

Single Equality Scheme

Mid Devon District Council's Single Equality Scheme (SES) sets out how we are working to implement the equality duties that are set out in the Equality Act 2010.

Section 149 of the Act imposes a duty on 'public authorities' and other bodies when exercising public functions to have due regard to the need to:

- a. eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act
- b. advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it
- c. foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

These are the three aims of the general equality duty.

1.0 Our Vision

Mid Devon District Council is committed to providing quality services delivered in a fair and equitable way and to promoting good relations between different groups within the community. We value the positive contribution that all our residents bring to the district, and want to work with individuals and groups to continue to improve our services and to promote equality.

2.0 How will we achieve this?

In order to achieve our vision we will:

- Seek to understand the needs of our community
- Know our customers and their specific needs
- Involve the community in changes that might affect them
- Develop services that can respond to the requirements of different residents
- Develop an inclusive working environment
- Ensure equality in procurement and commissioning
- Promote equality through working with others
- Recognise the needs of specific equality groups

3.0 Understanding our community

In order to develop services that meet people's needs we must first of all understand our community. The following gives a brief profile of the district.

An equality profile of Mid Devon

Mid Devon is a rural district lying equidistant between the north and south coasts. It has three principle towns, Tiverton, Cullompton and Crediton, serving an extensive rural hinterland.

Population

The population of Mid Devon, currently around 79,500¹, has grown by 11% over the last 10 years. Much of this increase is due to inward migration from other parts of the UK. The largest increase is among those of retirement age, who now make up 23%² of the population. A significant proportion of young people move out of the area for education or work.

The Black and Minority Ethnic population is now 1.4% of the population with a further 2.3% 'Other White Ethnic Groups' which includes significant number of migrant workers, mostly from Eastern Europe 5% of the population were born outside of the UK.²

The key issues for the population of Mid Devon are:

Economy

Mid Devon is an area of low unemployment, but jobs tend to be poorly paid and low skilled. Average earnings of employed people are almost 8% lower than the national average - £499 compared to £541 nationally³. Over a third of the resident population commutes out of the District for work, particularly from the Crediton and Cullompton areas. There are a high proportion of part-time and self-employed workers. There are also a growing number of older people who are dependent on benefits and pensions for their income.

Housing

House prices have more than doubled in the last ten years, far outstripping local average wages. The average house price in 2015 was £233,123, representing nearly 10 times the average full time wage. This situation is considerably worse in the rural areas of the District. This makes it extremely difficult for first time buyers and people on low incomes. 14% of households live in social housing. There is also an increasingly aging population who require support to live in their own homes, and suitably adapted accommodation when they are unable to manage on their own.

Crime

Mid Devon is an area of low crime. The incidence of all major crime (theft, burglary, violent crime) is well below national averages. However, concerns about crime and anti-social behaviour remain high particularly amongst the most vulnerable.

Education

Most Mid Devon schools perform well against national averages, but there are concerns about the aspirations of young people in certain areas. 62.5% of 16-year old pupils achieved 5 GCSE or equivalent at grades A* - C including English and Maths in 2014 compared to 57.9% Devon-wide. However, the proportion of people of working age who lack any qualifications is higher than the Devon average.

Access

¹ 2011 Census

² Office of National Statistics 2015

In a rural district access to vital services can be a significant problem for some people, particularly those on low income. Some 60% of the district falls into the bottom quartile of deprivation for 'Access to Housing and Services'. Over half of rural parishes do not have a post office, and access to scheduled public transport is a problem in many areas, including the edges of market towns. Despite regional programmes to increase speeds, broadband speeds remain low in many rural areas limiting the growth of home-based businesses and increasing the digital divide.

Health

The residents of Mid Devon are generally healthier than the rest of the population in the UK. Life expectancy is higher than the national average both for men and women, and mortality rates for all major diseases are lower. However, there are pockets where life expectancy and mortality rates are considerably lower than would be expected. There is a growing proportion of over 75s who will put increasing demands on health and social care services, and a number of people with physical, sensory and learning disabilities whose needs and those of their carers, must be met.

Multiple disadvantage

Although Mid Devon generally rates very well in national statistics, small parts of Tiverton, Cullompton and Crediton do disproportionately badly for income, education, skills and training when compared to other areas nationally. Mid Devon ranked just above the half way point on the Index of Multiple Deprivation.

Similarly, some people in Mid Devon, because of their condition or circumstances, are more vulnerable to disadvantage and poor health outcomes than the rest of the population. This may be due to their age, gender, physical, sensory or learning disability, mental illness, sexuality, race, religion or social circumstances. There are a variety of organisations that provide support to these individuals and their families, including education and training providers, health and social care agencies, employers, voluntary sector organisations.

Equality Priorities

From this profile the Council recognises that there are three main equality priorities for the district:

1. Meeting the needs of an aging population
2. Overcoming the problems to vulnerable individuals caused by rural isolation
3. Overcoming the effects of multiple disadvantage in families with complex needs.

4.0 Knowing our customers – equality monitoring

Mid Devon District Council recognises that it is important to know who uses our services. By comparing this with what we know about the community as a whole, we can see if there are any groups who are under-represented, highlighting where there may be barriers to overcome.

We regularly monitor the age, disability, gender, and ethnicity of our customers. Where appropriate and relevant, we also monitor religion or belief, and sexual orientation.

The equality information collected can be used to:

- review service delivery
- compare our performance over time
- assist in the development of services in line with people's needs
- monitor the impact of any service changes.

In line with current legislation we will publish relevant equality information, while maintaining customer and employee confidentiality. This information will include:

- an equality profile of the district
- workforce information, and
- service-level information for services most relevant to equality.

5.0 Involving the community

As part of our commitment to good consultation, we have developed a Community Engagement Strategy to improve how the Council engages with the community progress was reported to Cabinet on 2 March 2017 . The Council is keen to make sure that people from different equality groups take part in consultation, and will try to find the most appropriate way to consult with them according to their needs.

Mid Devon District Council will:

- work with groups representing the interests of people from different equality groups to get feedback on proposed service changes particularly relevant to them
- develop and support forms of consultation that are appropriate to the communication needs of different groups within the community
- monitor and assess the consultation methods used and where necessary adapt them to meet the needs of different participants
- publish the results of these consultations and feed them back into our decision-making processes in an open and responsible way.

Customer feedback

Mid Devon District Council positively welcomes feedback. We want to ensure residents' views, whether positive or negative, are noted and their concerns are addressed. We are aware that the Council's formal feedback process may be inaccessible to those sections of the community who have difficulties in accessing services. The Council encourages helper organisations to act as advocates for a complainant if necessary.

6.0 Developing responsive services

The Council undertakes Equality Impact Assessments on those service most likely to impact on the wellbeing of individuals. The impact assessment process asks 'How does this service or policy affect different groups in the community', and 'how can any adverse effects be reduced?' Each Equality Impact Assessment includes an action plan on how we will try to reduce any inequalities identified and promote equality.

A primary factor in making a service accessible is providing information and advice in a usable and convenient format.

We seek to ensure that all users:

- know about the relevant services they might need.
- are given support where necessary i.e. with completing forms
- are confident about using and contacting a service and, if necessary, complaining about it.

We will do this by:

- communicating clearly both internally and externally
- providing information in plain English
- making as many services as internet accessible as possible
- offering information in different formats on request
- providing interpretation and translation services when deemed appropriate
- ensuring that buildings that are open to the public, including leisure and community facilities, can be accessed and used by all residents
- making sure that our employees are trained and supported to deliver the highest possible levels of customer service in line with this policy.

Changing services and policies

Mid Devon District Council has a responsibility to assess the likely impact on residents and employees of policies or services it is proposing to change or introduce before they are adopted. This is to make sure that any changes do not disproportionately affect any particular group, and any adverse impacts can be reduced as much as possible.

Policies, in particular, are frequently adapted or replaced to reflect changes in the legal, social and political environment. Our objective is to build equality and diversity into the policy making process and to make that process clear, open and inclusive.

7.0 Developing an inclusive working environment

The Council considers equality and diversity in all aspects of employment, from advertising vacancies, recruitment and selection, terms and conditions of employment, training and personal development, to reasons for ending employment.

We will promote equality in recruitment by:

- advertising jobs as widely as possible
- providing job details and accepting job applications in alternative formats on request as appropriate to the needs of the applicant
- monitoring recruitment processes and taking action as a result of the findings
- acknowledging that recruitment and selection decisions should be based upon objective, measurable and reasonable selection criteria
- asking only for the skills and qualities actually needed to do the job
- commitment to equality in employment and in service delivery will be reinforced in staff induction programmes for new staff
- training managers on how to recruit in a non-discriminatory way, making sure that all job applicants, whether redeployment candidates, existing employees or people who do not currently work for the District Council, demonstrate that they are qualified, motivated and competent to do the job.

We will promote equality in disciplinary procedures by:

- regularly reviewing our disciplinary and grievance procedures to ensure an appropriate mechanism is in place to deal with bullying and harassment at work.

We will promote equality in pay and conditions by:

- using a pay structure that makes sure employees are rewarded fairly and equitably.

We will promote equality in training and development by:

- providing training programmes for staff to raise awareness of equality issues and assist them in applying equality principles to their role within the Council
- recognising and supporting the potential of all employees by offering opportunities for training and personal development
- monitoring employee development to make sure that training and development opportunities continue to be open to all employees.

8.0 Ensuring equality in procurement and commissioning

Mid Devon District Council is a major purchaser of services. Every year we spend over £5 million with businesses so that we can deliver our services. We recognise that our spending power gives us the chance to influence how others work and to promote equality. We will:

- require any company or business that wishes to be one of our contractors or suppliers to demonstrate appropriate consideration in their policies on equality in relation to employment and service delivery
- seek to encourage any company, business or individual wishing to provide goods or services to Mid Devon District Council, to contribute to our policy by implementing fair practices in employment and training
- review our own policies and practices and where necessary make changes to them to ensure they do not discriminate or place unfair requirements on small businesses from Mid Devon
- cease issuing contracts to, purchasing from or commissioning any contractor, business or organisation, where we believe they fail to comply with our values in relation to equality and diversity
- follow good practice by having a procurement strategy that gives a clear commitment to equality of opportunity and to tackling discrimination and disadvantage.

9.0 Promoting equality through working with others

The Council recognises that it cannot meet its equality responsibilities without working closely with other public bodies, community groups and individuals.

Mid Devon District Council will:

- use our standing in the area to help shape public opinion to promote understanding between different sections of the community
- work with other public, private, voluntary and community groups in Mid Devon to ensure that equality and diversity policies and plans similar to our own are adopted and implemented more widely

- share information, experience and examples of good practice on equality through links with other public, private, voluntary and community organisations in the region
- promote equality and diversity within partnership working and in our dealings with the media
- involve people from different equality groups in influencing our work and progress on equality
- learn from the equality and diversity policies and plans of other local authorities and organisations.

10.0 Meeting the needs of specific equality groups

The Council is aware that certain groups within society are particularly vulnerable to discrimination because of age, disability, gender, marital status, race, belief or sexual orientation. In order to eliminate discrimination and promote equality we recognise the need to work with representatives who can advocate on behalf of particular equality groups in order to develop services that meet their specific requirements. We also recognise that people are individuals, and that although they may be included within a particular equality group they also have individual needs that may differ from the rest of the group. We are committed to dealing with every resident as an individual with their own particular needs.

11.0 Monitoring

We will monitor the progress of this Single Equality Scheme, reporting on it to our Scrutiny Committee.

Monitoring Impact and Acting on Results

Mid Devon District Council recognises that monitoring is an important way of assessing the effects of policies in practice and is a vital part of any strategy to promote equality.

Monitoring will help us check whether our policies, operations and organisational culture are discriminating against some groups and individuals. This will help us find out why and how discrimination takes place. Where we see that any of our policies or procedures have a negative impact we will investigate the reasons for this and revise them accordingly.

Publishing Results

If Mid Devon District Council is to be successful and keep public confidence, we need not only to promote equality but also to be seen to be doing so. The Council will therefore publish the results of its monitoring, assessment and consultation activities.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Summary of Equalities Legislation

Mid Devon District Council Equality Strategy complies with the following Equal Opportunities Legislation, Codes of Practice and recommendations:

- The Sex Discrimination Act 1975
- Sex Discrimination (Gender Reassignment) Regulations 1999
- The Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003
- Gender Equality Duty
- Equal Pay (Amendment) Regulations 1983
- Codes of Practice, including on Equal Pay
- The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000
- Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003
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- Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006
- The Macpherson Recommendations, Stephen Lawrence Inquiry
- The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and 2005
- Disability Equality Duty
- Special Educational Needs and Disability Regulations 2014
- Equal Opportunities Commission and Commission for Racial Equality Codes of Practices
- The Human Rights Act 1998.
- The Work and Families Act 2006
- Equality Act 2010

Appendix 2 Protected Characteristics

We understand we have a duty to promote equality and eradicate discrimination in relation to the nine protected characteristics outlined in the Equality Act 2010.

- Age
- Disability (including people with learning disabilities, people with a mental illness, and people living with HIV and/or AIDS)
- Gender reassignment
- Marital status, family circumstances, or caring responsibilities
- Pregnant women and mothers with young children (under 5's)
- Race, including nationality, national or ethnic origin, being a traveller or gypsy
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation