

Equality Information Report

2015



**Epping Forest
District Council**

www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk

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If you would like a copy of this Equality Report in another format, for example large print or Braille, please contact: Epping Forest District Council on 01992 564042 or email: equality@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

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Introduction

About this report

This report provides an overview of our work over the last 12 months, to bring greater equality to our residents, service users and employees. It provides information about the equality related developments we have made to our services, and our achievements since we published our last report in July 2014. This report builds upon previous reports and should be read in conjunction with them. These reports are on the Council's website www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk

This report meets the specific duty to publish information to show the progress we are making towards meeting the requirements of the public sector equality duty (more information on page 5).

Equality at Epping Forest

Equality is about fairness, recognising that people are different and that all individuals have the right to have those differences respected. Equality is also about recognising that inequality exists and that it can mean that some individuals are unable to reach their full potential or access services because of their individual characteristics. Whilst equality is morally right it also brings benefits to the Council and the whole community. Equality of opportunity helps to create an environment whereby everyone can contribute thereby maximising the value of the talent and skills available. It also helps the Council to attract, motivate and retain the best staff. Embedding equality into service provision allows for resources to be targeted where they are needed and for services to be provided in ways which allow all customers to access them.

An integrated approach

We plan our work to ensure it takes forward the Council's Corporate Plan and medium term aims for innovation, involvement and transparency, and to provide clear community leadership. It reflects corporate values of fairness and the provision of services tailored to the different needs of our communities. We are committed to delivering equality for all those who use our services, and our employees. Equality, therefore, is an integral part of our work.

Statement of commitment to equality

Short Statement:

‘Epping Forest District Council is committed to treating everyone equally and fairly according to their needs’

Full statement:

Epping Forest District Council is committed to ensuring that all individuals and groups are treated with respect and are valued equally;

We will endeavour to make our services accessible to everyone;

We will endeavour to eliminate discrimination against people who are perceived to have, or are associated with someone who has a protected characteristic;

We will consult and involve relevant people and groups from our community where appropriate in the design and monitoring of our services;

We will collect information about our customers to ensure our services are accessible and provided equally to all in our community;

Where necessary we will take positive action through our service provision to meet the particular needs of disadvantaged groups in our community;

We will endeavour to promote understanding and good relations between communities;

We will consider taking positive action to address under-representation and promote diversity in our workforce profile;

We will publish sufficient information to demonstrate how we have complied with the general equality duty;

We will use our procurement opportunities to drive equality, for example, by working proactively with key suppliers to promote equality and positive practices in their operations and in the provision of services;

We will ensure appropriate resources are available to meet our statutory equality responsibilities;

We will make sure that appropriate equality and diversity training is provided for all Members and staff of the Council.

The Equality Act 2010

...sets an expectation that public services must treat everyone with dignity and respect.

Protected Characteristics:

...are age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex and sexual orientation.

Public sector equality Duty:

Also known as the general equality duty and s149

The specific Duties:

Whilst the Council has always been fully committed to equality and its leadership role in the community, legislation guides much of our equality work. Existing anti-discrimination legislation was harmonised and strengthened in 2010 by the introduction of The Equality Act providing stronger protection against discrimination, and greater clarity for employers, businesses and public service providers about their responsibilities.

Evidence shows that some groups of people are repeatedly disadvantaged in society by the way their needs are overlooked or ignored. These groups of people are now identified by their characteristics under the Equality Act and offered protection. The Equality Act requires us to consider their needs and requirements when carrying out our business as an employer and service provider. Some characteristics are common to everyone. For example, everyone has a race or sexual orientation. There are also some characteristics which do not apply to everyone, such as disability.

The Equality Act 2010 places a number of responsibilities and requirements on the Council. We have a general duty to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- Advance equality of opportunity between different groups; and
- Foster good relations between different groups

The purpose of the general duty is to integrate consideration of equality and good relations into our day-to-day business. Having 'due regard' means consciously thinking about the three general duty aims as part of the process of our normal business and decision making, removing disadvantage, and encouraging participation and success. The term 'foster' means tackling unlawful discrimination and promoting good relations between different groups of people.

We have two additional and specific duties:

1. We have to set equality objectives at least every four years that will help us to further the aims of the general duty; and
2. We must publish information annually to show the progress we are making to deliver the general duty.

Equality initiatives and progress

Equality Framework for Epping Forest District Council

We have produced a new tool to help employees build equality into their work. All our equality policies, forms and systems have been brought together within a framework making it easier to see what employees have to do and to access the tools they need to do it. The framework provides structure to our equality agenda and the systems to deliver it and is a useful reference document to answer any queries about what the Council is doing about equality, and why it does what it does.

LGBT History Month

In February this year the Rainbow flag was once again flown above the Civic Offices for a day in recognition of Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender history month. The Portfolio Holder for equality invited staff to join him by the flag pole outside the Civic Offices to hear him deliver a short message on the importance of tolerance and diversity.

Member training

A thorough understanding of equality is important at every level of the authority. The Council's elected members have received training, learning about when and how equality is relevant to the work the Council does. They also familiarised themselves with some of the Council's report formats and where to find equality information so they can take it into account when they make decisions on behalf of the Council. This training was received well by Councillors and will continue to be a part of the Member Development Programme.

International Women's Day

International women's Day has been celebrated in many countries around the world on 8 March since 1913. It is a day when women are recognised for their achievements throughout history and across nations. The Council has a number of high achieving women employees who have addressed challenges and taken different routes to progress their careers and achieve success. Ruth Rose, Senior Lawyer for the Council, described the path she took in the first of a series of interviews with staff published in the Council's staff newsletter District Lines

Improved access to our buildings

Manoeuvrable desks have replaced the old furniture in the Committee Rooms to provide greater flexibility as to how the room is used and to make it more accessible for people with disabilities.

Text messaging alerts

A text messaging service has been put in place to alert visitors and employees who have hearing difficulties or are deaf in the case of fire in the Civic Offices. Details are located at main reception and visitors and employees are required to send a text to activate this service so that they are alerted in the event of a fire.

Helping children make considered choices

Every year we help to provide a range of specialist workshops through the Crucial Crew programme to year six pupils who are ten years old, and through the Reality Roadshow programme to year nine pupils who are 14 years old. The workshops are designed to encourage them to make considered choices and understand the consequences of their actions. Every child in these year groups takes part in interactive scenarios focussing on personal safety, emotional well-being and crime prevention.

Baby changing table

Recognising that pregnancy and maternity are protected characteristics under the Equality Act, the Council adapted a disabled toilet on the first floor to include a baby changing table for any visitors to the Civic Offices who may require baby changing facilities.

Polling Stations

Polling Stations are reviewed annually to make sure they are accessible. We are pleased to announce at this years General and Local Elections we had no negative feedback about the accessibility of our polling stations.

More inclusive image

Disabled, black and multi ethnic and gay people are all part of our community yet sometimes they are not routinely included in images illustrating our general publications. We are exploring ways to develop a library of images to use in our leaflets, news items or posters, to show that our services are inclusive and open to all.

Six for all

The Council was successful in applying for Sport England's Inclusion Fund. The Six for All project will run for three years and the aims of the project are to increase the number of competitive sporting opportunities for young people and adults (14 plus) who have a disability. The project will focus on six projects over the three years, boccia (a seated inclusive sport), table tennis, judo, trampolining, swimming and athletics. Working closely with local clubs the project will look to set up sustainable disability sections of these clubs and will offer training to coaches and volunteers. The 'Six for All' project was launched in November 2014 at Ongar Leisure Centre. The launch event saw 30 young people with various disabilities/ Special Educational Needs take part in trampolining, boccia, judo and athletics. Since the launch event the project has set up a new trampolining session at Ongar as well as a 'bounce and swim' session.

New Horizons

A new brochure of activities for anyone aged 50+ was produced in April. It covers a range of sporting, social and leisure opportunities. In addition to the Council's own sessions, details of activities and courses provided by Everyone Active, private clubs and other organisations are included. In this year's brochure you will find everything from athletics, badminton, bowls and cycling to dancing, netball, swimming and tea dances. New Horizons activities take place across the District. A qualified coach or supervisor is on hand and equipment is provided at most sessions. Everyone aged 50+ is welcome with absolutely no restrictions regarding fitness or ability.

Boccia

"The Jubilee Court group in Waltham Abbey really enjoyed their afternoon of boccia".

The Council works with several key organisations like Volunteer Action Epping Forest (VAEF), Resident Associations and Age UK to deliver boccia sessions, a seated inclusive sport. Working across a variety of sites qualified coaches deliver boccia which engages older people in low level physical activity through a variety of challenges and games. Adaptations to the game can be made to ensure it is fully inclusive like using a ramp, shortening game space and being able to throw or kick the boccia balls depending on their level of ability. Julie Bristow, VAEF Befriending Scheme Co-ordinator, gave feedback at one particular session "The Jubilee Court group in Waltham abbey really enjoyed their afternoon of boccia".

Looking after our vulnerable citizens

We have appointed a Vulnerable Persons Officer within Local Taxation. With the advent of Local Council Tax Support a lot more potentially vulnerable people now receive a Council Tax bill and it became evident that we needed a new way of co-ordinating these cases. There is now a new process whereby a formal step has been put into the recovery process whereby those who are potentially vulnerable and have debts with us are referred to this vulnerable persons officer for assessment, and further action will be appropriate to the individual's circumstances. This officer will also act as a conduit for signposting and liaising with agencies such as the Citizens Advice Bureau and Mental Health teams., and liaise with the Corporate Safeguarding team where cases may be identified within the section's work.

The aim is to enable a person's vulnerability to be properly identified, to help them access services and to assist them to manage their debts.

Warmer homes in rural areas

Many of our older tenants live in rural areas which may not have gas supplied. This year we carried out major energy efficiency improvements including installing insulation to external walls, and air source heating to a number of our rural homes to improve warmth, comfort, and energy efficiency. During 2014/15 approximately 40 properties benefited from this initiative with a further 40 planned for 2015/16.

Adapting council homes for older tenants and residents with disabilities...

Every year we adapt some of our council properties to help people with disabilities to get up and down stairs, or to use their bathroom, or otherwise get the benefit of their home.

This year we have:

- installed a further five stair lifts,
- 165 level access and over bath showers,
- constructed six hard standings and vehicle crossovers; and
- adapted four kitchens,

Mental health

The Council is working with authorities from across Essex to deliver mental health training to all our managers and Human Resources (HR) team. The objectives of the training are to assist our managers and HR staff when dealing with mental health issues, to increase understanding, to spot the signs and advise them on the appropriate support to consider.

Apprenticeships

In 2013 the Council employed seven Business Administration and two Construction Apprentices to its Corporate Apprenticeship Programme. All the apprentices were young adults from the District. Six of the nine apprentices have found permanent employment with the Council. This year (2015) we are looking to recruit the same number of apprentices. This has been achieved, in part, by working in partnership with a group of preferred Housing Associations, which will fund up to three of the apprenticeship places.

The Apprenticeship programme provides a wide range of work experience and the opportunity to gain a work based qualification. The aim of the Programme is to find them permanent employment with the Council.

Understanding our residents

The Council recognises that we have an ageing population and this year the Council has adopted a corporate aim that specifically targets meeting the needs of older people.

Policy review

The Council has introduced a new Medical Health – Incapacity Policy which includes a robust Redeployment Policy. This is to assist employees, in particular circumstances, to remain in employment.

The Council has also implemented a new Recruitment Policy which provides managers with a thorough scoring system for both the short listing and interview stages of recruitment exercises. In addition it supports the Guaranteed Interview Scheme, whereby disabled applicants are guaranteed an interview if they meet the essential criteria for a post and they identify themselves as having a disability.

Accessible services

As a Council we want to be as accessible as possible and are taking steps so that our Customers can contact us in a range of ways that is appropriate to them. This year we have increased the opening hours of our Council Offices at the Limes Centre, Chigwell as well as introducing a web based and smartphone application that enables our tenants to report repairs online.

The Local Plan

As of March 2015 the Council has 121 permanent authorised pitches for Gypsies and Travellers as well as six temporary pitches and 16 unauthorised caravans with an assessed need for increasing this provision by an additional 112 pitches in the period up to 2033.

Planning for the future

We supported the planning application for a state of the art Autism centre and Autism School proposed by the Anderson Foundation. The Council received positive feedback for the way in which officers dealt with the planning application which has the potential to be a beacon of excellence.

Get Active Epping Forest

During the period March to May 2015, 20 workshops were run with 247 elderly residents of some of our sheltered housing schemes in a project called 'Dance'. The aim of the project is to encourage healthy and active lifestyles and reduce the number of inactive people in the district. Further funding has been received to deliver themed activity workshops to enhance the health and well-being of residents at Jubilee and Jessops Court in Waltham Abbey. The sessions will increase their physical activity through creative dance bringing both health and social benefits to those involved.

Inclusive theatre performances

In August 2014 28 participants attended the 'Charlie Bear and his Smelly Socks' event aimed at children under five with additional needs, and their families. 'Bangers and Mash theatre company' performed a new play written from personal experience of severe learning disability, and from working closely with carers and teachers, and a wide range children with disabilities and from different age groups, over the last ten years. It was a relaxed performance prioritised for children with additional needs and their families in a fully accessible arts centre.

In the same period the theatre company ran a similar event, 'Jack and the Beanstalk' for children under ten with additional needs and their families.

Big Draw

“Good fun was had by all. It was a novel experience and very entertaining. We were all impressed with the artistic conclusion at the end of the day”.

The 'Big Draw' was an international drawing festival which took place throughout October. Eight adults from Voluntary Action Epping Forest's group for adults with learning disabilities were in attendance. They were invited to draw around each other's shadows projected on to the gallery wall. During the course of the exhibition this created a network of outlines that overlapped making other shapes and connections in the drawing.

Richard Ford, a volunteer for the charity, said 'Good fun was had by all. It was a novel experience and very entertaining. We were all impressed with the artistic conclusion at the end of the day'.

Limes Street Dance

Between March and May 2015, 17 young people aged between five and seven years, attended the Limes Street Dance project. The aim of the project was to encourage them to be more physically active and build a greater sense of community identity.

Going Forward

We will publish more equality information in July 2016 and annually in July thereafter.