



# **Mid Sussex District Council**

## **Equality and Diversity Scheme**

**2020 – 2024**

February 2020

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## **Foreword**

This Equality and Diversity Scheme sets out the Council's commitment to meeting the public sector duty under the Equality Act to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations. This applies to everything that the Council does, whether providing services to our local population, employing people, working with partners, developing policies or communicating and involving people in our decision making.

Mid Sussex is fortunate in being a generally prosperous area, whose residents in the main enjoy good health and above average life expectancy. However, anyone can be discriminated against and suffer disadvantage which affects their quality of life. This scheme identifies the issues faced by the protected groups in Mid Sussex and the measures that we are taking in response. We also recognise that living in a rural area or having poor skills or low income can impact on people's life chances, so our scheme addresses these issues too. The scheme also covers our work to support the needs of the Armed Forces Community.

We value the diversity of people within the District and will regularly monitor progress to the scheme. Particularly important is ensuring that we know our community, by local analysis and engagement. The latest information suggests that there have been increases in the numbers of over 65s and 85s in Mid Sussex, with the District becoming more diverse in terms of its ethnicity and religious beliefs. These factors present challenges and opportunities, which will be reflected in the way that we plan our services.

I would like to acknowledge the contribution of the partner organisations that we work with to promote equality and diversity in Mid Sussex. Our grants scheme supports a wide range of community organisations and projects that seek to assist vulnerable groups.

We are committed to being an employer of choice, providing a flexible and supportive working environment and trying to ensure that our workforce reflects the community that we serve. As Cabinet Member with responsibility for this area of work, I recognise that our elected members, who know and represent their communities, are central to both policy development and to the scrutiny of this work. We will work with staff to ensure that we deliver against our Equality Objectives.

Councillor Norman Webster Cabinet Member for Community

## 1. Introduction

The purpose of the Equality and Diversity Scheme is to:

- a) Show how the Council will meet the requirements of the Equality Act and the public sector equality duty. This is in relation to our work in representing, employing and serving people and as a partner working with other organisations.
- b) Set out the Council's Equality Objectives and to outline the main actions that the Council intends to take for their achievement.
- c) Enable monitoring of progress.
- d) Enable the public and other agencies to hold the Council to account for progress.

We have published annual Equality and Diversity Progress Reports since 2010 and the 2019 Progress Report is included as an appendix to this scheme.

### Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 introduced a public sector equality duty and nine protected characteristics. The duty means that the Council must in the exercise of its duties have due regard to:

- eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- advancing equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- fostering 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 their 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.

The nine protected characteristics covered by the duty are:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation
- marriage and civil partnership (but only in respect of eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act).

## 2. The Council's Equality Objectives

It is a requirement under the Equality Act for the Council to have a set of Equality Objectives and to review them at least every four years. The Council's Equality Objectives were adopted in 2011 and were subject to a consultation exercise. They were amended in 2016, with the adoption of the Council's Equality and Diversity Scheme 2016 – 2020. These four objectives have been retained and now make reference to support for the armed forces community, which the Council has decided to integrate with its equality and diversity work. The objectives are shown below, together with some of the actions that have been identified for their delivery over the next four years.

### **Objective 1. We will show leadership and commitment in promoting equality and diversity**

Supporting actions:

- Publish a reviewed Equality and Diversity Scheme every four years.
- Prepare an Equality and Diversity Annual Report by March each year, reviewing progress to the scheme and setting out further action for the year ahead.
- Provide equalities training for Members at least every electoral cycle.

### **Objective 2. We will consider the needs of individuals across the whole community, and especially those groups protected by the Equality Act 2010, when we plan and deliver our services.**

Supporting actions:

- Ensure that our community engagement follows the best practice principles contained in the Statement of Community Involvement.
- Use the Council's Grants Schemes to support organisations that promote the interests of protected groups in Mid Sussex.
- Ensure that equality and customer service implications are taken onto account in our decision making through the appropriate use of Equality Impact Assessments and references in Committee Reports.
- Ensure that the Council's website continues to maintain high standards of accessibility, with more customers benefitting from online transactions.
- Use a range of communication methods, including social media, to widen the range of people that we communicate with.
- Ensure that robust equal opportunity and diversity principles are embedded in all of the Council's communications.
- Deliver further improvements to the accessibility of the Council's buildings and open spaces.
- Act in accordance with our Armed Forces Community Covenant.

### **Objective 3. We will seek to prevent discrimination and to promote good relations between different sectors of our community.**

Supporting actions:

- Work through the Mid Sussex Partnership to tackle Hate Crime, Anti-Social Behaviour and domestic abuse.
- Ensure that the Council's communications continue to include positive content and images of a diverse Mid Sussex.

- Work to address the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers.
- Celebrate those that contribute to their communities through schemes such as Mid Sussex Applauds.

**Objective 4. As an employer, we will seek to promote equality and respect for diversity in the workplace by providing appropriate staff policies, training and support, including assistance for former members of the armed forces.**

Supporting actions:

- Monitor and publish annually data about the Council's staff through a Workforce Monitoring Report looking at the composition of our staff in relation to the background Mid Sussex population and to ensure that there are no sex or age related pay issues.
- Provide equalities and diversity training for all staff at least every 3 years.
- Include equalities and diversity in the induction programme for new staff.
- Supporting former members of the armed forces through the Community Covenant and Employer Recognition Scheme.

### **3. Meeting the needs of Protected Groups in Mid Sussex**

This section of the scheme looks at references to the protected groups in the Equality Act, the issues that they face in Mid Sussex and how the Council is responding in its service delivery. As well as protected groups our Equality and Diversity Scheme also covers potential disadvantage arising from residential location (for example rural isolation) and levels of income or skills. The Council has decided to include addressing the needs of the Armed Forces community in its Equality and Diversity Scheme. Demographic and needs information about the District comes from a number of sources including the Mid Sussex Strategic Intelligence Assessment which is prepared annually to inform the priorities of the Mid Sussex Partnership.

#### **Disability**

The Equality Act states that a person has a disability if:

- they have a physical or mental impairment
- the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to perform day to day activities.

The Act also provides rights for people not to be directly discriminated against or harassed because they have an association with a disabled person. This can apply to a carer or parent of a disabled person.

The 2011 census showed that 14.2% of Mid Sussex households contained at least one person with a long term illness, health problem or disability which limits their daily activities, compared with 13.5% in 2001. Health Study information and predictions to 2030 suggest that, while the number of people with a disability aged 18-64 is expected to rise only moderately, the rate of increase for those aged 65+ is much higher, reflecting the projected increase in this sector of the population. A further consequence of our ageing population is that whilst in 2014 there were 14,201 people living with dementia in West Sussex, this is predicted to rise to more than 16,692 by the year 2021.

Particular difficulties that the Council can assist people with a disability to overcome include issues of access and the need to promote independent living. Also ensuring that the needs of those with different types of disability are met, such as people with learning difficulties, mental health issues, physical disability, hearing or visual impairment.

There has been a significant increase in the number of vulnerable people with mental health issues approaching the Council for help. For example, 35% of the homeless acceptances in 2018/19 were from households who are vulnerable due to mental health issues. Also, 60% of the single person households in temporary accommodation had mental health issues.

### **Measures that we are taking:**

Examples include:

- Promotion of independent living - provision of Disabled Facilities Grants to enable disabled people and parents with disabled children to adapt their homes to meet their needs.
- Tailored customer services - assisted refuse collections, home visits.
- Improving the accessibility of Council buildings, facilities and parks - disabled car parking spaces, accessible toilets, Changing Places public conveniences, providing suitable access paths in green spaces and play equipment for children with disabilities in our parks.
- Accessible new housing and public spaces- providing new wheelchair accessible affordable housing and extra care housing. Involvement of the East Grinstead Access Group in planning applications and the public realm in new housing developments. Working through town centre regeneration projects to improve the accessibility of our town centres.
- Leisure and community activities - programmes of activity for disabled people at our leisure centres and using our grants scheme to support voluntary organisations that provide services to disabled people.
- Ensuring that Council publications and the website are accessible, for example through Browsealoud.
- Participating in campaigns aimed at promoting the interests of people with disabilities, such as Dementia Friendly Communities and Pavements are for People.
- Updating our main reception signage and public toilet facility to ensure it meets the needs of those with additional needs including people living with dementia.
- Being a member of the Compass Card Scheme that helps disabled young people and their families to make the most of local leisure activities. Cardholders in Mid Sussex have access to half price tennis court booking, Petanque and bowls facilities.

### **Race**

The Equality Act refers to discrimination on the grounds of race, which it defines as colour, nationality, ethnic or national origins.

The last Census results showed that 9.7% of the Mid Sussex population are from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Groups. "White Other" groups make up 4.8% of the District's population, comprising 0.9% White Irish, 0.1% who identify themselves as Gypsy or Irish Traveller and 3.8% "Other White". The biggest other single group is Asian or Asian British: Indian at 1%. The Census data also provides information on country of birth. This shows that 90.3% of Mid Sussex residents were born in the UK, 0.7% in Ireland, 2.9% from other European Union countries and 6.1% from other countries.

### **Measures that we are taking:**

Examples include:

- Customer service – provision of translation and interpretation. Our web site allows translation of any document on the site.
- Community safety – systems for reporting and dealing with racially motivated hate crime and anti-social behaviour.
- Planning to meet the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers – working to assess their accommodation needs and to adopt an Allocations Development Plan identifying potential sites for additional pitches.
- Providing Gypsy and Traveller accommodation through management of the site at Bedelands, Burgess Hill.

## **Age**

Age is a fundamental factor affecting people's life experiences. Mid Sussex has an older age structure with 20% of residents over 65 compared to 18% in England as a whole. The number of people aged 65+ and 85+ is projected to rise in the next 10 years by 22% and 28% respectively. An increasing number of people have one or more long-term health conditions and there are over 14,000 carers in the District. These projections for an ageing population, means an increasing demand for services to meet the needs of these groups. A large number of older people live alone (over 7,500 65+ in 2011) and due to the predominantly rural nature of the District, there is an increasing danger that many older people will face social isolation and feel cut off from the wider community.

Feelings of being socially excluded and marginalised within these communities also need to be considered in relation to younger people. This means that we need innovative measures to engage with young people to empower them to participate in their local communities. Also, providing youth activities in order to meet the perceived need for young people to have "something to do".

### **Measures that we are taking:**

Examples for older people include:

- Engagement with and funding for groups such as the Mid Sussex Older People's Council
- Production of the Community Connections Directory to publicise the clubs and activities that they can participate in to maintain their health and wellbeing and the services available to meet their needs.
- Providing activities for older people, such as Healthy Walks, Health and Wellbeing initiatives in support of ageing well and promoting independent living. Including older people in our updated safeguarding policies.
- Supporting Silver Sunday with a small grants scheme for community organisations to hold events.

Examples for young people include:

- Engagement with local young people by providing community youth activities, especially in the holiday period in their neighbourhood in Mid Sussex District Council recreation grounds and Skate Parks.
- Leading Better Young Lives a forum of professionals from the statutory and voluntary sector to ensure better lives and outcomes for children and young people.
- Improving and developing the equipment of Mid Sussex District Council amenities such as skate parks and play areas consulting with local users.
- Facilities provided at leisure centres, together with programmes to encourage youth sport.



## **Sexuality**

The Equality Act refers to a person's sexual orientation as their sexual attraction to persons of the same, opposite or either sex.

The Office for National Statistics carries out a survey of a sample of households which includes a question on sexual orientation. Data for the South East from the survey undertaken in 2012, estimated that 0.9% of people identified themselves as gay or lesbian, 0.4% as bisexual and 0.4% as "other".

### **Measures that we are taking:**

Examples include:

- Homophobic crime is one of the categories of hate crime that is monitored and reported upon.
- Providing equal opportunity in employment - our staff monitoring survey includes a question on sexuality.

## **Sex**

Information from the Office for National Statistics 2015 suggests that the overall split in the District is 48.8% male and 51.2% female. Estimates from the ONS for life expectancy in Mid Sussex are 80.8 years for men and 83.0 years for women.

Issues related to this protected characteristic include ensuring equal access to our services and addressing issues such as domestic abuse. Also, ensuring that our employment practices are fair and address equality issues.

### **Measures that we are taking:**

Examples include:

- Community safety - providing support for services for women and men suffering domestic abuse.
- Leisure and health promotion - targeted schemes for getting young women active and for men's health.
- Employment practice - equal pay and flexible working policies.

## **Gender reassignment**

The Equality Act states that a transsexual person has the protected characteristic of gender reassignment if they are proposing to undergo, are undergoing or have undergone a process (or part of a process) for the purpose of reassigning their sex by changing physiological or other attributes of sex.

It is difficult to establish the numbers in this protected group. There were no questions in the 2011 Census regarding gender identity. The Gender Identity and Research Society has estimated that nationally 1% of the population may be gender variant to some degree, with 0.2% of the population likely to seek medical treatment, at some stage, to present in the opposite gender.

### **Measures that we are taking:**

Examples include:

- Community safety - hate crime incident reporting includes the recording of hate crime motivated by transphobia, which refers to various kinds of aversion towards transsexual people.
- Using the Better Young Lives Forum to provide information about the support available for young people with gender identity issues.

## **Religion or Belief**

The protected characteristic of religion or belief includes any religion and any religious or philosophical belief. It also includes a lack of any such religion or belief. Information from the 2011 census shows that 62.7% of Mid Sussex residents stated their religion as Christian, with the second largest group being those with no religion at 26.6%. Of the remaining 2.8% who stated their religion, responses were spread across a number of faiths, with Muslim being the largest at 0.8%.

It is important that the Council respects the sensitivities of faith issues in its decision-making, employment policies and provision of services.

### **Measures that we are taking:**

Examples include:

- Tackling religiously motivated hate crime.
- Using our links with faith-based groups in our community development work, e.g. Churches Together and the Foodbanks in Mid Sussex, linking to Money Advice Services provided by the Kings Church in Burgess Hill and the debt centre at Trinity Methodist Church in East Grinstead, supporting the Jubilee Hub (part of Kings Church) in East Grinstead.
- The Council is adopting the working definition of antisemitism produced by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance from the Stockholm Declaration <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/working-definition-antisemitism?focus=antisemitismandholocaustdenial>

## **Pregnancy and Maternity**

The Equality Act prohibits discrimination on the grounds of pregnancy or maternity. This relates to a defined protected period from conception to the end of statutory maternity leave.

Issues around pregnancy and maternity are mainly relevant to the Council in its role as an employer, but also in the accessibility of our facilities for pregnant women and parents with young children.

### **Measures that we are taking:**

Examples include:

- Employment practices - maternity/paternity arrangements.
- Access issues - unisex access to baby changing facilities in our public toilets. Parent and toddler spaces in our car parks. Access to buildings for parents with young children.

## **Marriage and Civil Partnership**

Under the Equality Act 2010, it is unlawful to directly or indirectly discriminate against or harass a person because they are married or in a civil partnership. Marriage and civil partnership is only a protected characteristic in the context of the Council's employment

practices, for example in ensuring that employees who have a civil partnership are treated in the same way as married employees. Same sex weddings became legal in England and Wales from March 2014.

The next two categories of disadvantage are not covered by the protected groups referred to in the Equality Act, but are important factors in the delivery of the Council's aim to ensure that all sectors of the community can thrive and enjoy access to our services. They are income or skills level and residential location.

### **Income or skill level**

Mid Sussex is one of the least deprived districts in the country. However, the levels of deprivation vary considerably across the District and there are pockets of deprivation within Haywards Heath, Burgess Hill and East Grinstead. Information from the 2011 census shows that the population is generally well qualified, with 33.6% qualified to level 4 or 5 (first degree or higher), the highest in West Sussex. Conversely, 14.8% have no qualifications, the lowest in the County.

Welfare reforms are impacting on people, whether working or not, who are in receipt of benefit. This has particular implications for the Council's Housing Needs and Benefits services and requires initiatives to ensure that those affected by the welfare changes are supported. The Council has an important role to play in helping people into work through supporting them to improve their skills and removing obstacles to finding employment.

### **Measures that we are taking:**

Examples include:

- Benefits Services - operation of the Discretionary Housing Payments scheme and working with the Department of Works and Pensions and other partners on the introduction of Universal Credit.
- Housing Services - providing housing advice and temporary accommodation for homeless people; supporting people to access the private sector through our Rent in Advance and Deposit Guarantee Scheme that helps those with insufficient funds for a deposit; provision of affordable housing.
- Working with Housing Associations to target support at social housing tenants affected by the welfare reforms.
- Debt advice - providing access to debt advice services and supporting the local Credit Union.
- Measures to address fuel poverty and affordable warmth.
- Community projects in areas of relative deprivation.
- Employment projects - working to get local people into work, especially geared towards young people Not in Education or Employment (NEETs).
- Providing community leadership in working for the reopening of the Sixth Form College at Haywards Heath.

### **Residential Location**

The Council recognises that whether our residents live in a rural or urban location can affect how they access our services. Based on Office for National Statistics data for 2011, it is estimated that 22.7% of the population of Mid Sussex, some 31,800 people, live in the rural wards and therefore could be experiencing rural isolation. This is associated with issues such as travel difficulties for those dependent upon public transport, high local housing prices and a lack of community facilities.

## **Measures that we are taking:**

Examples include:

- Customer service - offering on-line services and visiting officers.
- Providing rural affordable housing - including working with Parish Councils and developers on Rural Exception Sites.
- Investing in community facilities in rural areas such as pavilions and village halls.
- Funding Action in rural Sussex (AirS) to support rural communities.

## **Support for the Armed Forces Community**

Mid Sussex District Council signed the Armed Forces Community Covenant in September 2014, which is a statement of mutual support between the District Council and the local Armed Forces community. Specifically, the Covenant aims to:

- Encourage local communities and the Armed Forces community to support each other:
- Nurture public understanding and promote awareness of issues affecting the Armed Forces community.
- Recognise and remember the sacrifices made by the Armed Forces community.
- Encourage activities which help to integrate the Armed Forces community into local life.

The Council also received the Bronze Employer Recognition Scheme award in January 2018, which shows support for the Armed Forces community through its employment policies. Initiatives associated with this have included the adoption of a guaranteed interview scheme for suitably qualified applicants with an armed forces connection and proper recognition in the Council's employment policies of provision for members of the Reserve Forces.

## **Measures that we are taking:**

Examples include:

- The Council publicises the Heroes Welcome Scheme, which provides for retailers to provide discounts to service personnel.
- Participation in events such as Armed Forces Day and Remembrance Day.
- The Council's Housing Allocation Scheme exempts those with an armed forces connection from the usual requirements to have a local connection to the District to be on the Housing Register.

## **Council initiatives that benefit a range of protected groups**

In looking at the measures that we are taking to meet the individual needs of the protected groups, there are a number of initiatives that the Council is delivering that cover a range of equality issues such as:

- The operation of our grants scheme to support a wide range of community organisations and projects that seek to assist vulnerable groups. The grants scheme funds through partnership agreements, a core of voluntary organisations that support vulnerable people of all ages and backgrounds, such as Citizens Advice; Age UK; Mid Sussex Voluntary Action; and Action in rural Sussex.
- Our systems for reporting and dealing with hate crime and anti-social behaviour, motivated by racial, faith, disability or homophobic prejudice.

- Provision of a balanced range of activities offered at our leisure centres to suit all sectors of the community. We also work with the health sector on the promotion of sport and healthy lifestyles.
- Working with Places Leisure and Alzheimer's Society to deliver Living Well events in the leisure centres offering free taster activities for people aged 50 plus with a focus on people living with dementia and their carers.
- Our Health and Wellbeing service provided on behalf of NHS West Sussex and the County Council. The services provided by the Wellbeing Hub are of particular benefit to vulnerable groups, for example in addressing issues associated with an ageing population, fuel poverty and support for carers.
- The Mid Sussex Applauds Awards recognises individuals and organisations for their contribution to their communities, with nominations open to the public in eight categories.

### **Equality Impact Assessments**

The Council completes Equality Impact Assessments for its major changes to services and where there are relevant new policies. The assessments identify opportunities to promote equality and the barriers to services/differential impact on the protected groups in Mid Sussex. The completed assessments are published on the Council's website.

There is also a standard section in all of the Council's reports to Members, which assesses the "Equality and Customer Services Implications" of the actions referred to in the report.

### **Equality and Diversity and the Council's Procurement**

The Council provides a wide range of services to the community in Mid Sussex, some of which are provided directly and others on our behalf by contractors and partners. We seek to ensure that the contractors that the Council uses and partners with whom we work have the same standards in meeting equality and diversity requirements. Equality considerations are assessed as part of every procurement exercise and embedded into the specification and contractual conditions.

### **Equality and Diversity and the Council's staff**

The Council's equality and diversity responsibilities as an employer are met through our employment policies, which aim to ensure that all staff are treated fairly and with respect. These include Dignity at Work; Code of Conduct; Equal Opportunities; Family Friendly; Disciplinary and Grievance Policy. There is also the provision of regular Equality and Diversity staff training, both general awareness training and tailored courses for frontline staff on meeting the needs of customers with specific needs.

The Council monitors the composition of its staff in relation to the background Mid Sussex population so that we are aware of how representative the workforce is of the people that we are seeking to serve. We publish an Annual Workforce Monitoring Report as part of the requirement to publish equality data, which includes information about age, gender, ethnicity, disability and religion. The Report includes information about the gender pay gap, comparing the average male and female employee pay. We also publish a quarterly staff profile, which appears on the employment page of the website.

## **4. Responsibility for the Scheme and Monitoring Arrangements**

Responsibility for the implementation of this scheme at Member level rests with the Cabinet Member for Community. The lead at Management Team level will be with the appropriate

Head of Service, currently the Head of Regulatory Services. The Council's Scrutiny Committee for Community, Customer Services and Service Delivery will be responsible for scrutinising the scheme, prior to its adoption by Full Council, and will consider an annual progress report.