

The Duty

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 nine 'protected characteristics': age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and 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.

MBC's Commitment to Equality

An equal opportunities organisation is one which welcomes and manages diversity, using everyone's talents and abilities, and where individual contributions are encouraged and differences valued; it is responsive to the needs of its employees and the community it serves. This principle is enshrined in the Council's core values as 'Equality in a diverse organisation'. This also features as a category in the Council's annual STRIVE awards.

For the Council as a community leader, service provider and employer it is vital that all of MBC's staff and elected members understand about equality and diversity and how to operate in a non-discriminatory and inclusive way. **Employees and others working on behalf of an employer can be held personally liable for acts of unlawful discrimination where an employer has taken all reasonable steps to prevent such an act.** Maidstone Borough Council also has a zero tolerance approach to officer behaviour that are inconsistent with our organisational values.

Everyone who uses services, facilities and information provided by the Council should be treated in line with this policy. This includes service users/customers, members of the public, partners, contractors, employees, workers and elected Members.

This policy is for all officers and elected members in all their activities on behalf of Maidstone Borough Council. The Chief Executive and Corporate Leadership Team have responsibility for overseeing implementation of the policy and the monitoring process and managers are responsible for ensuring that all aspects of their services comply with this Policy.

Roles & Responsibilities

As a Community Leader...

Maidstone Borough council recognises its statutory obligations and are committed to meeting them. As a Community Leader it is the Council's 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 Maidstone'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.

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 will remove barriers to services and opportunities¹. 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 taken 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 council services with fairness and consistency, without discrimination.

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

¹ Members of the public do not have the right to be refused a service from staff or elected members on the grounds of age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, race, religion/belief, sexual orientation, or any other factor that is not reasonable. This can only happen where there is a genuine occupational and objective need for example, some women from certain religious backgrounds may require services to be delivered by a women.

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.

Contractors, Suppliers and Consultants

The council will include equalities as part of the evaluation process in awarding or monitoring every service contract. Contractors, Suppliers and Consultants 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. Organisations doing business with us are welcome to adopt our equality policy for their own use. Volunteers (although not specifically protected under the Equality Act 2010) are expected to comply with, and be treated in line with, the spirit of this policy.

Cross references to other policies

This policy will impact on how all current policies held by Maidstone Borough Council are implemented and in addition how future policies will be formulated. All policies should have an equality impact assessment to show if there are any inequalities. The council has templates to assist with the formulation of impact assessments.

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. 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.
- Undertake Equalities training with all staff and members for example the respecting difference programme and ivy learning modules.
- Monitoring and review of our corporate equality objectives and progress towards them is carried out by Corporate Leadership Team and the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services on a half yearly basis.
- We will review and update our equality objectives every four years.
- This Equalities Policy will be reviewed every two years subject to changes in the relevant legislation.
- Undertake Equality Impact Assessments where there is a change to a service or policy.
- We will 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 residents, to be reviewed every two years.