

Uttlesford District Council
Single Equality Duty 2012 -2015

April 2012

Foreword

This is our first Equality Scheme which we have published to reflect the new statutory requirements and expectations contained in the Equality Act 2010. This Single Equality Scheme now replaces our separate Equality Schemes for disability, gender and race which we published under previous legislation.

The Council has made progress in developing and implementing its equality aims and objectives in recent years and in 2009 we successfully achieved level 2 on the former Equality Standard for Local Government.

The Equality Standard for Local Government has now been replaced by the Equality Framework for Local Government and the Council needs to sustain and build on the achievements to date whilst recognising the need to review and refresh its approach having regard to the new assessment framework and the new legislation.

In preparing our Equality Scheme we have built on the work undertaken to date and we have been equally ambitious in what we are setting out to achieve in the future. In doing so, we have actively consulted and listened to the views of many different individuals, organisations and our own staff.

We believe that this Equality Scheme ensures that we place equality right at the core of our organisation, our employment practices, our working practices and the services that we deliver to our community. I am also confident that it will have a real impact on how we do things and what we can achieve.

We would personally like to thank all those involved in helping us to shape our Equality Scheme and for their ongoing commitment and support.

Cllr Ketteridge
Leader of the Council

John Mitchell
Chief Executive, Uttlesford District Council

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Section 1 – Introduction to the Equality Scheme

As a public authority, the Council has legal requirements to ensure equality in the areas of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

Our Equality Scheme sets out how we will aim to meet those legal requirements. This three year Equality Scheme describes how the Council will fulfil its moral, social and legal obligations to put equality at the heart of everything we do. Covering the period 1 April 2012 to 30 March 2015 this Equality Scheme is closely linked to the Corporate Plan and to other strategies, policies and plans.

The Council views equality, human rights and good relations between people as something that affects us all, regardless of background, and we are committed to working closely with all those who are affected by, or interested in, our work. We see this as an ongoing process enabling individuals, organisations and staff to influence and shape the work we do.

In developing our three year Equality Scheme we have engaged with stakeholders through extensive involvement and consultation.

Our approach to developing this Equality Scheme has been based on the work we do rather than how we are structured as an organisation.

We thought about what we wanted to achieve ('outcomes') and what we thought we needed to do to make them happen ('actions').

The equality priorities

Through working in partnership with representative stakeholders and reviewing a range of evidence we have identified key priorities for the three years Equality Scheme.

We will use our action plan to focus on these priorities and provide clear accountability for their delivery.

We are committed to promoting equality in service delivery

- We will provide easy and convenient access to local services for all residents
- We will develop a robust and accessible inclusive communications strategy
- We will continue to improve the inclusive accessibility of our website
- We will use relevant information to ensure that we are prioritising key equality areas in our work

- We will monitor the effectiveness of our service provision to ensure that we reach all groups
- We will seek to resolve any issues where our service does not meet expectations

Promoting equality in our working practices

- We will implement an involvement strategy to engage and respond to our stakeholders with a stronger emphasis on working with well informed and representative members of the community
- We will consult and involve representative networks covering all equality groups to help inform and develop our future activities
- We will strengthen our equality procurement framework so that suppliers can demonstrate their commitment to equality and explore training for suppliers as necessary
- We will identify the equality profile of organisations who supply services for us and set targets to ensure they reflect the community we serve
- We shall ensure that we encourage supplier diversity during our procurement procedures

Promoting equality in employment

- We will maintain the diversity of our staff to reflect the community we serve across all the equality groups and we will continue to monitor our workforce profile
- We will provide pay gap monitoring information to include gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, age, and religion or belief
- We will develop a workplace environment where all our staff are treated with dignity and respect
- We will continue to improve accessibility in our working practices and to our buildings
- We will conduct regular equal pay reviews
- We will continue to promote awareness and support for victims of Domestic Abuse and offer appropriate training
- We will monitor our Grievance Policy to ensure dignity at work for all

- We will ensure that all staff are given relevant training opportunities

Section 2 – About the Council

Uttlesford is a rural authority with three main centres, Saffron Walden, Great Dunmow and Stansted Mountfitchet.

Each area has its own distinctively different landscape, built environment and social conditions which present a number of issues and opportunities.

The District faces a variety of challenges which reflect the diverse needs of the population. The proportion of Uttlesford population over 65 is currently 16.5% and this is projected to increase to 17.7% in 2021. The proportion of young people (19 and under) is currently 25.7% and this will have decreased to 21% by 2021.

The numbers of individuals with moderate or severe disability, with age ranges from 16 to 64, will rise by 8% from 4,947 to 5,330 in 2020; again this highlights the potential decline in the population of potential carers.

Uttlesford has a diverse community. There is a relatively small ethnic population currently of 4.9%. (Census 2011) However, these groups add to the diversity and culture and have distinct needs that should be addressed in order that positive relationships between communities can be enhanced.

Uttlesford District Council needs to ensure that its services are fully accessible, tailored and targeted such that there is no social inequality and all residents are supported appropriately. We are endeavouring to provide equal treatment for equal opportunity.

Management team

The Council sets the Strategic direction of the Council with the Corporate Management Team led by the Chief Executive, John Mitchell.

The Corporate Management Team is accountable to the elected Councillors for making sure that we achieve our business aims and for advising on emerging strategic priorities.

Our statutory duties

The Equality Act 2010 brings together all of the different equality strands and refers to them as “protected characteristics”:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and Civil Partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

The Council is a “public body” and has the following statutory duties as set out in the Equality Act 2010:

- Single (integrated) equality duty
- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation or any other conduct prohibited by the Act
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a ‘protected characteristic’ and those who do not
- Foster good relations between people who share a ‘protected characteristic’ and those who do not

Section 3 – How we developed the Equality Scheme

Our approach to meeting the equality duties

As a public authority, the Council has a legal requirement to promote equality in relation to age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

The Equality Act 2010 has strengthened protection, advanced equality and simplified the law. The legislation has extended previous equality duties and, therefore, like other public bodies, the Council has elected to produce a single Equality Scheme which will cover the equality strands.

Our evidence base

In developing our three year Equality Scheme we have gathered evidence from a number of sources to determine how we are promoting equality within our employment practices, our service delivery and our working practices.

We have also reflected on national data, specific research and consultation to inform our Equality Scheme.

Stakeholder involvement

We have ensured that we listened to many different individuals, organisations and members of staff in developing this three year Equality Scheme.

We carried out a consultation exercise which asked interested stakeholders to provide us with their views on our approach to the Equality Scheme. A list of these consultees is provided at Annexe A.

We also asked them to provide us with information on emerging challenges and priorities within their areas which we would need to consider making sure that the Council embraced equality within all the services it provides.

Staff involvement

We asked staff to reflect on what they saw as the priorities for action for our three year Equality Scheme.

We worked with our staff and took into consideration comments received from our staff representatives through the work of our Equality and Diversity Group.

How we have used feedback from our engagement with stakeholders and staff

We listened to all of the responses we received and used these to inform the Equality Scheme and its action plan.

The key messages from our stakeholders were:

- to develop a clear communications strategy reaching out to the most excluded groups within our society and utilising all forms of communication
- to further enhance the accessibility of our website and helpline services
- to tailor service delivery to meet differing needs
- to ensure we did not favour any particular group or groups and to secure equal protection for all the equality groups as required by the Equality Act 2010
- to ensure that all actions were balanced against needs and demands and financial and other resource implications
- to ensure that our suppliers were as diverse as the communities we serve and that they could demonstrate a strong equality commitment to their workforce and service users
- to ensure that all Equality Impact Assessments are produced in a timely manner and published

The key messages from staff were:

- The culture and attitude within the organisation was important and staff wanted to see this addressed through specific training for all. This will also include Members.
- that we should review and promote our flexible working options ensuring all staff had equitable access
- Improving the accessibility of our buildings was important and something which required a continued commitment
- develop equality issues within personal performance and development plans
- ensure that all services recognised where they could have an adverse impact on service users and take steps to prevent such situations

Section 4 – The Equality Scheme

Equality in our service delivery

The Council has a key role in helping individuals to access appropriate services and supporting them in that process where appropriate.

Customer Service

The Council offers its customers access to the services we provide through a number of channels. This is supported by the Council's Customer Charter which helps to ensure that services are accessible to all.

First Contact advisers are trained to deal with a variety of calls, relating to most of the Council's services and will do their best to ensure that enquiries are dealt with at the first point of contact.

Detailed Service Plans are developed and an associated Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) is provided. The action plans supporting these documents, outline the work that is being done to improve the service we provide to our customers.

The Council's website

The Council is continually improving the facilities and information available through the website.

Involvement and consultation

By involving, the Council means engaging with a wide variety of people and organisations in different ways and through different mechanisms. This is an ongoing process.

Procuring goods and services

By procurement we mean how we acquire goods, works and services. It is essential that people and organisations who provide goods, works and services share our values.

When procuring goods, works and services, this will ensure that supplier diversity is encouraged and a better understanding of equality issues through the understanding of potential customer needs is developed.

Equality in employment

The Council has a duty to make sure that those policies and practices that affect staff are fair and promote equality of opportunity and outcome. Members of staff have rights in their capacity as employees.

The Council wants to enable all staff to be fully involved in its work, to protect them from unfair treatment, to uphold obligations to provide job profiles, appraisals and related performance and monitoring systems and to give them support, development opportunities and training.

Workforce diversity

The Council is committed to tackling all forms of discrimination whether it is direct, indirect, intentional or unintentional and to promoting equality of opportunity both as an employer and service provider.

Our gender pay gap

For 2009-10, the percentage of the top 5% of earners that were women was 17.65%. The Council conducts a regular equal pay review and this determines any pay differences and any issues arising from the review are addressed.

Flexible working patterns

Current national trends in data advise that the demand for flexible working patterns by both workers and employers will rise, placing a need for innovative approaches to achieving flexibility in the workplace.

Supporting staff with disabilities

The Council is committed to creating a supportive and accessible working environment, based on mutual respect and trust, to enable all staff to carry out their roles. Reasonable adjustments are made where identified in consultation with the Occupational Health Service.

Workforce training

The Council is committed to offering learning and development opportunities to all staff. This will ensure that it becomes a more efficient and effective Council providing good value for money services.

Workforce disciplinary, grievance and promotion

The Council has a disciplinary and grievance process and is committed to ensuring that processes are fairly applied.

Workplace culture

The Council recognises that the culture of an organisation is intrinsically linked to treating people fairly, eliminating inequalities and promoting shared values.

An established set of values and behaviours have been identified through the performance review system. These are shared throughout the organisation. These values are used to develop the culture of the organisation by building trust, openness and integrity with respect for diversity and equality as a core value.

The organisation works to ensure flexibility in working practices, to develop communication processes, increase accessibility through the effective use of IT and to involve all staff in the continuous development.

EqlAs and monitoring

Embedding equality into policies, procedures and practices is essential to enable the Council to ensure all people are fairly treated.

The Council has therefore incorporated equality issues in the development of its policies and during service planning process through EqlAs, developing actions plans to ensure that it does not discriminate against a particular group(s) and that equality is promoted in accordance with statutory equality duties.

Training staff

Through the Council's internal training programme, equality training is provided for all staff to ensure they understand their role and objectives under the equality duties and wider equality legislation. In addition, specific training on EqlAs is also provided.

Staff are trained to understand:

- What an EqlA is and why they are undertaken
- The benefits of EqlAs
- How to use the EqlA tool
- The roles and responsibilities of staff with respect to EqlAs

An EqlA tool and guidance to help staff to carry out EqlAs in a systematic way has been developed.

Training provision will continue to be reviewed as well as the overall EqlA process to ensure that it is fit for purpose and is updated to reflect feedback from staff and stakeholders.

Quality assuring EqlAs

The Council's Equality and Diversity Group has overall responsibility for the scrutiny of EqlAs. Assistant Directors will be responsible for signing off EqlAs relevant to their function. The Equality and Diversity Group will continue to monitor the EqlAs along with the Scrutiny Committee. Both groups will also review the action plan included within this Equality Scheme and include quality assuring a sample of EqlAs and monitoring and reviewing overall progress. Progress will be reported regularly to the Corporate Management Team.

Monitoring

The Council is committed to gathering and monitoring data to assess the impact of its policies on staff and stakeholders and individuals

To meet the duties on gathering information and monitoring, suitable systems need to be in place to collect relevant data that allows existing policies to be assessed to see how they affect different groups. In this way it will be possible to identify whether any policies are having an adverse impact on a particular group or are missing an opportunity to promote equality. The Council can then review or amend the policy to remedy the situation.

Why gather information on equality?

In policy development equality monitoring can help to understand:

- Whether the policy is likely to have the intended effect
- How proposed policies might affect particular groups
- How policies can be amended to eliminate discrimination and promote equality

In service delivery, equality monitoring can help the Council to understand:

- The needs of service users
- Which groups are using its services
- Which groups are not using its services
- How to reach under-represented groups
- How satisfied different groups are with services
- Differences in service outcomes

- How to use resources better

In employment, equality monitoring can help to:

- Measure the make-up of the workforce and compare it to national data
- Analyse personnel practices and procedures to see how they affect different groups of employees
- Understand the causes of any pay gap by group

The Council collects employment data about recruitment, retention, promotion, development, disability performance appraisal, grievances, disciplinary action, leavers, staff in post, training, part-time working and caring responsibilities.

This data is analysed to reflect the protected characteristics defined in the Equality Act 2010.

Evidence-based policy-making

As part of any effective policy development process, it is important to consider any potential risks to those who will be affected by the policy's aims or by its implementation and to consider only opportunities to actively promote equality that the policy presents. The EqIAs helps the Council to consider any potential risk on different groups but it also offers an opportunity to consider how the policy may help to further develop equality, thereby ensuring that the organisation has the best possible policy in place.

EqIAs are a major part of a wider approach to evidence-based policy-making, where the principles of monitoring, EqIAs and involvement lead to policies being developed that are user-focused and based on sound evidence.

Carrying out an EqIA at the start of the policy development process allows the policy holders to identify, at every step, what the consequences may be to different groups and whether a policy should adopt a certain direction, approach, criterion or eligibility requirement or whether there are any opportunities to promote equality.

This fosters ownership and a real understanding and commitment to get it right'. Most importantly it will lead to a focus on the user and with the right involvement, it reduces the risk of creating policies that can lead to direct and/or indirect discrimination.

In this section, 'policy' includes the terms policies, practices, functions, decisions and strategies.

Publication of EqIA results, consultations and monitoring

The Council is committed to publishing the results of its EqIAs, consultations and monitoring on its website.

Responsibility and accountability

The Chief Executive, John Mitchell, has overall responsibility for making sure that the actions in this Equality Scheme are carried out. Actions have been allocated to the relevant officers across the Council and they are responsible for carrying these out and reporting on progress. Responsible post holders for each target outcome in the action plan have been identified and our Equality and Diversity Group will monitor progress.

Publication of the 2012–15 Equality Scheme and progress reports

The 2012–15 Equality Scheme will be available on the website. The Equality Scheme will be reviewed annually. Progress reports will be published annually on our website shortly after the completion of each review process.

The Equality Scheme and progress reports can be made available in another language or format (such as Braille, audio CD, data CD, “easy read” or large print). Please visit our website or contact us using the details below.

How to give feedback

Feedback on the Equality Scheme is welcome in order that the organisation can continue to improve. You can do this by contacting us using the information below:

Assistant Director Corporate Services, Uttlesford District Council 01799 510500

Section 5 – The action plan

The actions set out in this plan relate to what we do as an organisation. We promote and enforce equality legislation on age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

These are our main functions:

- To provide statutory Council services
- To support our communities
- To develop and improve partnership working to the benefit of residents

In order to carry out these functions, the Council

- Employs people
- Involves and consults people
- Procures goods, works and services
- Screens and impact assesses how to work and how to provide services
- Publish and review the Equality Scheme

Single Equality Scheme – Action Plan

Community Engagement

Outcome	Action	Links to Improvement Programme Suggested responsibility	Timescale	Lead Responsibility
Greater Community Engagement	Actively involve the community in the decision making process. Promote services and achievements in public places.	Access to Services: Community Engagement	April 2012	
Use a wide range of methods to engage and respond to our stakeholders, whose views we use to review and improve our service provision.	Actively consult with the community via different media channels and provide information on the actions taken as a result of the consultation. Regularly review the representation on consultation forums to ensure it is representative of the community.	Access to Services: Community Engagement	Ongoing 2012	
Communications Policy is reviewed to reflect the meeting of individual needs	Review the Communications Policy to ensure that information is delivered and available to all. Ensure all service areas share known best practice.	Access to Services	April 2012	

Equality in employment

Outcome	Action	Links to Improvement Programme	Timescale	Lead Responsibility
Maintain our current workforce diversity reflecting the community we serve across all the equality areas.	Review workforce development plan for equality issues. Monitor equality impact assessment for workforce diversity.	Flexible Working/Staff culture – Workforce Development Plan	Ongoing	
Flexible working patterns are available to all staff regardless of equality profile, promoting innovative working practices.	Promote and develop flexible working options. Monitor uptake of flexible working options by equality profile and measure progress annually.	Flexible Working/Staff culture – Workforce Development Plan	Ongoing	
Monitor and address any unjustified pay gaps in relation to gender, disability and race.	Extend pay gap monitoring to cover race, disability, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief and gender reassignment.	Flexible Working/Staff culture – Workforce Development Plan	Ongoing	

Outcome	Action	Links to Improvement Programme	Timescale	Lead Responsibility
Our staff and Councillors understand their roles and objectives under the equality duties and wider equality legislation. They receive training and are confident in their knowledge of the work of the Council.	Implement learning opportunities for staff including, mandatory training workshops, e-based learning, secondment and mentoring opportunities. Monitor evaluation and access to training by staff across all the equality groups.	Access to Services	April 2012 and ongoing	
Staff are fully supported in all areas of their employment to enable ease of access that meets individual requirements.	Consider the need for an Officer to create a 'single point of contact' to support and manage the needs of all staff in an integrated way. Involve known disabled staff in this process.	Flexible Working/Staff culture – Workforce Development Plan	Ongoing	

Outcome	Action	Links to Improvement Programme	Timescale	Lead Responsibility
Staff feedback confirms a culture in the Council where everyone is treated with respect and dignity at work.	Revise our Bullying and Harassment policy and monitor their impact through our staff survey by equality profile and national data on bullying in the workplace for under-represented strands such as transgender staff. Consider provision of independent support for staff provided by a neighbouring authority under a reciprocal arrangement. Review and publicise our policy on domestic abuse.	Flexible Working/Staff culture – Workforce Development Plan	April 2012 and ongoing	
The working environment is accessible for all staff and visitors.	Review the Access to Services policy to reflect the access to the working environment for staff and engage the Asset Management Group Consult with staff on proposed actions via the Staff Forum.	Access to Services	Continuous monitoring through the Council's Covalent system	

Procurement of goods, facilities and services

Outcome	Action	Links to Improvement Programme	Timescale	Lead Responsibility
<p>Through procurement, we achieve a diverse supply chain and our contracts are governed by a robust equality framework.</p>	<p>Monitoring arrangements in place to assess whether contractors are compliant with our pre-qualification questionnaire we which makes clear to our current and future contractors our equality requirements. Ensure all staff receive training on the procurement process and its role within the equality agenda. Consult with internal and external stakeholders to develop guidance that provides support and advice on our tendering and selection processes removing barriers to small- and medium-sized organisations and publish guidance. Follow the procurement toolkit for internal guidance. All contracts to be monitored and any breach of contract to be dealt with swiftly.</p>	<p>Efficiencies</p>	<p>April 2012</p>	<p>Cristine Oakey and Stephen Joyce</p>

Monitoring our Services

Outcome	Action	Links to Improvement Programme	Timescale	Lead Responsibility
The services provided by the Council and all policies/strategies are monitored and impact assessed.	Services undertake an Equality Impact Assessment which is reviewed annually. Each Equality Impact Assessment has an action plan which is reviewed monthly at the service management team meeting. All policies and strategies undergo an Equality Impact Assessment during the recommended review and refresh cycle.	Access to Services	Continuous	
Access to Services	Review the Access to Services Strategy to ensure fairness for all. Review the availability of services through partner organisations and develop the Community Information Points.	Access to Services	March 2013	

We publish and review our equality scheme

Outcome	Action	Links to Improvement Programme	Timescale	Lead Responsibility
We implement our equality scheme. We will monitor it and publish our findings annually.	Review and report monthly to the corporate management team. Produce and publish an annual progress report.	Access to Services	April 2012 to April 2013	
The Equality Act 2010 is enforced	Ensure that breaches of the Equality Act 2010 are appropriately acted upon. Enforcement actions to be taken are published.	Access to Services	September 2010	

Appendix A – List of Consultees

Chief Executive of Uttlesford District Council, Corporate Management Team and Members

Equalities Officer, South Cambridgeshire District Council

Support4Sight

The Citizens Panel

The Council for Voluntary Services Uttlesford and its Member organisations

The Equality and Diversity Strategic Group

The Uttlesford District Council website

Unison (Uttlesford District Council Branch)

Uttlesford District Council Staff

Uttlesford District Council Tenant's Forum

Uttlesford District Council's Disability Forum