



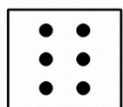
Durham County Council

Equality Policy

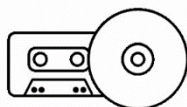
2020-24



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Equality and inclusion are at the heart of Durham County Council's vision and core values. We recognise that inequality continues to affect different people and communities in different ways. We are committed to creating and sustaining a modern and supportive working environment for our employees and tackling the inequalities, prejudice and discrimination affecting the diverse communities which we serve.

Background

The Equality Act 2010 brought together a number of existing laws making it a more streamlined piece of legislation. It sets out the personal characteristics that are protected by the law and behaviour that is unlawful. The protected characteristics under the Act are; age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex, sexual orientation.

Under the Act people are not allowed to discriminate, harass or victimise another person because they have any of the protected characteristics. There is also protection against discrimination where someone is perceived to have one of the protected characteristics or where they are associated with someone who has a protected characteristic. As a major employer and provider of services Durham County Council is committed to advancing equality of opportunity and providing fair access and treatment in employment and when delivering or procuring services or working in partnership.

This policy reinforces our responsibility under the public sector equality duty (PSED) which was created under the Equality Act 2010. It consists of a general equality duty and specific duties.

General Duty

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act;
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; and
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

Specific Duties

- To publish information to demonstrate how we are complying with the Public Sector Equality Duty, and
- To prepare and publish equality objectives (at least every four years).

The specific duties help us to improve performance on the general duty, by improving focus and transparency.

Policy statement

Our policy is to treat people fairly, with respect and dignity. We believe that everyone in County Durham deserves excellent public services which take account of their needs and circumstances. As an employer, service provider, partner and community leader we will ensure that all communities have opportunities to access our services, be involved in decision making and be part of our workforce.

Responsibilities

Our policy applies to every elected member, employee, volunteer and any other person or organisation employed by the council to work or to deliver services on its behalf. This includes contractual and commissioning arrangements. The policy applies to all work-related situations including social events and the use of electronic communications and social media.

It is the individual's responsibility to:

- Treat others fairly, with dignity and respect,
- Follow council policies and procedures,
- Ensure documentation, information and activity is lawful,
- Consider reasonable adjustments and other requirements relating to disabled people,
- Challenge discrimination and unfair treatment, reporting it where appropriate, and
- Attend relevant training and ask for advice where necessary.

All actions, which are intentionally contrary to this policy, will be dealt with under the appropriate disciplinary procedure.

Our commitment

We know that some people face inequality and disadvantage¹, prejudice and discrimination and we are committed to tackling this and use a variety of methods to demonstrate and progress our commitment. We understand the challenges some groups experience, including the social and physical barriers experienced by disabled people, which limit opportunities or choices. We are committed to integrating equality into mainstream service planning, development, delivery and management. This is evident through our policy documentation and budgetary decisions and allocation.

As part of our specific duties we must develop and deliver equality objectives at least every four years, our equality objectives for 2020-24 are set out below. This helps us to focus our attention on specific equality issues in order to deliver real improvement.

We will take all reasonable steps to ensure that discrimination is prevented, such as staff training and inclusive service design and delivery. We perceive discriminatory bullying, harassment and unfair treatment of any individual as contradictory to our core values which will not be tolerated and have processes in place to investigate complaints.

We have described below some of the ways we meet our commitment to equality.

Equality objectives

Our equality objectives (2020-24) were identified through recent public consultation with a wide range of stakeholders for a shared vision for the county for the next 15 years².

¹ <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/britain-fairer>

² <https://www.durham.gov.uk/vision>

Analysis of evidence including countywide data sets³ and national policy has also influenced our priorities.

Our equality objectives support the 2035 vision that County Durham is a place where there are more and better jobs, people live long and independent lives and our communities are well connected and supportive of each other. The council plan reflects this vision and includes a fourth ambition to be an excellent council. Our equality objectives align to the vision and corporate planning framework with supporting outcomes and actions, which will be used as a framework to illustrate how the council complies with the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Our equality objectives are:

- **We will improve employment opportunities for disabled people**
 - As a Disability Confident Leader, we will improve recruitment and retention rates of disabled people within the council and work with businesses locally to improve disability employment rates countywide and through our approach to procurement.
- **We will build inclusive communities**
 - To connect our communities and improve levels of tolerance and integration for our diverse communities we will support better partnership working on equality. This work will support a series of events that foster good relations between groups.
- **We will build an inclusive and welcoming employee culture**
 - Through our transformation programme we will become a more inclusive organisation by improving our staff engagement through the development of staff networks and improving how we collect, monitor, analyse and utilise staff diversity data.

Our values

The culture of our council is created by the way we behave. To help develop a positive culture, four core values and a behaviour framework have been developed to describe the sort of organisation we want to be. Our 'open' values focus on creating a positive working environment by setting guidelines for the way staff should approach their work which underpin our approach to equality and inclusion:

Outcome focussed – we work together to achieve the best for people

People focussed – we put people and communities at the heart of everything we do

Empowering – we value trust and support each other

iNnovative – we embrace change and look for better ways to deliver services

Impact assessment and equality analysis

We use a process of equality impact assessment (EIA) to support the development of inclusive and responsive policies, procedures and service provision. These are carried out when a new policy, procedure or service is being developed or significantly changed, where a service review is taking place or where a potential inequality has been identified. The assessment involves an evidence based analysis of impact across the protected

³ <https://www.durhaminsight.info/>

characteristics. This is carried out for all medium-term financial plan (MTFP) proposals as well as Cabinet and delegated decisions where there is a relevance to equality.

Integrated communities

We know that people in our communities can face prejudice and discrimination. This can be due to fear, a lack of understanding or intolerance which may be linked to a person's disability, race, religion, sexual orientation or transgender identity. We recognise that some people express fear, lack of respect and contempt towards people from other groups and communities.

To tackle this, we work closely with a range of agencies including Durham Police under the banner of the Safe Durham Partnership to tackle the underlying causes of crime and behaviour adversely affecting our communities. Our tension monitoring toolkit responds to the Government's Integrated Communities Action Plan⁴ and sets out how the council will respond to incidents. It acts as a guidance tool for those responding to hate incidents and facilitating community cohesion.

We actively facilitate integration, with programmes that build intercultural awareness and via activities such as the refugee mentoring project. We mark specific events such as Holocaust Memorial Day and Durham Pride. We have also adopted the working definition of anti-Semitism as set out by International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance⁵.

Consultation and involving others

To ensure our services are inclusive and responsive we involve and consult employees, elected members, trade unions and people who use our services, on service changes, including communities and organisations who represent protected groups, e.g. Area Action Partnerships, Disability Partnership, People's Parliament. Engaging with communities of interest allows us to gain focussed customer insight and, where required, external validation for schemes such as our Disability Confident Leader application.

Commissioning and procurement

Integrating equality considerations into our commissioning and procurement work improves services by making them more appropriate and responsive to the needs of different groups. Use of our procurement award criteria helps us to engage with organisations who drive equality through schemes such as Disability Confident and Stonewall Diversity Champions.

Employee policies and practices

As an inclusive and supportive employer, we ensure our policies and practices do not discriminate and treat staff with dignity and respect. The principles of equality are embedded within our employment policies. All staff and elected members receive mandatory equality training. Additional specific and tailored equality training modules or sessions and awareness raising events are also available to staff and members.

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/integrated-communities-action-plan>

⁵ <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/working-definition-antisemitism>

We ensure a fair and inclusive recruitment and selection process to attract applicants from different backgrounds and remove any bias. This takes into consideration the way employment is structured, removing barriers to employment and providing specific support. As a Disability Confident Leader⁶ organisation, disabled job applicants who meet the essential criteria in the person specification are guaranteed an interview.

We offer a wide range of apprenticeship opportunities at the council for all ages. We also offer internships and supported employment placements. This includes placements for young people with SEND and the Change 100 internship programme for talented students and graduates with disabilities or long-term health conditions.

We have achieved gold status of the Better Health at Work Award⁷ and have a programme of activities and support available to staff to promote and sustain wellbeing. As part of our approach to staff wellbeing we carry out regular staff surveys.

As an employer we provide a safe and accessible working environment, creating a culture which is free from discrimination, harassment, bullying and victimisation. We are members of the Stonewall Diversity Champions Programme⁸ to help us ensure that all LGBT+ staff are accepted without exception in the workplace.

All employees will receive fair and transparent pay, reward and employment conditions, as well as options to work flexibly and access to learning and development opportunities.

We will monitor our employment procedures to avoid unlawful discrimination and ensure consistent treatment.

Dealing with complaints

Any allegations of discrimination, harassment and/or unfair treatment will be investigated with disciplinary action taken where necessary. There are a number of ways to report equality related issues or complaints:

- Employees can raise issues informally with their line manager or Head of Service. Formal complaints should follow the resolution policy which can be found on the intranet
- Councillors can report issues through the member officer protocol or the code of conduct depending on the nature of the complaint.
- Members of the public can use the corporate and statutory complaints procedures.
<http://www.durham.gov.uk/complaints>

We will take prompt action to investigate any complaints. Anyone who has complained will not be treated unfavourably or victimised. However, if a complaint is found to be malicious this will be dealt with under the appropriate disciplinary procedure.

Monitoring

This policy links to identified actions within the corporate planning framework. Relevant actions will be monitored on a quarterly basis, and, also through our annual updates to demonstrate compliance with the public sector equality duty. We also produce mandatory gender pay gap reporting⁹, as required on an annual basis.

⁶ <https://disabilityconfident.campaign.gov.uk/>

⁷ <http://www.betterhealthatworkne.org/>

⁸ <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/diversity-champions-programme>

⁹ <https://www.durham.gov.uk/genderpaygap>