

North Hertfordshire District Council

# Corporate Equality Strategy

2017 - 2022

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## 1.0 Foreword

Hertfordshire is one of the safest places to live and work and continues to have low levels of crime<sup>1</sup>. However, North Hertfordshire District Council recognises that disadvantage and discrimination exists in society, and that people may experience more than one form of discrimination at some stage in their lives. The Council is committed to striving to eliminate these inequalities and aims to be fair and reasonable in its responsibilities to its workforce, residents and visitors to the district.

Local authorities and those working within them are likely to be affected by the Equality Act 2010 in a number of different ways, including in their roles as:

Education providers

Employers (including personal and public office holders and employment service providers)

Landlords Service providers

Transport providers

In addition to this, local authorities must also comply with their general obligations under the [Equality Act 2010](#) including:

The duty to make reasonable adjustments

The provisions relating to enforcement

The general and specific public sector equality duties.

The general positive action duty

Adherence to the statutory codes drafted by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)

This Corporate Equality Strategy is a refreshment of the 2009 version and now includes the duties contained in the Equality Act 2010 and the Human Rights Act 1998.

This strategy outlines the actions the Council will be taking to;

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation of North Hertfordshire's residents and visitors
- Advance equality of opportunity for all people in the district
- Foster good relations between people in the local area

The Council has committed itself to making its services, facilities and resources accessible to residents and visitors to North Hertfordshire. The Council will also work towards ensuring that individual Human Rights are supported within its decisions, policies and practices and that people are not discriminated against on the basis of age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnerships, sex and sexual orientation,. A corporate approach is required to ensure that equality legislation is adhered to and equality is embedded within Council services, policies and procedures.

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<sup>1</sup> The Police and Crime plan for Hertfordshire, 2015-2020, *Everybody's business*, David Lloyd, Hertfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner.

Through the progression of the equality objectives that complement this strategy, the Council will ensure all our diverse communities receive Council services that are truly responsive to their needs and treat everyone fairly and with dignity and respect. The strategy will continue to provide a focus for promoting equality in all aspects of the Council's functions, policies and services.

Cllr Tony Hunter

Executive member for Community Engagement and Rural Affairs.

## 2. Purpose

The Corporate Equality Strategy highlights the Council's commitment to eliminating discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations in the workforce and for residents and visitors to North Hertfordshire. Through the progression of the objectives of the corporate plan that complement this strategy, the Council will endeavour to ensure all our diverse communities receive Council services that are responsive to their needs and treat everyone fairly and with dignity and respect.

## 3. Definitions

For the purposes of this strategy, the definitions related to equality at the Council can be found in Appendix A.

## 4. Vision- and Objectives

Despite the challenging financial climate, the Council continues to pursue the vision to make:

***'North Hertfordshire a vibrant place to live, work and prosper'.***

This vision is supported by the following three objectives of the corporate plan:

- **Attractive & Thriving**  
**To work with our partners to provide an attractive and safe environment for our residents, where diversity is welcomed and the disadvantaged are supported**
- **Prosper & Protect**  
**To promote sustainable growth within our district to ensure economic and social opportunities exist for our communities, whilst remaining mindful of our cultural and physical heritage**
- **Responsive & Efficient**  
**To ensure that the Council delivers cost effective and necessary services to our residents that are responsive to developing need and financial constraints**

Together these underpin the Council's vision by aiming to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations which will improve the quality of life for the North Hertfordshire community.

## 5. Corporate interactions

These aspirations are reflected in a number of ways in which the council interacts with the residents of North Hertfordshire. Some of those are listed, but not limited to, below:

### The Local Strategic Partnership

The LSP is an umbrella partnership which brings together organisations from all sectors to support the shared aspirations of the Local Strategic Partnership.

These are:

- We will support individuals and businesses to develop and grow by provision of training and skills
- We will support 'civic engagement' - Encouraging communities and individuals to have a greater voice and participate in local activities and community groups
- We will play our part in the global effort to mitigate the effects of climate change

As partners, we are working together to ensure that the North Hertfordshire is '*a vibrant place to live, work and prosper*'. More information on the Local Strategic Partnership is available at the following link: <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/home/council-data-and-performance/policies/strategic-partnership-involvement>

### The Statement of Community involvement -

The Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) sets out how North Hertfordshire District Council will involve the community in the preparation, alteration or review of local planning policies or in determining planning applications. The document outlines the need and commitment to involve a wide cross section of the public when developing planning policies.

An extensive consultation database is already in place which includes the following types of organisations:

- Statutory consultees;
- Central government departments;
- Town, Parish and Community Councils;
- Neighbourhood Planning Steering Groups;
- Parish Meetings;
- Hertfordshire County Council;
- Hertfordshire District and Borough Councils;
- Neighbouring local authorities;
- Neighbouring Parish Councils;
- The North Hertfordshire Partnership (LSP);
- Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation;
- Local community groups and organisations;
- Black and minority ethnic groups;
- Religious / faith groups;
- Disabled persons organisations;
- Developers, landowners and agents;
- Businesses and business interest groups; and
- Individual members of the public.

The following examples illustrate the range of ways that the Council supports and engages with the residents of North Hertfordshire. In regard to those groups that are perceived as 'hard to reach' ( which includes People with disabilities, Black and ethnic minority groups, Working age people, Young people and Gypsy and Traveller communities), the Planning Policy and Projects team are working with the Community and Policy Teams to further develop those links and try to encourage more involvement in the future.

The document also clearly states the position of the Council in regard to comments that are received in regard to planning matters. It states that

*'The Council, in its absolute discretion, reserves the right not to consider or include comments which are inappropriate including:*

- *comments of a discriminatory nature (age, gender re-assignment, disability, ethnicity, religious belief, sex and sexual orientation) including racist and homophobic comments;*
- *Inflammatory or offensive comments (of a foul or abusive nature); or any other comments of a similar nature that it deems inappropriate.*

*If a written response to a consultation is received which contains inappropriate content as listed above, this will be discarded from the consultation and, where there is a postal address, will be returned. In these circumstances the respondent will be given an opportunity to make their comments using more appropriate language so that they can be considered as part of the consultation process.'*

More information on the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI is available at the following link; <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/home/planning/planning-policy/local-plan-emerging-policy/statement-community-involvement-sci>).

## **Hate Crime Champions -**

Full Council passed a motion in 2016 to ensure that local bodies and programmes have the support and resources they need to fight and prevent hate crimes and to 'publically condemn racism and xenophobia'. This also includes the adoption of the DLCG approved definition of Anti-Semitism.<sup>2</sup>

As part of the Council's zero-tolerance approach to hate crime, North Hertfordshire District Council has recently become a third party reporting centre. This means that designated Hate Crime Champions are on hand to assist any member of the public wishing to make a report of Hate Crime through the Council.

This third party reporting centre is a safe place where victims and witnesses to a Hate Crime, or incident, can safely and confidentially make a report without going directly to the police.

A Hate Crime is any incident which constitutes a criminal offence that is perceived by the victim, or any other person to be prejudice towards; their race, religion, sex, sexual orientation or disability. This directly supports the objectives of the Public Sector Equality Duty. Further information regarding Hate Crime and Hate Crime Champions can be found at

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix A

the following link: <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/home/community/community-safety/report-hate-crime>

## **Investors in People (IiP) assessments**

### **Benefits to NHDC**

NHDC is committed to managing and developing its people. In recognition of this, the Council was awarded Investors in People status in July 2000. The council have been reassessed on a regular basis and have been awarded the standard in 2017. One of the standards within the award focuses on recognising inclusive, diverse and values-driven organisations. Having a diverse workforce with people from different racial, educational and social backgrounds and a diverse age range opens up a wealth of possibilities and helps to encourage creativity and foster innovation.

An organisation with a diverse range of employees is well placed to understand the needs of a wide range of customers, and can interact with a broad client base. It is also in a good position to recruit and retain staff in an increasingly diverse and competitive labour market.

### **Benefits to Staff**

There are also other considerable benefits to staff and the underlying philosophy of the standard is that all individuals are enabled to realise more of their potential.

Working to the principles of IiP encourages:

- A more positive working environment
- Recognition and development
- Good quality training when required
- Improved job satisfaction
- Better communication

## 6. Linkages to National and Local Priorities

The Strategy supports the Council's Priorities by contributing to;

- Promoting Health, Wellbeing and Independence – HCC Health and wellbeing strategy helping people to stay healthy, strong and fit for the future
- The Strategy contributes to the reduction of crime and disorder as it incorporates the reporting and monitoring of hate crimes and other discriminatory incidents.
- The Council will at all times recognise and respond to its legal obligations with regard to equalities and the Human Rights Act 1998.

The Corporate Equality Strategy supports the following council policies and procedures for staff:

- Bullying and Harassment
- Code of Conduct
- DBS Employment checks
- Equality and Diversity in Employment
- Home working
- Managing Misconduct
- Maternity Leave and Pay
- Information Security
- Investors in People
- One to ones
- Paternity Adoption leave
- Paternity Leave
- People strategy
- Recruitment and Selection
- Religious observance
- Retirement
- People Strategy
- Safeguarding of Adults and Children at risk
- Shared Parental leave and Pay
- Special leave, dependant and parental leave
- Time off for dependants
- Tackling Extremism and Radicalisation guidance

The Corporate Equality Strategy supports the following national policies for staff and residents:

- Counter – Extremism Strategy (*Central government guidance to counter the ideology of non-violent and violent extremism*)
- Prevent Duty guidance for England and Wales (*guidance for specified authorities in England and Wales on the duty in the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 to have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism*)

NHDC's Tackling Extremism and Radicalisation guidance links to the national policies, as above, and is intended to provide a framework for dealing with issues relating to vulnerability, radicalisation and exposure to extreme views. We recognise that we are well placed to be able to identify safeguarding issues and this guidance clearly sets out how the council will deal with such incidents and identifies how our vision underpins our actions.

## **7. Background and Context**

The Council recognises that disadvantage and discrimination exists in society, and that people may experience more than one form of discrimination at some stage. The Council is committed to striving to eliminate these inequalities and aims to be fair, reasonable and just in its responsibilities to its workforce, residents and those who are visiting North Hertfordshire. This commitment is enforced by the Equality Act 2010.

### **The Equality Act 2010**

During 2011, the Equality Act 2010 was enacted by the Government. The general equality duty requires the majority of public bodies, including councils, to pay 'due regard' to;

- Eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- Advancing equality of opportunity between different groups
- Fostering good relations

This duty covers nine protective characteristics;

- Age discrimination
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Race
- Religion or belief (including lack of belief)
- Sex
- Sexual orientation
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity

## **8. Public Sector Equality Duty**

The Council, as well as other public bodies, is also subject to the specific Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) where the Council is legally required to publish information to demonstrate its compliance with the general equality duty and develop and publish one or more equality objectives.

North Hertfordshire District Council is committed to equality of opportunity in employment and aims to have a workforce that is representative of the community that it serves.

A workforce profile is published annually. The report provides an overview of the equalities picture in respect of those joining the Council, current staff and those leaving the Council. This is followed by data showing a more detailed analysis by protected characteristic. Where appropriate, reasonable adjustments will be made for disabled appointed applicants in accordance with the Equality Act 2010, covered in the Recruitment and Selection policy. The following report provides useful information on the Council's workforce profile and policies:

- Attendance Procedure
- Bullying and Harassment
- Complaints Resolution
- Equal Pay
- Equality and Diversity Policy
- Improving Performance and absence procedures
- Learning and Development
- Long Term Sickness

- Recruitment and Selection
- Pregnancy and Maternity
- Leavers

The Policy team also conduct an annual review of all relevant council decisions which have equality implications. This annual cumulative equality assessment is published on the internet.

## 9. North Hertfordshire workforce

The Equality Act 2010 ensures that Public bodies follow their duty to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation within the work place. The compilation of the annual work profile is a useful tool to monitor and ensure that the council meets its specific duties under this specific legislation.

### Age<sup>3</sup>

Of the Council's total workforce of 330, 56% are between 45 and 64 years old. 2% of staff are over 65 and 42% are between 21-44 years of age.

### Disability

The council recorded that 5% of the workforce indicated that they had a disability, although 18% declined to disclose this information.

### Sex

Of the 330 staff employed, of the number of people aged between 21 – 65 and over, 34% are men whilst 66% are women.

### Race<sup>4</sup>

88% of staff identified themselves as White, 4% identified themselves as Asian, 2% as Black, 1% as mixed and 5% as other. This is broadly in line the diverse community of North Hertfordshire.

### Religion

53% of staff identified themselves as Christian, 1% Sikh, 1% Muslim 1% Buddhist and 2% other. 23% did not disclose this information and 18% declared themselves as not having a religion.

### Sexual orientation

1% of the current staff numbers declared that they were either Gay/Lesbian or bisexual. 76% identified themselves as heterosexual. 23% choose not to disclose their orientation.

### Transgender

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<sup>3</sup> Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

<sup>4</sup> Race Categories – *White* – White British, White Irish, Other white background, Asian – *Indian*, Pakistani, Other Asian background, Bangladeshi, Chinese, *Black* – African, Caribbean, Other mixed background, Other black background, *Mixed* – White and Black Caribbean, Other mixed background, White and Asian, *Other* – Information not disclosed, other

There is no current information regarding staff member who are transgender.

#### Marriage and civil partnerships

59% of staff are married, 29% are identified as single, 3% are divorced and 1% are identified as being in a civil partnership. (8% did not disclose their status).

By having a diverse workforce means that:

- the organisation can offer a wide range of ideas, skills, resources
- There is a much wider pool of talent available to the organisation which embraces diversity
- and raises the profile of the organisation within the community.

If we are actively seen as an organisation that encourages the seeking of a diverse workforce, we could benefit in the following ways:

- Knowledge of different areas of the community is increased and can be utilised
- A better understanding of resident/service user behaviour can be attained
- NHDC can become an employer of choice
- NHDC could grow to have a more 'balanced' and representative workforce

By having a working environment that has diversity management initiatives this can be beneficial to employees.

Such as

- Staff will have a better appreciation, understanding and respect for difference:
- Contrasting perspectives will be encouraged, which can lead to improved team productivity and success
- Employees' morale will be improved, which raises motivation
- Standards of delivery will be improved

Retention of employees will be strengthened, as will employee progression All external advertisements state that applications from disabled candidates will be welcomed and will include the 'Two Ticks' symbol. In line with the Employment Service Two Ticks Scheme, all applicants with a disability who meet the essential criteria for a job vacancy will be invited to interview and considered on their abilities. Further information can be found within the HR Recruitment and Selection Policy

## 10. Equality Analysis

Equality analysis provides a way for the Council to consider the effect of decisions on different groups protected from discrimination by the Equality Act 2010.

NHDC must demonstrate that any analysis:

- contains sufficient information to enable a public authority to show it has given due regard to the equality duty in its decision making
- identifies methods for mitigating or avoiding adverse impact (either disproportionate disadvantage and unlawful discrimination)
- considers if there are any unintended consequences for some groups
- considers if the policy / decision will be fully effective for all target groups.

NHDC is committed to complete equality analysis for policy decisions made by the authority. (i.e. key decisions that have an impact on equality issues, major budget implications and any major service revisions.)

The corporate priorities embrace the work that we do with our local communities, parishes, town councils and charities.

The Council's Corporate plan is supported by Service plans which reflect the wide ranging work of the Council. Each Service plan is a key component of NHDC's Corporate Business Planning Process and sets out how the Service will support the achievement of the three main priorities of the Council.

By regular review of these service plans officers are able to ensure that the provided services are inclusive as possible. The use of the equality analysis is a useful tool to ensure that this occurs. The range of council's activities outlined in this document seek to ensure that North Hertfordshire is a 'vibrant place to live, work and prosper' for our diverse communities.

## **11. Summary**

The Public Sector Equality duty requires public bodies to consider all individuals when carrying out their day to day work – in shaping policy, in delivering services and in relation to their own employees.

The actions within this strategy seek to discharge this duty by promoting the principles of equality, diversity, fairness and inclusion within our employment practices, service design and delivery, and partnership working. The changing demographics within the district will require an assessment of service delivery.

The attached appendices provide definitions for the purpose of this policy and an update community profile of the District.