

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy

Policy summary

Purpose	This policy sets out Dorset Council's approach to equality, diversity and inclusion. Dorset Council is committed to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion and promoting a culture that actively values difference and recognises that people from different backgrounds and experiences can bring valuable insights to the workplace and enhance the way we work with the diverse communities that make up Dorset.
Scope	This policy applies to all who represent Dorset Council in any capacity including elected members (councillors), employees, agency workers, consultants and volunteers. In addition, it also applies to suppliers, sub-contractors and agencies in our supply chain and to customers and residents.

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy sets out Dorset Council's commitment to promoting equality of opportunity and recognising and celebrating the diversity that exists in our workforce and among our communities in Dorset.
- 1.2 Promoting equality of opportunity means creating an environment where people have the chance to achieve their potential, free from barriers, prejudice and discrimination.

2. Scope

- 2.1 This policy applies to all who represent Dorset Council in any capacity including elected members (councillors), employees, volunteers, agency workers and consultants.
- 2.2 The policy also applies to suppliers, sub-contractors and partners in our supply chain and to customers and residents.
- 2.3 We all have a right to be treated fairly and with dignity and respect. We are also responsible for ensuring that our own actions and behaviours are fair and that we respect the dignity of others.

3. Understanding equality, diversity and inclusion

- 3.1 Equality is not about 'treating everyone the same' but recognising that everyone is different, and that people's needs are met in different ways. We would define equality as essentially being about fairness and ensuring that we all have the best possible chance to succeed in life whatever our background or identity.
- 3.2 The right to fair treatment is underpinned by the Equality Act 2010. The Act entitles all of us to be treated fairly and not be subjected to discrimination on the basis of a protected characteristic¹.
- 3.3 Diversity is about understanding that everyone is unique, recognising, respecting and celebrating the added value that differences bring.
- 3.4 Inclusion is where difference is seen as a benefit and where perspectives and differences are shared, leading to better decisions. An inclusive working environment is one in which everyone feels valued, that their contribution matters, and they can perform to their full potential, regardless of their background, identity or circumstances. An inclusive workplace enables a diverse range of people to work together effectively.

4. The Legal Framework

- 4.1 The Equality Act 2010 sets out the different ways in which it is unlawful to treat someone, such as direct and indirect discrimination, discrimination by perception or association, harassment, victimisation and failing to make a reasonable adjustment for a person with a disability.

¹ See section 4.2 for definition of protected characteristic

4.2 The Equality Act also introduced the term 'protected characteristics' to refer to specific aspects of a person's identity these cannot be used as a reason to discriminate against. These are:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- pregnancy and maternity
- marriage and civil partnership
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

It is important to note that carers are also protected through association to any of the above nine protected characteristics.

4.3 Everyone has a one or more protected characteristics, so the Act protects everyone against discrimination, harassment and victimisation.

4.4 The Equality Act 2010 also places specific responsibilities on public bodies. The Public Sector Equality Duty includes the General Duty which requires public bodies to:

- a) publish information to show compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty
- b) set and publish equality objectives at least every four years.

4.5 In addition, Dorset Council is required to have due regard to the need to:

- a) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act;
- b) advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not share it; and
- c) foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those do not share it.

4.6 The general duty applies to all the protected characteristics. However, for the protected characteristic of marriage and civil partnership it applies only in respect of the requirement to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination.

4.7 Having due regard means consciously considering the three aims of the equality duty in relation to our decision making and delivery of services and in our duties as an employer.

4.8 Dorset Council acknowledges and welcomes its legal duties. However, we also recognise that there are some additional characteristics that impact on people and their ability to access services and/or participate in public life and we consider these also when making decisions and refer to these as 'local characteristics'. These include:

- rural isolation
- socio-economic status
- single parents
- people with an armed forces background and their families
- gender identity (how someone describes their gender)

5. Our aims

- 5.1 When we develop our policies and plans or make decisions we will aim to:
- design our services to meet the diverse needs of our residents
 - prevent, challenge and eliminate inequality
 - involve and consult with individuals and organisations as necessary
 - foster good relations within Dorset so that it is welcoming to all those who live, work and visit.
 - undertake an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) to consider the actual or potential impact of our activities and decisions on people and to remove or reduce negative impacts.
- 5.2 When we deliver services we will aim to:
- ensure that our services are relevant and take different needs into account
 - provide information that is clear, accurate and accessible
 - ensure that customers receive a quality service
 - respond to, investigate and take appropriate action to address complaints of bullying, harassment, discrimination or victimisation
 - monitor services, analyse gaps in provision and identify and remove any barriers to access.
- 5.3 When we procure or commission services, we will aim to:
- consider equality of access in service delivery
 - ensure contractors, suppliers and partners are aware of what the authority expects in relation to equality and diversity and understands that they must provide services that are free from harassment, discrimination or victimisation
 - ensure that the tendering processes include equality and diversity as part of the selection criteria
 - provide guidance to employees about how to include equality and diversity in procurement and commissioning processes.
- 5.4 As an employer we will aim to:
- recruit and retain a workforce that reflects the diversity of Dorset
 - welcome the contribution made by the experience, knowledge and skills that a diverse workforce brings
 - make reasonable adjustments to support current employees and potential employees
 - provide all employees with access to learning and development opportunities
 - ensure that equality, diversity and inclusion is an integral part of the council's induction for all new employees and members
 - provide an environment free from harassment, discrimination, victimisation and bullying
 - use our behaviours framework to promote dignity and respect
 - take seriously any employee grievance concerning harassment, discrimination, victimisation and bullying

- deal with acts of harassment, discrimination, victimisation or bullying by an employee against another employee or a member of the public under the disciplinary policy and procedure
- deal with comments made on social media, as outlined in our social networking policy
- providing ex-offenders with equal employment opportunities in accordance with the policy on the employment of ex-offenders
- guaranteeing to offer an interview to all disabled applicants who fulfil the essential criteria for a post
- promote access to our employee well-being support service
- promote and work with our employee networks
- promote flexible working to help employees balance their work/life commitments and still achieve their full potential
- provide support to employees who are undertaking the process of gender reassignment
- ensure that managers with responsibility for recruitment and selection do not discriminate unfairly.
- seeking to ensure that managers with responsibility for selecting employees for redeployment or redundancy do not discriminate unfairly in the process of selection
- incorporate legislative requirements and best practice to all our employment policies and procedures and support these with appropriate and accessible guidance.

6. Support to implement this policy

6.1 All our policies are supported by training or briefing sessions and guidance. For the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy we will provide:

- on-line training via Learning Online including the mandatory equality and diversity courses.
- advice and support including bespoke equality, diversity and inclusion training
- information on the intranet and the internet.

7. Monitoring and measuring progress

7.1 Dorset Council collects equality information from employees and potential employees, this helps us to make sure our policies and working practices are inclusive do not discriminate against certain groups.

7.2 We will work with employees to understand the barriers that stop individuals from declaring data and try to remove these barriers.

7.3 We will make sure that we keep sensitive information confidential and secure (with only appropriate employees having access, e.g. HR or IT employees where access to the data is necessary for performance of their roles).

7.4 Dorset Council will work with external benchmarking equality organisations to map progress in the organisation around equality, diversity and inclusion.

8. Promoting and communicating equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)

8.1 We will use all available routes to communicate and promote this policy. In addition:

- elected members will promote our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion in their day-to-day work
- Senior Leadership Team will be responsible for overall management and direction of EDI commitments
- the EDI Executive Advisory Panel will oversee this policy and monitor the extent to which we are achieving our commitments
- managers will make sure EDI is core to service delivery and employee management
- all employees will ensure they are aware of this policy and take responsibility to promote EDI and challenge discrimination
- contractors, suppliers and potential suppliers will be advised of this policy through the tendering and contract review processes and will be expected to adhere to the policy.

9. Review

- 9.1 Dorset Council will continually seek to develop its approach to equality, diversity and inclusion by identifying good practice in employment and service delivery. The council will review this policy on a regular basis, usually at least every three years, to ensure that it reflects the latest legalisation, best practice and other council policies.

10. Further information

- 10.1 Further information on equality, diversity and inclusion visit [Dorset Council/Equality](#)