

Equality & Inclusion Policy

1.0. Introduction

This Policy sets out our commitment to equality and inclusion and shows how we comply with the Equality Act (2010) and the Public Sector Equality Duty (2011). The Equality Act legally protects people from discrimination in the workplace and wider society. The purpose of this Policy is as follows:

- to set and publish our Equality Objectives
- to show that we have considered the aims of the legislation as it relates to protected characteristics in setting our Equality Objectives
- to show that our Equality Objectives are supported by a sound evidence base and that the process for arriving at them is strategic and well informed¹

We want the District to be “a great place for living, working, learning and leisure” with “people who feel valued and included” (Corporate Plan 2018-2023). We recognise that residents may experience inequality connected to characteristics protected by Equality Act. We also recognise that they may not feel included and experience poor wellbeing due to disparities in health, housing, education, employment and their experience of crime. The connection between equality and wellbeing was made in our 2016 Equality & Diversity Policy and Covid-19 has highlighted the relationship between economic recovery and wellbeing. The Equality Act establishes the principle that considering the needs of all our communities is key to removing or minimising the disadvantage suffered by those most in need. This is something we are passionate about.

Under the Public Sector Equality Duty, we must pay due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different groups, so that everyone feels included. We have a good record of achievement in delivering services which are fair, accessible and of benefit to all sections of the community. As we move into recovery we need to better understand and measure the effectiveness our work to ensure that all our citizens benefit from growth and opportunity and feel part of their communities.

1.1. Our District

The District is a mixture of urban and rural areas and stretches northward from its boundary with Greater London into rural Essex, covering an area of 131 square miles. Over a quarter of the population live in rural and rural related areas.

- The total resident population is estimated to be 132, 200 (all ages, 2020)
- The ward with the largest population is Grange Hill, representing 5.56% of the total population (2020)
- In the 2011 Census 63,650 residents were male and 68,039 were female

¹ Objectives and the Equality Duty: A Guide for Public Authorities England (and non-devolved public authorities in Scotland and Wales), Equality and Human Rights Commission 2014

- In the 2011 Census the District had a black and minority ethnic population of 9.5%, although 14.7% of residents described themselves as being from a non-white UK population². This compares to 5.7% and 9.3% for Essex as a whole.
- The mean age of residents was 41 years, the same as Essex as a whole
- 15.7% of the resident population have a long-term illness or disability compared to 17.1 for Essex as whole.
- 75.6% of women (aged 16-64) were in employment, compared to 75.9% for Essex as a whole (2019/20)
- 86.0% of men (aged 16-64) were in employment, compared to 81.7% for Essex as a whole (2019/20)
- 76.6% of people (aged 16-64) who are 'White' were in employment, compared to 75.9% for Essex as a whole (2020 Q4)
- 82.5% of people (aged 16-64) from 'All Ethnicity Minority Groups' were in employment, compared to 79.6% for Essex as a whole (2020 Q4)³
- 46.4% of people over 50 were in employment, compared to 40.8 % for Essex as a whole (2020 Q4)

The inequalities that result from socio-economic issues are covered by Section 1 of the Equality Act. While this section is not currently in force, it is important to consider socio-economic inequality because some people facing these issues also face inequality because of their protected characteristics. Others may not experience inequality because of protected characteristics but can feel excluded because they have a low income, are socially isolated, live in poor housing or experience poor health.

While we are working with our NHS partners to address the health inequalities associated with socio-economic deprivation, we need to better understand the relationship between this and protected characteristics under the Equality Act. Deprivation is a broad concept that refers to unmet need caused by a lack of resources and opportunities of all kinds, not just financial. It can be understood through issues such as poor housing, homelessness, low educational attainment, lack of employment, worklessness, poor health and high levels of morbidity.

The Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) attempts to measure deprivation at small area or neighbourhood level (average 1,500 residents) and provide a picture of relative deprivation. The IMD is produced by comparing each small area (Lower Super Output Area) against all the others based on a basket of indicators within weighted domains: Income (22.5%) including subsets for children and older people; Employment (22.5%); Education (13.5%); Health & Disability (13.5); Crime (9.3%); Barriers to Housing and Services (9.3%); Living Environment. (9.3%). Scores are calculated for each small area and areas are ranked against each other from 1 (most deprived) to 32,844 (least deprived). An overall rank is then calculated for each local authority. For district councils, as lower tier authorities, this is between 1 and 317, with one being the most deprived.

The District has an IMD rank of 200. This positions the Council in the upper 40% of least deprived Lower Tier Local Authorities (LTLAs) nationally. Within Essex, EFDC is ranked 5th out of 12 district and borough councils for deprivation. It has the highest rank/ least deprivation relating to Health & Disability (266) and the lowest rank/ most deprivation relating to Crime (63). Between 2015 and 2019 deprivation relating to children improved while deprivation affecting older people worsened. The biggest negative change in this period was

² This is the population who do not describe themselves as being white English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British

³ Employment data is aggregated for ethnic groups other than 'White'

in the Living Environment domain (176) which measures the quality of housing, air quality and road traffic accidents.

The table below lists the 10 most deprived neighbourhoods in the District and their wards. Loughton Alderton has the only neighbourhood that falls into the two most deprived deciles (1&2) nationally. There are 75 neighbourhoods or small areas in Essex in deciles 1&2

Table 1: 10 Most Deprived LSOAs					
LSOA Code	LSOA Name	Ward Name	IMD Score	IMD Rank	IMD Decile
E01021771	Epping Forest 013A	Loughton Alderton	36.978	5,221	2
E01021816	Epping Forest 007E	Waltham Abbey Paternoster	33.151	6,610	3
E01021806	Epping Forest 009A	Waltham Abbey High Beach	28.681	8,666	3
E01021800	Epping Forest 003C	Passingford	27.203	9,468	3
E01021811	Epping Forest 007A	Waltham Abbey North East	26.996	9,594	3
E01021764	Epping Forest 017A	Grange Hill	26.987	9,597	3
E01021776	Epping Forest 011C	Loughton Broadway	25.623	10,408	4
E01021812	Epping Forest 009B	Waltham Abbey North East	25.406	10,509	4
E01021775	Epping Forest 011B	Loughton Broadway	25.264	10,606	4
E01021774	Epping Forest 011A	Loughton Broadway	24.593	11,012	4

Ward profiles

Grange Hill has the largest population (7,321) representing 5.56% of the total population of the District. Grange Hill has the highest number of Asian / Asian British and Black / African / Caribbean /Black British residents. It has largest number of people who cannot speak English well, or at all, and the highest number of households with dependent children.

Waltham Abbey High Beach has the highest percentage of residents with no qualifications (38.73%) compared to 24.00% for the District as a whole and the lowest number of households with dependent children.

Waltham Abbey Paternoster has the lowest life expectancy at birth for males and females and the highest percentage of people whose daily activities are limited by a long-term illness or disability. Waltham Abbey South West has the highest number of households in social renting other than Council housing.

Loughton Broadway has the highest number of households renting from the Council. It has the highest proportion of overcrowded households, the highest proportion of older people living in poverty, the highest number of pensioners living alone, the second highest percentage of people in very bad health and the third highest percentage of residents whose daily activities are limited by a long term illness or disability.

Shelley has the highest percentage of residents claiming unemployment related benefit (May 2021). It also has the highest proportion of residents aged 15 and under.

Chipping Ongar, Greensted and Marden Ash have the highest number of people aged 65 and over.

1.2. Our Approach to Equality

The Public Sector Equality Duty requires us to be pro-active in addressing equality and we have many examples of our work to promote and embed equality. This section describes some of our achievements, which we have built on to set our Equality Objectives.

2020/21 were unprecedented times. Covid-19 highlighted the effect of disparities such as age and race on health risks and outcomes and the need to reduce health inequalities. To mitigate the impact of the pandemic we worked with our communities through the Faith and Communities Tactical Co-ordination Group. Underpinned by a collaborative mindset and a desire to achieve collective impact, the Group brought together faith and community leaders to work with public services in a way that hadn't been seen before. Key activities included providing guidance on places of worship, ceremonies and marking key religious, cultural and community events; coronavirus advice for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Groups and providing advice to employment sectors. Working groups were established to support the mental health and wellbeing of the LGBTQ+ community and for people with dementia. Covid-19 had tragic consequences for many people with dementia in 2020 and a new Dementia and Faith Working Group has been established. This is more reflective of multiculturalism and is now taking forward work on dementia with Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic Groups.

During the pandemic, the Epping Forest District Museum focussed on developing digital opportunities for the community to engage with its collections in an accessible and interactive way. The Museum continues to focus on how it can represent the whole community and provide meaningful experiences for everyone. To mark its reopening in 2021, the Loughton Boys Holocaust Survivors exhibition told the story of survivors sent to Holmehurst Hostel in Loughton and the staff that supported them.

Our People Strategy sets out how we are working towards becoming a more inclusive employer, promoting the Council as a great place to work, attracting and retaining talent, creating an inclusive, respectful culture where people feel recognised and valued. We have made it easier for a wider range of people to apply for roles, implemented essential inclusivity training for all managers and an e-learning programme on diversity and inclusion. We aim to achieve Disability Confident Level 2 status as an organisation and work in partnership with the Shaw Trust - a charity that helps people with disabilities and those who feel excluded to find the right career path.

We have made a made a commitment to flexible working and research suggests that this has a positive effect on diversity and perceptions of workplace inclusion. It also suggests that creating an environment where people can work in a more varied way is a worthwhile inclusion and diversity initiative⁴. According to national statistics, although more men worked from home before the pandemic, the number of women working from home during the pandemic increased to 48% compared to 46% of men (ONS 2020). Research also found that 64% of people said that the female partner was working almost exclusively from home

⁴ Center for Evidence-Based Management (2021) Flexible working, teleworking and diversity: an evidence review, scientific summary. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development

during lockdown compared to 52% of men (UK Working from Home During COVID-19 Lockdown Study).

While Covid-19 brought challenges in terms of additional childcare and home-schooling responsibilities, it is hoped that flexible working and reforms such as the four-day week will reduce labour market inequalities and the gender pay gap. Flexible working also supports people with fluctuating health conditions to stay in work and enables carers to balance work and caring responsibilities. We will seek, therefore, to understand and monitor the impact of flexible working on our workforce.

We are committed to tackling prejudice and hate crime and building community cohesion. The Strategic Hate Crime Prevention Partnership (SHCPP) brings organisations across Essex together to develop a consistent, multi-agency response to hate crime focussed on the following themes: understanding hate crime; preventing hate crime; increasing the reporting of hate crime; increasing access to support for victims; improving the operational response to hate crimes. In-line with the objectives in this Policy we will work with the Partnership to better understand hate crime, including fluctuations in reporting over time and cyclical patterns in performance. We will also work to understand the socio-economic factors that impact on crime including labour market issues such as wages and skills and their relationship to protected characteristics.

Although Covid-19 created physical barriers, we inspired people to connect in new ways and feel part of a community. This included work to address digital exclusion with the WECAN (West Essex Community Action Network) partnership. Digital exclusion applies to people who lack access to the internet or to a device, or who lack the skills, ability, confidence or motivation to use it⁵. Working with Digital Unite, we developed a programme of digital skills learning to support residents and help them engage with the digital world. The programme included a range of guidance on computer basics, document creation, email and internet telephone, social networking and blogs, government services internet security. We also worked with Unite in Kind who aim to create an online community of kindness to help people connect with friends, neighbours and strangers and overcome feelings of isolation. Our Older People's Team and Digital Buddies also provided a support line and access to a briefing scheme for residents in sheltered accommodation.

Our Digital Strategy will ensure that we understand the relationship between digital exclusion, deprivation and protected characteristics under the Equality Act. To help understand inequalities in internet usage the Economic and Social Research Council/ Consumer Data Research Centre have developed an Internet User Classification tool that segments populations into categories based on how they interact with the internet (Appendix A). The majority of our 10 most deprived small areas/ LSOAs (Table 1, page 3) fall into the category 'Passive and Uncommitted Users'. This group has limited or no interaction with the internet and is characterised by higher levels of employment in semi-skilled and blue-collar occupations.

Waltham Abbey Paternoster has an area where residents are characterised as 'E-Withdrawn'. Here we find the least engagement with the internet in terms of information seeking, access to financial services and the lowest rate of online access via a mobile device. E-Withdrawn neighbourhoods are characterised by high rates of unemployment and high use of social housing. Passingford has an area that falls into the category 'E-Rational Utilitarians'. This group is located in mainly rural/semi-rural areas with a higher than average retired population often constrained by poor infrastructure.

⁵ Preventing Digital Exclusion from Online Justice' (April 2018) <https://justice.org.uk/new-justice-report-on-preventing-digital-exclusion>

Table 2: Internet User Classification		
LSOA Code	Ward Name	Category
E01021771	Loughton Alderton	'Passive and Uncommitted Users'.
E01021816	Waltham Abbey Paternoster	'E-Withdrawn'
E01021806	Waltham Abbey High Beach	'Passive and Uncommitted Users'.
E01021800	Passingford	'E-Rational Utilitarians'
E01021811	Waltham Abbey North East	'Passive and Uncommitted Users'.
E01021764	Grange Hill	'Passive and Uncommitted Users'.
E01021776	Loughton Broadway	'Passive and Uncommitted Users'.
E01021812	Waltham Abbey North East	'Passive and Uncommitted Users'.
E01021775	Loughton Broadway	'Passive and Uncommitted Users'.
E01021774	Loughton Broadway	'Passive and Uncommitted Users'.

Inequalities in education, confidence, resources, responsibilities (work and caring), language barriers and disabilities may prevent people from participating fully in local democracy. We are reviewing our approach to community engagement and consultation, considering those groups who we engage well with and those whose needs we don't understand well enough and who may lack a voice. Positive outcomes from community engagement include service and project delivery that better responds to communities' needs and the use of local knowledge and skills to improve community experience. Evidence suggests that a 'one size fits all' approach to community engagement and consultation is not effective and that a hybrid approach drawing on participatory research methods and co-design is likely to be successful⁶

1.3. Equality Legislation

The General Duty

The Public Sector Equality Duty was created by the Equality Act to harmonise the previous race, disability and gender equality duties and extend protection to newly protected characteristics under the Act. It replaced these duties and came into force on 5 April 2011. The Duty covers age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief and sexual orientation. Under the Duty public authorities must have due regard to the following 3 aims:

- to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act
- to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

⁶ See for example 'Hard to reach' or 'easy to ignore'? Promoting equality in community engagement (2017), What Works Scotland.

- to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

Due Regard

Due regard to equality means that these 3 aims must be considered and reflected on during:

- the decision-making process
- the design of policies (including internal policies), and
- the delivery of services.

The duty to have due regard is not a duty to achieve a particular result, although policies and practices must be kept under review.

Advance Equality

This is defined as the need to:

- remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by people who share a relevant protected characteristic
- meet the needs of people who share a relevant protected characteristic where these are different from the needs of people who do not share it
- encourage people who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low

Foster good relations

This is defined as the need to:

- tackle prejudice, and
- promote understanding

Specific Duties

Specific duties are designed to help public authorities demonstrate how they are meeting the General Duty by preparing and publishing, in a manner that is reasonably accessible to the public:

- one or more “specific and measurable” Equality Objectives, at least every four years, to further any of the aims of the General Duty
- information relating to their employees and others affected by their policies and practices. This includes information to check whether any group protected under the Equality Act is being disadvantaged by their employment policies and to report their gender pay gap.

It is not specified how public authorities should measure the effect of their policies and practices on equality. It is up to each organisation to choose the most effective approach to analysis. The Equality and Human Rights commission recommend that a recognised approach to setting effective objectives is used e.g., S.M.A.R.T. It also recommends that

qualitative evidence is used to measure the experience of people with protected characteristics as well as quantitative information about service outcomes⁷.

Equality Impact Assessments

The Equality Act 2010 does not specifically require EIAs to be carried out, although they are recommended to demonstrate compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty. It should also be noted that the legislation refers to 'equality analysis' rather than 'equality impact assessment'. This is intended to focus attention on the quality of analysis and how it is used in decision-making rather than the impact assessment document.

1.4. Our Commitments

While equality is integral to our work, embedding it is a continuous process. In our 2020 Equalities Statement we made the following commitments to equality:

- In 2021 we will review our Equality Objectives and produce a new Equality Policy
- Our Equality Objectives will be supported by a framework for measuring performance and evaluating the effectiveness of our work on equality.
- Each Service Plan will describe how it is working to improve equality and will report on the delivery of equality.
- We will review our Equalities Impact Assessment to focus more on the role of analysis in understanding the impact of our policies, practices, events and decision-making processes. This supports our commitment to ensure that these are fair and do not present barriers to participation or disadvantage to any protected groups from participation.
- We will engage and learn from our communities about the challenges they face and ensure that policy development, innovation and growth are inclusive and put people on an equal footing.
- We will continue to promote the District as a place where diversity of background and thought are valued.

1.5. Equality Objectives

Our previous Equality Objectives were to integrate the Council's Public Sector Equality Duty into our partnership work; to apply robust equality requirements in commissioning, procurement and contract management; to develop our capacity so that our employees have the knowledge, skills and confidence to deliver our plans; to improve and develop equality in our business activities. While these activities remain important, they are now embedded in our everyday work and addressed in our Service Plans. In-line with the principle of continuous improvement that underpins this Policy our prior Equality Objectives will be monitored as they become embedded into business as usual.

⁷ Objectives and the Equality Duty: A Guide for Public Authorities England (and non-devolved public authorities in Scotland and Wales), Equality and Human Rights Commission 2014

Our Equality Objectives (2021-2025) build on our commitment to delivering excellence in equality. They focus on what we will do to advance equality and how we will do it.

- **Equality Objective 1:** To develop, and deliver in partnership, a District-level approach to growth and recovery that builds, and can demonstrate, an Epping Forest that works for all.
- **Equality Objective 2:** To drive improvement in service delivery through the use of equality data and data on socio-economic deprivation.
- **Equality Objective 3:** To develop a research and consultation strategy to understand the needs and experiences of our communities with a clear pathway or process to embed their knowledge and experience into service design, development and delivery.
- **Equality Objective 4:** To understand, and evidence, the impact of our workforce initiatives on improving equality.

These Equality Objectives will enable EFDC to:

- Better understand our diverse communities and the relationship between protected characteristics under the Equality Act and socio-economic deprivation.
- Embed this understanding into policy and practice, particularly in relation to growth and recovery.
- Demonstrate inclusive leadership, partnership and a clear organisational commitment to be a leader in equality and inclusion.
- Develop services that are relevant and responsive to people's experiences and the challenges they face in a digital world.
- Provide better evidence of the impact of our workforce initiatives

To support our commitment to continuous improvement and a whole council approach to equality we will adopt the LGA Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG). We will also identify Officer and Elected Member leads to make the links between this Policy and other policies and strategies e.g., The Health and Wellbeing Strategy, national strategies and Service Plan objectives.

1.6. National Developments

As well as delivering excellence, our Equality Objectives will help EFDC respond to new developments built on equality legislation and policy. The government has published the Race Disparity Audit and is currently developing an approach to mandatory ethnicity pay reporting. The new National Disability Strategy is wide ranging with a focus on improving access in work, education, healthcare, housing, transport, leisure and access to goods and services and local authorities have a key role in delivering sustainable improvements for disabled people. A consultation on disability workforce reporting will be launched at the end of 2021, after which the government will publish next steps.

1.7. Actions

To deliver the Equality Policy the following actions will be undertaken

- 2021 - Establish the foundation to deliver our Equality Objectives, building on our

current commitments.

- 2021 - Develop granular Action Plan to include activity with the Communities Team and alignment with other policies and strategies.
- 2021 - Collect baseline measures to inform and set targets, integrate existing Equality Impact Assessments into Corporate Equality Impact Assessment Framework.
- 2021 – Develop Equality Monitoring and Evaluation Plan.
- 2021 - Review Equalities Impact Assessment to focus on the role of analysis in understanding the impact of our policies, practices, events and decision-making processes.
- 2022 - Ensure higher standards being met in all areas. Address challenges.
- 2023 - Model good practice across the organisation. Self-assessment against EFLG.
- 2024/5 - Review Equality Objectives, produce new Equality Policy.

1.8. Conclusion, Monitoring and Evaluation

This Policy reinforces our commitment and responsibility to our communities and our workforce. While the focus on equality in our Service Plans embeds equality as part of the normal business planning process, we recognise the need to continuously improve and build on our past achievements to ensure excellent equality practice.

To ensure that service and policy work is aligned with the Equality Objectives in this Policy existing and future Equality Impact Assessments will be combined into an overarching, cumulative, ongoing Corporate Equality Impact Assessment. This will provide baseline measures to determine the impact of our work on all protected characteristics under the Equality Act and enable progress to be measured against baseline. A Monitoring and Evaluation Plan will be developed to support this and progress against Plan deliverables reported on a quarterly basis as part of our corporate governance arrangements. We will continue to report on progress towards meeting our Equality Objectives in our annual Equalities Statement, where we also publish our workforce statistics and gender pay gap data.

(Sources: Office for National Statistics: Population Projections Estimate 2018, Census 2011; Labour Force Survey; Annual Population Survey; Nomis Official Labour Market Statistics; Coronavirus and homeworking in the UK, Statistical Bulletin (2020); Working from home during the COVID-19 lockdown: Changing preferences and the future of work (2020), University of Kent; Rural-Urban Classification of Local Authority Districts (2011) Defra; English indices of deprivation (2019) Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government; Local Health Data, Public Health England)

Appendix A. ESRC Consumer Data Research Centre: Internet User Classification

e-Cultural Creators - High levels of internet engagement particularly in relation to social networks, communication, streaming and gaming but relatively low levels of online shopping, apart from groceries.

e-Professionals - High levels of internet engagement, located in urban areas aged between 25 and 34. They are experienced users and engage with the internet daily and in a variety of settings.

e-Veterans - Affluent families usually located in low-density suburbs with populations of mainly middle-aged and highly qualified professionals. Higher levels of engagement with information seeking, online services and shopping, less engagement with social networks or gaming.

Youthful Urban Fringe - Live at the edge of city centres and in deprived inner-city areas, young, ethnically diverse comprised of large student and informal households, access via mobile devices. High levels of internet engagement including high levels of social media usage.

e-Rational Utilitarians - Mainly located in mainly rural/semi-rural areas with a higher than average retired population often constrained by poor infrastructure. Undertake online shopping with the internet used as a utility rather than a conduit for entertainment.

e-Mainstream – Live in heterogeneous neighbourhoods at the periphery of urban areas or in transitional neighbourhoods. Have typical user characteristics.

Passive and Uncommitted Users - Limited or no interaction with the Internet. Tend to reside outside city centres and close to the suburbs or in semi-rural areas. Higher levels of employment in semi-skilled and blue-collar occupations.

Digital Seniors -Typically White British, retired and relatively affluent. Average use of the internet, typically using a personal computer at home. Despite being infrequent users, they are adept enough to use the internet for information seeking, financial services and online shopping.

Settled Offline Communities - Elderly, White British living in semi-rural areas. Limited engagement with the internet, may have only rare access or no access at all.

E-Withdrawn - Least engagement with the internet in terms of information seeking, access to financial services and the lowest rate of online access via a mobile device. High rates of unemployment and high use of social housing.

Source: Alexiou, A. and Singleton, A. (2018). ESRC Consumer Data Research Centre; Contains National Statistics data Crown copyright and database right (2017); Ofcom data (2016). CDRC data from Data Partners (2017)