aim to tackle the ongoing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic so that we can build back better.  
<https://www.stroud.gov.uk/media/1166427/item-6-covid-19-recovery-strategy.pdf>

### **Links to other Plans and Strategies**

There are a number of other current strategies and work-streams that directly contribute to the Council's equality agenda, where actions are being taken to combat discrimination and advance equality in our district, notably please see:

<b>Youth and Community Work</b>	<a href="https://www.stroud.gov.uk/community-and-living/youth-and-community-work">https://www.stroud.gov.uk/community-and-living/youth-and-community-work</a>
<b>Housing Strategies</b>	<a href="https://www.stroud.gov.uk/housing/housing-strategy">https://www.stroud.gov.uk/housing/housing-strategy</a>
<b>Health and Wellbeing Plans Director of Public Health Annual Report</b>	<a href="https://www.stroud.gov.uk/health-wellbeing/health-and-wellbeing-plans">https://www.stroud.gov.uk/health-wellbeing/health-and-wellbeing-plans</a> <a href="https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/media/2102344/dph-report-2020-beyond-covid-race-health-and-inequality-in-gloucestershire.pdf">https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/media/2102344/dph-report-2020-beyond-covid-race-health-and-inequality-in-gloucestershire.pdf</a>
<b>CN2030 Strategy and Master Plan</b>	<a href="https://www.stroud.gov.uk/environment/draft-2030-strategy-limiting-adapting-recovering-and-responding-in-a-changing-climate">https://www.stroud.gov.uk/environment/draft-2030-strategy-limiting-adapting-recovering-and-responding-in-a-changing-climate</a>

### 13. Our Proposed Objectives for 2021-2025

Our headline objectives are focused on three themes, these themes reflect the Local Government Association (LGA) Equality Framework for Local Government 2020 which is designed to help Councils plan and deliver equality outcomes.

<b>Community</b>	<b>Listen and learn from our communities and use this to deliver services that work well for everyone</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Improve data collection, publish it often, and use it to make decisions that focus on the needs of all our communities</li> <li>➤ Ensure people are engaged, involved and consulted.</li> <li>➤ Ensure our services are designed in an accessible and inclusive way.</li> </ul>
<b>Leadership &amp; Organisational Commitment</b>	<b>Actively champion our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion and tackle inequality together</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Embed equality into our services and procurement in a meaningful way that uses feedback to improve</li> <li>➤ Quality check decisions that impact disadvantaged groups and compare them so we can make improvements</li> </ul>
<b>Workforce</b>	<b>Build a diverse and engaged workforce, where everyone is respected</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Equip our workforce, including our leadership to meet the needs of the community we serve.</li> <li>➤ Take actions agreed in our Organisational Development Plan and resulting from equality workforce monitoring.</li> <li>➤ Ensure that our employees feel equal and included and are not subject to any unfair disadvantage regardless of their background and/or characteristics.</li> </ul>

*The Equality Objectives Action Plan appended to this Policy sets out the 2021-22 actions under each of these objectives.*

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought existing inequalities in opportunity, health and life chances into focus and the Black Lives Matter Campaign has raised awareness of ongoing discrimination and inequality faced by people in our communities. The objectives set out above and in further detail in the Action Plan set out how the Council will advance greater equality.

### 14. Review

We will continually seek to develop our approach to equality, diversity and inclusion by identifying good practice in employment and service delivery. The Equality Working Group will monitor progress and the Council will review this policy on a regular basis,

usually at least every 4 years, to ensure that it reflects the latest legalisation, best practice and other Council policies.

It is essential that we monitor our performance against our Equality Objectives and continue to challenge progress over time. The Equality Working Group will publish an annual report on our progress with a summary of what we have achieved against each objective. An annual report will also be scrutinised at a Full Council meeting annually.