



# Harborough District Council Equality Plan 2021/24

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## Introduction

The aim of this Equality Plan is to explain how we, at Harborough District Council, intend to continue to progress our work regarding equality and diversity and challenging discrimination over the next three years, from 2021 to 2024.

As a Local Authority, we have both a legal (statutory) and a moral duty to show fairness and promote equality for all our residents, customers, and employees. It is important that we provide services, facilities and policies which meet community and employee needs by designing and delivering them in a way that is appropriate and accessible for all. We want to ensure that our actions do not discriminate against or disadvantage anyone, and responsibility for this lies with everyone here at Harborough District Council.

Ensuring that equality and diversity informs key decision-making at every level within the Council, is a continuous responsibility and one that will allow us to adapt and be responsive to change. The disproportionate equality impacts of [COVID-19](#), issues raised by Black Lives Matter and contents of reports like [‘We Belong’](#) by Disability Rights UK and the [‘National LGBT Survey’](#) published by the Government Equalities Office, continue to highlight inequalities within society and expose the reality of the poorer life chances and opportunities some sections of our community face. Identifying the nature of inequalities can be complex, impacts can be cumulative and linked to factors such as socio-economic background and family influence as well as individual characteristics. This means that, as a Local Authority, we need to ensure that we are doing all that we can to understand, recognise and reduce any inequalities we encounter or identify in all areas of our work. We also need to delve further and so it is vital that we positively engage with, and listen to, all our communities and employees to make sure that our services and policies are accessible, appropriate, fair, and that they help to advance equality of opportunity for those who may be at risk of, have been or are currently being disadvantaged.

By continuing to promote equality both internally, within our organisation, and externally, within the community, we aim to develop social and economic benefits which will ultimately positively impact all communities within our district.

### **What do Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion actually mean?**

Equality does not mean treating everyone in the same way; it means treating everyone with fairness and respect and recognising needs of individuals. It is about recognising that some people may need to be treated differently to give them the same opportunities and ensure that they are able to reach their full potential.

Diversity is recognising and valuing that individuals are unique with their own values, beliefs, attitudes, cultures, ethnic backgrounds, sexuality, skills, and life experiences. A successful organisation respects and values these differences and understands how they can be developed for the good of the individual, an organisation and society as a whole.

An inclusive community can be described as one in which strong and positive relationships are developed between people from different backgrounds and circumstances. Successful and lasting inclusion involves a shared vision, values, and a sense of belonging for all communities, where the diversity of people’s backgrounds and circumstances is appreciated, respected, and positively valued.

### **The Law**

The [Equality Act 2010](#) and associated Public Sector Equality Duty are the main parts of equalities legislation which focus on the right of people not to be discriminated against because of who or what makes them different from other people.

There are nine 'protected characteristics' covered by the Equality Act 2010. It is against the law to discriminate against anyone because of any one of these 'characteristics', of which we all have one or more of, so the Act protects all of us against unfair treatment. The law applies whether the discrimination is actual or perceived and if it occurs directly or by association. The nine 'protected characteristics' are:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender Reassignment
- Marriage and Civil Partnership
- Pregnancy and Maternity
- Race
- Religion or Belief
- Sex (Gender)
- Sexual Orientation

As a Local Authority, Harborough District Council has additional legal responsibilities relating to the Equality Act 2010 and this is known as The Public Sector Equality Duty. The Public Sector Equality Duty requires us to have 'due regard' to the need to:

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

We aim to meet our Public Sector Equality Duty by:

- Paying 'due regard' and considering equality impacts before we make decisions which directly affect residents, service users or employees. We may do this by completing an Equality Analysis to demonstrate 'due regard' or through other activities or assessments
- Monitoring whether our decisions and actions do in fact reduce inequality by analysing and understanding information and feedback about our services
- Not tolerating discrimination or harassment of any staff member by ensuring fair and respectful treatment in the workplace, in training, development and career progression
- Not tolerating discrimination or harassment of any customers by ensuring they receive fair and respectful treatment from our staff and policies
- Working with communities, partners, and agencies across the district to promote good relations, and where there is discrimination to challenge it

Whilst not specifically mentioned as 'protected characteristics' within the Equality Act 2010, our commitment to equality also encompasses people who are socially or economically disadvantaged and communities known to experience poorer outcomes due to inequalities and discrimination such as asylum seekers, care leavers, carers, current and ex-armed forces personnel (Veterans) and refugees.

### **The Vision and Values of Harborough District Council**

Here at Harborough District Council, we are determined to provide equality of opportunity by ensuring everyone we support is treated with respect and dignity and that all residents can access our services by appropriate means. We will consider digital inclusion and ensure that suitable methods of contact are available to all whether that be online, by phone or face to face

if required. Our aim is to ensure that living, working, or visiting the district is the best possible experience.

We strive to deliver excellent services through a strong focus on customer access and support and by making sure that people and communities within our district are at the heart of our daily work. Our Vision is to secure a prosperous future for the people of Harborough district and our three main priorities are:

- The Place: A safe, enterprising, and vibrant place
- The People: A healthy, inclusive, and empowered community
- Your Council: Creative, proactive, and efficient

We want to deliver important and lasting improvements for local people, through good equality and diversity practice and by showing high levels of corporate and social responsibility. This is supported by our internal employee values which are embedded in our appraisal system:

- We value and are valued
- We are open, honest and accountable
- We challenge and innovate
- We are the best we can be

### **The Council's commitment to equality**

Harborough District Council is committed to equality of opportunity, elimination of discrimination and promotion of good relations. It is our aim to ensure that no customer, elected member, potential or current employee, worker or contractor is treated less favourably on the grounds of their 'protected characteristics' or because of possible family commitments, trade union membership/non-membership, political belief, social or economic circumstance. We endeavour to treat everyone according to their individual needs and are committed to promoting equality in respect of everything we do in our various roles as:

- A service provider, by providing services and facilities which meet the diverse needs of our residents and people who work in and visit our district
- An employer, by being fair in our recruitment, promotion, training and in the development of our staff. By aiming to have a representative workforce that reflects the communities we support and by providing a work environment that is safe, accessible and free from harassment and discrimination
- A community leader, through our democratically elected Members working with communities and partners in the public, private and voluntary sectors to improve the quality of life for the people within our district

We will make sure that the way we meet individual and community needs is fair, equitable and helps ensure that limited resources are targeted at those most in need and least able to have their needs met in other ways. Whether this is in the provision of services, employing people, developing policies, communicating, consulting or involving people in our activities.

### **Open, honest and accountable**

If someone feels that we, our services, or our policies cause disadvantage or are discriminatory in any way we would like them to let us know. We will thoroughly investigate any complaint and be open and honest about our findings. If challenges are made, it is important that we seek to address them so that we understand why people feel as they do. If lessons need to be learnt, we will embrace this so that we can ensure that we continuously improve.

## Working with Partners

Harborough District Council works closely with many partners and agencies in the delivery of our functions and services. We are a member of the LeicesterShire Equalities Forum (LSEF), which is a group consisting of equality officers from all statutory organisations in Leicestershire. The Forum meets regularly and focuses on tackling issues shared by all members. We are also a statutory member of the Harborough District Community Safety Partnership. The Community Safety Partnership contribute towards preventing hate incidents and improving community cohesion within our district. Hate incidents and crimes have risen within the district over the last reporting period, so combatting this is one of the Partnership's priorities in the coming year. Hate incidents based on the characteristic of race made up the majority of reported offences over the last 12 months, with almost 61% of all hate incident reports, followed by reports of incidents and crimes related to sexual orientation and disability.

Harborough District Council also helps to bring together and co-ordinate the work and contribution of other local organisations and local community groups, through our partnerships, to improve quality of life in the district. These partnerships also have a responsibility for promoting equality and diversity.

## The workforce of Harborough District Council

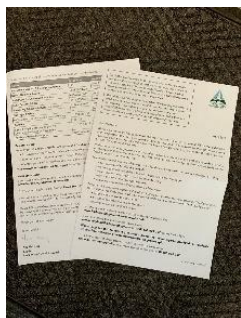
As a modern organisation, providing high quality services, we at Harborough District Council recognise the diversity of our customers and workforce. We seek to promote equality in our policies, the services we provide and in employment. More than that we seek to identify and eliminate barriers that create disadvantage. Our aim is to encourage good practice on equality throughout our organisation and to emphasise its importance as an essential element of all aspects of the business we conduct internally as well as externally within the wider community.

We operate a pay and reward system which is transparent, based on objective criteria and free from bias. We continue to review all new posts, and any existing posts regraded as part of reviews, to ensure equal pay. Through these actions we aim to avoid unfair discrimination in our pay and reward system.

Each year we produce information in relation to the characteristics of our workforce which, whilst being a legal requirement, is also useful for workforce planning. We publish this information annually on the [Equality and Diversity](#) page of our website and set ourselves objectives to ensure that we continue to ensure that we are an inclusive employer with staff who reflect and understand the communities that we support.

## What have we done since our last plan - Equality in Action

As well as looking at equality impacts of our policies and procedures, we have been seeking to foster good relations between communities within the district, through education and awareness raising, to assist in improving understanding of the challenges that some of our communities face. Examples of our recent work in this area include:



**Communications** – To ensure that all residents of the district had access to help and support during the COVID-19 pandemic we produced a plain English document for delivery to all households. This document was automatically translated into the preferred language or format for any residents who had requested translated documentation in the past. We also ensured that links to additional COVID-19 information in different languages and formats were also available on our website to make this more accessible for our communities and staff.



**Active Together** – Free ‘Activity Wellness Bags’ were delivered directly to isolated residents in the community to provide continued support with their health and wellbeing. The reusable bags contained a resistance exercise band, active at home booklet, local partnerships information, a reflective slap wrist band, re-useable travel mug, notepad and pen.



EMPLOYER RECOGNITION SCHEME

SILVER AWARD 2021

*Proudly serving those who serve.*

### **Armed Forces Covenant Employer Recognition Scheme**

- we have achieved the Silver award in recognition of our work in this area.



Member's Training

**Councillor Equalities training** – we successfully held online training modules and training workshops for all Members to help them with Equality Impacts as a decision-maker. The workshops also covered local perspective/risks, concerns, and responsibilities. This training will continue to be offered to Members, enabling them to keep up-to-date and aware of Equalities in their role.



**Dementia Friends** – Harborough District Council staff trained as Dementia Friends Champions run Dementia Friend sessions across the district to help the wider community understand how small actions can make a big difference to people living with Dementia.



**Disability Confident Employer** – New internal guidance for staff has been developed including information for managers on ‘recruiting and managing employees with autism’ and guidance on ‘Anaphylaxis Auto Injector (EpiPen)’. Staff have also been supported to work flexibly during the pandemic which has been particularly helpful for those with caring responsibilities.



**LGBT+ Inclusion Award** – In February 2020 we became one of the first organisations within Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland to receive the LGBT+ Inclusion Award in recognition of our commitment to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender + inclusive practices.



**Waste Team** – Our waste team have been developing ways of assisting residents who require additional support. Alongside the assisted collection service, the team have also provided larger bins for people who produce supplementary waste due to medical conditions. Residents living with dementia can have recycling bins removed, if required, so that they only have one bin to use, making disposing of rubbish easier.

**Supporting events** – Staff at Harborough District Council continue to also support events and initiatives in recognition of weeks such as Mental Health Awareness Week. We have shared information of awareness raising months like Gypsy and Traveller and Black History months and also publicly recognised how difficult it has been for people of all different faiths who have been unable to celebrate religious events in the way that they normally would have done due to the pandemic. Staff have also continued to recognise and support people who are struggling financially by collecting donations of food for the Harborough and Lutterworth Foodbanks and toiletries for the Hygiene Bank. We are also pleased to be supporting and promoting the new LOROS Hospice and Market Harborough and the Bowdens Charity Compassionate Communities Project which aims to build on the community spirit seen locally throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **The future**

For continued development and to further embed good equality and diversity practice, we have set the following equality objectives as part of our Equality Plan 2021/24:

### **General Equality Objectives**

**Objective 1.** Ensure COVID-19 recovery plans consider additional inequalities and cumulative impacts exposed by the pandemic and can be adapted in the event of future lockdown

**Led by:** Service Managers

**By when:** April 2022

**Measure of Success:** Equality Analyses are completed for changes to services and include data regarding known community impacts resulting from pandemic

**Support Required:** Service managers will need support from Equality and Diversity Officer with regard to data and statistics to assist in writing analyses

**Next Steps:** Service managers to receive refresher input with regard to completing effective analyses as part of their decision making

**Objective 2.** Support the development of public engagement and Council campaigns

**Led by:** J Clarke, Equality and Diversity Officer

**By when:** April 2023

**Measure of Success:** Equality related accessibility is considered as part of all public consultations and Council campaigns. The numbers of responses to consultations from people from each protected characteristic group is representative of the district population

**Support Required:** Consultation leads need to provide adequate notice and time for pre consultation engagement with target groups

**Next Steps:** Discussions with communication team and service managers to remind them of the need to consider equality related issues at an early stage of consultation planning

**Objective 3.** Revisit and strengthen equality commitments as part of contracting services

**Led by:** J Clarke, Equality and Diversity Officer

**By when:** April 2023

**Measure of Success:** Clear procedure in place for any staff member developing plans for contracting out services in relation to equality commitments and monitoring (if required)

**Support Required:** Support from Commissioning Officer and Service Managers to review/develop appropriate process

**Next Steps:** Consideration of creation of checklist in similar format to current safeguarding requirement

### **Employment Equality Objectives**

**Objective 1:** Assessment of potential for capturing employee equality monitoring data through electronic human resource records rather than via anonymous staff survey

**Led by:** R Jenner, Human Resources Manager

**By when:** April 2022



**Measure of success:** At least 70% of staff complete the equality monitoring section of their human resource record

**Support required:** Assistance from equality and diversity officer and service managers to encourage staff to complete equality monitoring information

**Objective 2:** Continue to monitor quarterly equality recruitment data

**Led by:** J Clarke, Equality and Diversity Officer **By when:** December 2021

**Measure of success:** Characteristics of new employees appointed by the council are representative of the characteristics of applicants who apply

**Support required:** Assistance from the human resources team to provide data and service managers to identify potential issues