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**Redditch Borough Council
Equality Strategy**

2017-2020

1. Introduction

As an employer and deliverer of services, Redditch Borough Council is committed to eliminate unlawful discrimination, promoting equal opportunities and fostering good relations between people from all communities. This Strategy sets out our commitment for progressing equality over the next four years.

The Strategy and Action Plan outlines our equality objectives, describes how we will fulfil our moral, social and legal obligations and what we will do to make Redditch a place where people get along with each other and treat each other with dignity and respect.

The Strategy covers inequality in terms of age, disability, gender reassignment (transgender/trans), marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation and is aimed at those who live, work in and visit the district, as well as elected Councillors and employees of the Council.

2. The Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty

The Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 came into force in October 2010 and legally protects people from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society. It replaced previous anti-discrimination laws with a single Act, making the law easier to understand and strengthening protection in some situations. The Act covers nine protected characteristics and these are the grounds upon which discrimination is unlawful. The characteristics are:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment (1)
- marriage or civil partnership (in employment only)
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

(1) before, during and after transition. This wording is the terminology used in the Equality Act; transgender (or trans) is now the accepted terminology. The Council understands there are many different identities which fall under the trans umbrella, including identities outside of the gender binary.

Public Sector Equality Duty

As part of the Equality Act 2010, public authorities must comply with the public sector equality duty (the equality duty). The equality duty replaced the previous race, disability and gender equality duties and was developed to extend across all the protected characteristics. It consists of a general equality duty, supported by specific duties and requires public authorities to consider or think about how their policies or decisions affect people who are protected under the Equality Act. Private organisations and individuals don't have to comply with the duty.

The general duty requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to:

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

In addition, public authorities also have specific duties and must do the following:

- publish equality information at least once a year to show how they've complied with the equality duty
- prepare and publish equality objectives at least every four years

The publication of our Equality Strategy will support us in meeting the general and specific duties placed on us as part of the Equality Act.

3. Why is equality important to the Council?

Redditch Borough Council is using the systems thinking method to change the way services are delivered to the customer. This is about looking at what we do from the outside-in or from the customers/residents point of view; it means understanding the different and sometimes multiple needs of our residents, including those who do not actively engage with the Council.

As a public service provider, it is important we recognise that our residents and customers come from different backgrounds; this will enable the Council to design and deliver services that meet the needs of the communities we serve. By understanding these differences and encouraging others to do the same, we can improve the quality of life for everyone by ensuring people who live, work or visit our district are treated fairly, with respect and are given the same chances and opportunities by taking into consideration their different needs.

As an employer, we believe that it is in the Council's interests and in the interests of all who work for the Council that we ensure that every possible step should be taken to ensure that individuals are treated equally and fairly and that decisions in recruitment and selection, training, promotion and career management are based solely on objective and job related criteria and that reasonable adjustments are made where feasible.

4. Equality in the delivery of our services

Equality Impacts

There is no longer a specific legal requirement for the Council to undertake an equality impact assessment. However, we *are* legally required to demonstrate that we have given 'due regard' to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation; advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations. In practice this means that equality considerations still need to be evidenced in our decision-making processes and policies. Any potential impact on equality should be considered before any key decisions are made and should be integrated into day-to-day policy-making, business planning and other decision-making arrangements. This is particularly relevant when making difficult financial decisions; if we are proposing to stop, reduce or change a service then we must have relevant equalities evidence to justify this.

Equality Assessment Guidance is available for officers on the Orb and the Policy Team can provide direct support for service areas and projects to help them to gather and interpret equalities evidence.

Equality Monitoring

The Council has a requirement to publish equality information at least once a year to show how we have complied with the equality duty. The Council recognises this also makes good business sense as it can help local people assess the Council's performance on equality, the impact our policies and practices have had, tell us who is and isn't using our services; understand why our services may not meet their needs and help us to improve the delivery of our services by identify any data gaps and address any issues. Any monitoring undertaken must be proportionate and relevant and of a benefit to our communities.

Procurement & Commissioning

The Council provides a wide range of services to residents and businesses in the borough. In some cases these are provided directly by the Council, in other by our partners and contractors. When a supplier provides goods, services or works on our behalf, we will ensure the equality obligations are part of the terms of a contract so that we know they will monitor the impact on service users and those they employ. The ultimate legal responsibility for meeting the requirements of the Equality Act remain with the Council for any services delivered on our behalf..

Specifically we will:

- Communicate this strategy to all potential contractors and service providers;
- Ensure contractors and service providers have policies, procedures and practices that do not discriminate and deliver goods, facilities and services that are appropriate and accessible;
- Provide opportunities for all to be in a position to bid and win council contracts from an equal basis; and
- Monitor the contracts and service arrangements to ensure they are meeting their equality commitments.

5. Equality in employment

The Council is working towards achieving a diverse workforce and offering equality of opportunity in employment, recruitment selection, training and development. We aim to ensure that the workplace is free from discrimination, victimisation or harassment of any kind where staff are treated with respect.

Employment policies

The Council has a wide range of policies in place for our staff and prospective employees. These policies support our staff and provide clear guidance to all employees about what is expected of them and what they can expect from us as an employer. We will continue review the range of policies and be pro-active in promoting and supporting equality in the workforce. This includes eliminating bullying and harassment, addressing discrimination, ensuring equality in pay and creating a flexible work-life balance.

The Equal Opportunities Policy pulls together the Council's commitment to equality within the workplace.

Equality Training

Equality training is provided for staff to ensure they are made aware of their rights and responsibilities. In particular all managers will be trained on a regular basis in equalities matters concerning employment. Similarly there is an expectation that all Members will attend Equality training. Equality issues are an integral part of our training and development programmes, regardless of whether the council uses internal or external trainers. In addition to the generic equality training, tailored equality training to reflect the needs of specific services will be encouraged, particularly for services engaging with external customers and / or where there is a significant engagement with protected group(s).

The council makes a strong commitment to training and development for all staff. All staff will have equal access to training and development and we will take positive action where appropriate for those who are underrepresented in our workforce.

6. Consultation & engagement

The Council wants to ensure that anyone who accesses council services either as a resident, visitor, customer or employee feels well informed about local issues; has the opportunity to get involved, influence local decision making and gets the opportunity to tell the Council what they think about its policies, procedures, service delivery and work with partner organisations.

To ensure consistency, the council has developed a Community Engagement Strategy with the following principles setting out how we are going to make certain that our engagement activity is flexible, focused and appropriate for the diverse needs of the communities. To achieve this, the Council will:

- Develop a strategic approach that provides clear guidance and promotes successful engagement across all service areas.
- Plan and co-ordinate activities, the use of resources and, where possible, work collaboratively.
- Actively encourage involvement from all communities, including those from traditionally 'hard-to-reach' groups so that everyone has a chance to represent their viewpoints on issues relevant to them.
- Use the most appropriate method to consult and engage making the experience interesting, relevant and worthwhile for participants.
- Development and implement new approaches to how we carry out engagement activities.
- Communicate results and ensure that the outcomes are used to inform the Council's policies and decision-making processes.
- Use the information from our engagement activities, alongside other evidence, to inform the design and delivery of effective and efficient services, within our current financial constraints.

If you would like to get involved taking part is easy and you can do as little or as much as you like e.g. from completing surveys on local issues to being part of a focus group. Your views can make a difference.

7. Our successes & achievements

The Council is committed to supporting equality through its services, including:

- Raising awareness of discrimination through a range of activity which included commemorating Holocaust Memorial Day in January
- Promoting Lesbian Gay Bi-sexual and Transgender (LGBT) History Month
- Support for No Barriers Redditch
- Disabled Facility Grants
- Translations and alternative formats
- Community Safety – support for Hate Incident Reporting and the Safe Places scheme
- Community Grants
- Providing assisted bin collections for people who struggle to get their bins to the roadside for collection, such as older residents and people with disabilities
- Supporting people through LifeLine, Shopmobility and Dial a Ride services

8. Measuring our progress

We will inform the public and staff about our progress through:

- An annual equality report
- Our information and advice services
- Council website
- Media (including social media) for advertising and press releases
- Through our community networks

9. How to contact us

To give us your views, get involved or for further information please contact the Equalities Team at equalities@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk or 01527 548284

To find out about the councils engagement activities please contact us or just go to www.redditchbc.gov.uk/consultations or www.bromsgrove.gov.uk/consultations

If you need this information in another language or format, please contact us to discuss how we can best meet your needs.

Email: equalities@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk or Phone: 01527 548284

Appendix 1

Redditch Borough Council Equality Objectives 2017-2020

Our equality objectives set out the direction for the council –

Objective 1: To understand the needs of the community so they can access our services, facilities and information

To achieve this we will:

- Collect, analyse and where appropriate publish equality data order to monitor who is and isn't using our services and facilities and to understand their satisfaction.
- Work with partners to identify and share issues facing specific groups of people in the district to inform future service delivery.
- Use the information from our engagement activities, alongside other evidence, to inform the design and delivery of effective and efficient services, within our current financial constraints
- Continue reviewing our policies and activities to monitor the impact on different groups
- Review our Customer Service Centres and procedures to ensure we are meeting the different needs within the community
- Ensure equality is considered in processes for procuring works, goods and services and contract management

Objective 2: To engagement and communicate with the community in the most appropriate and accessible ways

Community engagement is about giving people the confidence, skills and power so they can get involved. The Council wants to ensure that people feel well informed about local issues; have the opportunity to get involved, influence local decision making and get the opportunity to tell the Council what they think about its policies, procedures, service delivery and work with partner organisations.

To achieve this we will:

- Develop a strategic approach that provides clear guidance and promotes successful engagement across all service areas.
- Plan and co-ordinate activities, the use of resources and, where possible, work collaboratively.
- Actively encourage involvement from all communities, including those from traditionally 'hard-to-reach' groups so that everyone has a chance to represent their viewpoints on issues relevant to them.

- Use the most appropriate method to consult and engage making the experience interesting, relevant and worthwhile for participants.
- Development and implement new approaches to how we carry out engagement activities.
- Communicate results and ensure that the outcomes are used to inform the Council's policies and decision-making processes.

Objective 3: To support Council's employees and Elected Members to deliver accessible, non-discriminatory services.

To achieve this we will:

- Continue to collect, monitor, report and review information available on our workforce and job applicants
- Promote an environment where everyone is treated fairly and with dignity and we recognise and value the differences skills, abilities and experience people bring to the workplace
- Have policies and procedures that comply with legislation and ensure existing policies and procedures are regularly reviewed and amended so they conform to any new legislation
- When appropriate, work with teams to ensure equalities information is available for managers and Elected Members to use in decision making
- Provide all employees with the training and development to enable us to achieve our equality objectives
- Offer equalities related training and development to all Elected Members and make relevant resources available to them
- Continue to develop and promote work/life balance initiatives to enable employees to achieve a better balance between home and work responsibilities where feasible in line with business need.