

Equality Policy

1. Introduction

Gravesham Borough Council recognises that all our roles and functions impact – directly or indirectly - on the provision of equal opportunity to both service users and our staff. We also understand that such roles and functions impact on a range of groups differently. Individuals and groups from diverse backgrounds, cultures, lifestyles and experiences live in and work for the Borough. This policy outlines our commitment to ensuring that everyone in Gravesham can take a full part in the social, cultural and economic wealth of the Borough.

In order to achieve this, we have to understand that diversity is about acknowledging and appreciating that individuals and groups may have different lifestyles, cultures, abilities, religions or beliefs, experiences and backgrounds. Diversity within the workforce, as well as in the community, is an asset to the Borough. Our major challenge is to ensure that our equality policy links directly to our strategies and plans, particularly those which set out our priorities for action to improve the quality of life for everyone living and working in Gravesham.

Under the Equality Act 2010, as a public authority we have legal duties to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other prohibited conduct.
- Advance equality of opportunity.
- Foster good relations between people.
- Publish objectives to demonstrate how we will meet 1-3 above and publish information on our performance.

The duties apply to a series of 'protected characteristics': age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race (including caste), religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. The council acknowledges and welcomes its legal duties and uses the legislation and national guidance as a framework to eliminate inequality. However we are not only driven by legislation - our policy and work programmes are also in response to local needs.

2. Equality Policy Aims

We want to achieve equality of opportunity in all our activities, including in the delivery of services to the community, as an employer and through the range of activities we fund. We will put into place a range of practical strategies to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation within the communities we serve and among our workforce. An equal opportunities organisation is one which values and utilises everyone's talents and abilities, where individual contribution is encouraged and where differences are recognised and welcomed. We want to be fully responsive to the needs of our employees and the community we serve.

It is important that Gravesham is a good equal opportunities employer and a fair and effective service provider, because:

- a diverse workforce, reflecting the community, results in a better informed, more adaptable organisation that is better able to reflect and respond to the needs of our customer base.
- as the local authority it is incumbent upon us to give a clear lead to other organisations and employers in the locality.
- improved staff morale helps us to recruit and retain staff, as well as to make best use of the talents of our workforce. It further reduces the costs to the Borough.

- a stable, motivated workforce achieves higher levels of productivity and is more committed to the Borough.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

3.1 As a Community Leader

Gravesham Borough Council recognises its statutory obligations and are committed to meeting them. As a Community Leader it is the councils responsibility to provide members of the community the opportunity to be involved in decisions, service design and prioritisation and in turn to create cohesive communities and that foster good relations between people from different backgrounds.

The council will:

- Make democratic, informed decisions.
- Work with Gravesham's communities to tackle disadvantage and discrimination through consultation and involvement.
- Improve community relations and promote diversity through events, publicity and other initiatives.
- Encourage participation in local democracy.
- Take action to tackle discrimination that affects specific groups.
- Record and report all instances of hate crime and harassment and promote safety and security.

3.2 As a Service Provider

We know some people find it difficult to access services or take part in public life. By promoting fairness and inclusion we aim to remove barriers to services and opportunities. It is our aim to provide a welcoming, friendly environment which is easily accessible to all, to take steps to improve access to services, facilities and information where needed and be honest about what we can and cannot do.

The council will:

- Work with communities to identify their needs and make sure they are met.
- Make our services inclusive and accessible, delivered appropriately and sensitively in order to ensure equality of treatment.
- Monitor our service delivery and usage to ensure equality and take action where unequal treatment is identified.
- Ensure that everyone has the information they need about our services.
- Listen to comments and complaints about the services we provide and the way in which we deliver them and where possible improve services to ensure they meet the needs of all residents (for further details please refer to the Complaints Policy).
- Treat all customer, residents and users of services with fairness and consistency, without discrimination.

3.3 As an employer

The council has a duty to ensure that policies and practices that affect our staff are fair and promote equality of outcome. It is our aim to provide a welcoming, supportive, friendly, safe and inclusive workplace, where staff are equipped with the tools and skills they need to do fulfil their roles. A diverse workforce reflecting our community results in better informed decision-making and a stable, motivated workforce achieves high productivity and is committed to the council.

The council will:

- Encourage the diversity of our staff to reflect the communities we serve across all the equality areas and will continue to monitor our workforce profile.

- Provide equality of opportunity in all aspects of recruitment, work conditions and the working environment, including:
 - Appointment
 - Promotion
 - Training opportunities
 - Pay and reward
 - Grievances
 - Exit from employment
 - Any other conditions of employment
- Provide staff with a work environment where they are free from harassment or other barriers to performing their role.
- Monitor and review employment practices.

4 Contractors, Suppliers and Consultants

The council will include equalities as part of the evaluation process in awarding or monitoring every service contract. Contractors and Suppliers are expected to meet equality standards within contracts and service level agreements. The council will not award contracts if a commitment to equality and fairness is not demonstrated and breaches may lead to termination of contracts.

5 Handling Complaints

If a member of the public feels that they have been treated unfairly, or have suffered harassment, on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation this should be dealt with under the council's complaints procedure.

Complaints of discrimination, harassment or bullying among the workforce will be dealt with under the Dignity at Work Policy.

6 Policy Implementation & Monitoring

Where appropriate, the council will work through existing partnerships and with other organisations, to provide services which promote equal opportunities to all through the actions outlined below and detailed in the council's equality act objectives.

These actions will allow us to assess the progress the council is making on equalities and ensure that the council is adhering to the policy.

The council will:

- Take all reasonable steps to ensure the effective communication of this policy to all staff and members including regular training.
- Monitor and review of our corporate equality objectives.
- Review and update our equality objectives every four years.
- Review the Equalities Policy every two years subject to changes in the relevant legislation.
- Undertake Equality Impact Assessments where there is a significant change to a service or policy.
- Publish details of our workforce including the salary of senior officers on an annual basis.
- Provide information in alternative formats, translations and interpreters when needed and ensure meeting and events are easy to access.
- Create and publish an equalities profile of our local community, to be reviewed every two years.
- Create and publish equalities profile data for our workforce and take action to address disparities with our local community.