

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy

Scope: This policy applies to all staff at Uttlesford District Council (UDC), and all residents of and visitors to the district.

Effective Date:

Review Date:

Signed Off:

Author: Carla Claydon, Community Partnership Manager

Policy Owned by: Communities Team

Key Policies and Strategies:

The Council's Constitution
The Corporate Plan
Equality and Inclusion Policy
Code of Conduct
H.R Policies
Service Plans
Equality Act 2010
Human Rights Act 1998
Housing Act 1996
Environmental Protection Act 1990
Public Sector Equality Duty
Essex County Council Equality Policy

Forward By Councillor Maggie Sutton

Uttlesford is one of the most rural districts in Essex (over 80% rural population) with all the benefits this brings us across our communities, culture, heritage and local economy. We are extremely proud of this and believe it is one of our strongest assets. We are also determined to tackle the inequality experienced by so many people across the district.

The Marmot Review 10 years on and Institute for Health Equity, in their most recent report, highlights that where people live (their housing, infrastructure, access to services) matters to health outcomes.

The Black Lives Matter Movement has emphasised the longstanding institutional inequality of Black communities across the country, and we know that there are also other minority groups experiencing entrenched inequality.

In Uttlesford, 9% of children are living below the poverty line, with a household income less than 60% of the national average after benefits. Whilst this is higher than the Essex and national average, there are still 18% living in low-income families.

There is an urgent need to do things differently and we must function as community leaders to build back fairer practises. We are committed to collaborating with our communities to do more and implement solutions to address entrenched discrimination, racism and injustice and act to ensure equality of opportunity for all.

It also includes our equality objectives, which demonstrate specific areas where we are tackling inequality. These objectives were identified based on analysis of local data on the experiences of different people in our communities, national research.

Introduction and Policy Statement

*This policy reinforces our duty to comply with relevant legislation and statutory requirements and as the district continues to grow, confirms our commitment to improve equality and diversity for all residents, workers and visitors to Uttlesford, as reflected in our **Corporate Plan**. It outlines the behaviours and values that everyone working for the Council must demonstrate and the actions they must take in order to make this a reality.*

The Council is a disability confident employer and we have partnered with Stonewall on their diversity champion programme, to promote the rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, and Ace+ (LGBTQIA+).

We will work with our partners, stakeholders, business and residents to create a more equitable Uttlesford. We will support our residents, service users, council staff, elected Members and visitors to the district in doing so.

Definition of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)

We define an equal and inclusive district as one where all residents, Council staff and elected Members are treated without bias, with respect and supported to fulfil their potential, and are actively involved in shaping the decisions that will affect their workplace and the wider community. The following values form the framework for a fairer Uttlesford:

- **Equal Outcomes** We will ensure impartiality and uphold equity, so that our staff, partners, and communities have the same opportunities, regardless of their socio-economic or protected characteristics. To achieve this, rather than treating ‘everyone the same’, we will ensure that we do all we can to meet the unique needs of individuals and groups and address discrimination and disadvantages.
- **Diversity** We value and appreciate the differences between individuals and groups. We celebrate the rich culture, heritage and diversity of our community and we will collaborate with our partners to ensure that everyone in Uttlesford can safely express their views, religion, beliefs, feelings and wishes. Promoting the benefits of a diverse community helps to encourage community cohesion, breaks down barriers and negative attitudes created through a lack of understanding and misinformation, and helps develop social cohesion and good community relations.
- **Inclusion** We will support communities from across the protected groups to actively participate in community life and to influence decision-making. We will support disadvantaged groups to have the opportunity to help shape policy and service changes which will affect them. We will take action to support minority groups to be represented in leadership roles across the Council.
- **Respect** We will treat everyone with dignity and respect. “Respect” could be defined as having due regard for a person’s feelings and wishes. Negative behaviours, such as discrimination, harassment and intimidation, undermine people’s dignity, prevent equality, and reinforce disadvantages.

Meeting our requirements

Uttlesford District Council complies with the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Equality Act 2010. The Equality Act 2010 covers nine protected characteristics which cannot be used as a reason to treat people unfairly. Every person has one or more of the protected characteristics, so the Act therefore protects everyone. The protected characteristics are:

- Race
- Religion
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Gender reassignment
- Age
- Disability
- Sex
- Sexual orientation
- Pregnancy and maternity

Uttlesford District Council is going beyond our statutory duty under the Equality Act 2010, by treating care experience and socio-economic status as protected characteristics.

The Equality Act 2010 places a duty on public bodies to play an active role in reducing inequality (the Public Sector Equality Duty) through three key aims. It requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to:

- a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and any other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- b) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it by minimising disadvantage suffered by people because of their protected characteristics.
- c) Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it. People are protected against discrimination under the Act, for example:
 - i) **Direct discrimination:** Whereby someone treats a person less favourably than they treat, or would treat, other people because that person has a protected characteristic.
 - ii) **Indirect discrimination:** Where a criterion, policy or practice is applied equally to everyone but has a disproportionate negative effect on people sharing a protected characteristic or being associated with a protected characteristic.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Uttlesford District Council is committed to fulfilling our obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty. Direct and/or indirect discrimination, harassment or victimisation will not be tolerated within the workplace, nor in the way we deliver services or carry out our functions and duties.

Uttlesford District Council will ensure that reasonable adjustments are made wherever possible, and as set out in our **Vulnerabilities Policy**.

The Council is committed to promoting equality of opportunity, eliminating unlawful discrimination and promoting community cohesion throughout the district. We will seek to protect the rights of everyone not to be discriminated against, and work to ensure equal opportunity for all, so that each person is supported to realise their potential.

Our Approach to Quality and Inclusion

Equality, diversity, and inclusion are fundamental to our decisions delivering the best possible outcomes for our communities at a time of increasing financial challenge. We will continue to use our limited resources smartly and our workforce will continue to maintain ambitious standards in delivery service to support all those who live, learn, work, or visit the district.

The following principles set out the approach we will take to tackle inequality and discrimination and promote equality, diversity, and inclusion in all that we do and in the most effective and efficient way possible. As community leaders we will:

- **Being transparent** and open about our progress on equality and inclusion, sharing information with our partners and our communities, celebrating success, and learning from experience, and being open about where we need to improve.
- **Foster knowledge**, mutual understanding and respect for the beliefs and practices of different religious groups and their common ground to promote good relations between people of different faith traditions.
- **Use our influence** to encourage other employers and service providers in the district to comply with our standards for equality, diversity, and inclusion.
- **Champion** good relations between communities in our communications and address negative behaviours of any group.
- **Lead by example** by demonstrating best practice for equality, diversity and inclusion as a service provider, commissioner, and employer.

As a landlord, service provider, employer and commissioner

The Council aims to provide homes and services that meet the diverse needs of our community. We believe that all customers should be able to access housing, support, and care services with the same ease and that the quality of our service is of the same high standard for all.

We will ensure that the services we deliver are accessible and tailored to the diverse and individual needs of our community, and that everyone receives fair and equal treatment and are treated with dignity and respect. Reasonable adjustments are provided where necessary to help people access our services and we will advise them of their rights.

We will engage with all groups in our community when making decisions about our services; and prioritise engagement with those who represent marginalised or disadvantaged groups or where involvement is low.

We will, where possible, use the commissioning and procurement of services to reduce inequality across the district by ensuring that those services are compliant with Uttlesford's equalities standards and encourage the employment of diverse workforces, training and services that are accessible to all.

The council is committed to welcoming and valuing diversity, promoting equality of opportunity, and tackling unlawful discrimination. We will demonstrate behaviours in line with the Uttlesford Code of Conduct for Employees, ensuring that our staff promote equality and do not discriminate on the basis of sex, sexual orientation, marital status, pregnancy and maternity, gender reassignment, race, religion, belief, disability or age (collectively referred to as protected characteristics in the Equality Act 2010).

The Council routinely carries out an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) to consider the effect that any prospective changes to policy or service delivery may have on different protected groups and take action to mitigate against any unequal impact. This process will also be used to ensure we are taking every opportunity to advance equality.

We will collect and monitor relevant equalities data from residents so that we can understand how effective our services are at reaching and improving outcomes for our diverse communities. This helps us to understand the needs of our different residents and design policies and services to meet those needs.

Our expectations of Uttlesford residents, communities, and our partners

No organisation can tackle inequality alone. We ask all our residents, communities, service users and partners to support us by treating each other, Council staff, elected Members, and all those who live, learn, or visit Uttlesford with respect and fairness, including when using our online platforms.

We do not expect any person to use language or physical actions of any form that could demean, distress, or offend Council staff or elected Members. Threats of violence against a member of staff, an elected Member or our partners will not be tolerated. Enforcement action may be taken against any person using or threatening violence.

Working with health partners to identify and address health inequalities, focusing on prevention

Good health is of vital importance for both individuals and communities. However, health inequalities contribute to shorter lives with more years spent experiencing ill health.

Health inequalities are avoidable differences in health between individuals, communities, or populations. Evidence shows that the greatest contribution comes from 'wider determinants' of health, such as our income, education, and housing, which contribute to at least 50% of health outcomes.

In Uttlesford we are using a 'population health' approach to deliver our [Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2023-2028](#), and to ensure our residents start well, live well and age well. The four key areas of 'population health' are: the wider determinants of health; our lifestyle and behaviours (for example smoking or being active); an integrated health and care system that works together; and the places and communities we live in. This approach aims to improve the health and wellbeing of our population and reduce health inequalities.

- Start Well**

In Uttlesford, we are committed to supporting children in their early years to thrive, enabling them to have the best start in their school or education setting. We strive to improve nutrition, oral health, and physical activity among children and young people; and provide them with the tools to maintain good emotional wellbeing and mental health.

By delivering early interventions and empowering young people and families we want to enable them to access preventative healthcare, which includes a focus on sexual and reproductive health, vaccinations, and support for those who face issues related to drugs, excessive alcohol, smoking, and vaping. This will be achieved through partnership working with education settings, the NHS and voluntary sector organisations.

- **Live Well**

We will collaborate with our partners and community to empower people to shape their health knowledge, enabling them to make informed and healthy choices. We will focus on the prevention and management of major health concerns and take a comprehensive approach to the promotion of well-being and healthy, active lifestyles that nurture good mental health and build resilience.

- **Age Well**

We will work with service providers and support agencies to ensure that the right support is available at every stage of life. This includes assisting residents to have the social network they need to support their wellbeing and enabling Uttlesford residents to live an independent and resilient life into older age. We aim to help every Uttlesford resident prevent the risks of age-related ill health and receive the best end-of-life care that ensures that the final stages of life are dignified and respectful.

Taking action to reduce serious youth violence in Uttlesford

We recognise that children who participate in serious violence have experienced adverse childhood experiences, trauma and can be criminally exploited. Serious violence can have devastating consequences for all those affected. Without support, many victims and survivors can experience mental health issues, substance misuse and have greater difficulties accessing education, services, support and employment.

We will, where possible, provide victims of serious violence with appropriate support to keep them safe and help them to recover and rebuild their lives. This will be achieved through partnerships, collaborating with our partners, including education settings, the NHS and voluntary sector organisations.

Develop the diversity of our workforce so it reflects the community at all levels

We want our workforce to reflect Uttlesford's communities at all levels and so we can support and deliver the best outcomes for residents.

To achieve this, we will continue to improve the diversity of our senior leadership team and our overall workforce, making sure that equality and inclusion is embedded across the organisation.

We will:

- Encourage all staff to confidentially declare their protected characteristics through employee self-service. This will improve the quantity and quality of equalities data we hold about our workforce and help us make more insightful decisions.
- Review and update our human resources policies (including those relating to recruitment, learning and development, performance appraisal and employee relations) to ensure that they are inclusive and accessible for all staff, regardless of protected characteristics.
- Provide support to enable staff to manage and / or work within a diverse and inclusive workforce, and deliver services, infrastructure and projects which are inclusive, non-discriminatory and tackle inequality for local people.
- Encourage and support all hiring managers to have diverse recruitment panels for shortlisting and interviews.
- Support employees to participate in staff networks as part of their professional development and wellbeing and grant staff reasonable time away from their daily responsibilities to do this.

Provide services that are easy to access and respond to people's needs, tackling inequality and exclusion

We want residents to feel informed about their local community and our services, so that everyone can be clear and confident about what is happening and why.

We will:

- Collect data on the experiences and needs of our residents and businesses and analyse this data to review services and ensure that they are accessible, effective, and meeting the needs of all groups in the district.
- Communicate in plain English without jargon, understanding how people would like to be contacted by the Council.
- Recognise that not everyone is able to use our digital services and, accordingly, we will continue to offer telephone and face-to-face services wherever possible for those people.
- Offer free access to our Wi-Fi network when on Council premises.
- Make equality, diversity, and inclusion part of everyday practice to better reflect the community's needs.

Data collection and insight

We understand that the decisions we make on services, projects and initiatives could impact residents and visitors to the district in a number of ways. Therefore, we use data collection and insight to help us to make informed decisions.

Where applicable, we undertake Equality Impact Assessments when a new policy, procedure, or service is being developed, or significantly changed. We include evidence-based assessments, analysis of equality impacts across the protected characteristics, socio-economic status, and any other relevant information.

When considering any proposed service changes, we will:

- Engage with both current and potential service users to understand whether all members of the community have equal access to our services.
- Ensure that our decisions are informed by key data and insight.
- Ensure that where applicable, all 'key' decisions made by Cabinet, decisions made by Full Council, and portfolio decisions made by Cabinet Members have a published Equality Impact Assessment included within the decision-making report.
- Provide training to officers on how to complete Equality Impact Assessments.
- Collect and monitor data on the protected characteristics of people using our services. All data will be stored securely and in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

The data we collect enables us to analyse trends, lack of usage, service barriers and customer experience, including causes of inequality, so that we can improve our services for the benefit of all residents, visitors, and staff. We will benchmark our approach using national and regional standards of excellence, using national resources, and our geographical and statistical neighbours.

The Council is a Disability Confident employer, and we use our staff equality monitoring data to benchmark ourselves against other councils. As an employer, we use the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index to measure progress on Lesbian, Gay, Bi and Trans inclusion.

Governance

This policy forms part of the Council's policy framework, which is agreed by Full Council. Our elected Members represent the views of their constituents and bring their views into the Council's decision-making process in their role as community leaders.

The Equalities Steering Group, which forms part of the Council's Committee structure is made up of service leads from across the Council. This forum can scrutinise polices, and oversee processes, to eliminate discrimination and promote equality, diversity and inclusion from within.

The Corporate Management Team provide visible leadership on equality, ensuring that it is embedded into policy, strategy, service delivery, our culture and behaviours as well as ensuring that the Council is fulfilling its duty under the Act. A lead director has been identified to oversee the delivery of our equalities objectives.

All members of our workforce are responsible for delivering services, working with our communities, and collaborating with one another in accordance with the Council's policies and procedures and with regard to tackling inequality and promoting equality, diversity and inclusion. Senior Officers throughout the Council are responsible for ensuring that everyone who works for Uttlesford District Council follows this policy in all aspects of their work.

Monitoring and Review

This Policy will be reviewed periodically and updated to reflect any changing needs, new strategies, or organisational restructuring. The delivery of our equalities objectives will be subject to ongoing review, and the objectives themselves will be updated every four years, in line with our Public Sector Equalities Duty.

Progress made towards achieving our equalities objectives will be assessed annually as part of our Public Sector Equality Duty, and we will publish an annual Equalities Report. This report will set the progress on equalities targets, and review inequalities which persist across Uttlesford and demonstrate our commitment to overcoming these challenges. The report will include workforce data in terms of ethnicity, age, disability and gender and equal pay.

Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs) are used to monitor the equality impact of all key decisions, including by assessing whether groups are disproportionately affected by changes to policy or services and identifying action we will take to mitigate this as a result. We also use our equality impact assessment process to review the accessibility of our services to all groups.

Responding when things go wrong

As a Council we aim to apply the highest standards for equality and inclusion; however, we recognise that, despite the best intentions, sometimes things can go wrong. People have the right to complain about a service they have received from us, a contractor that provides services on our behalf, or their experience in the workplace.

The Council has a formal complaints procedure for residents and a grievance procedure for employees. We also have a procedure for dignity at work for those who feel they have faced discrimination through service delivery or employment.

We take all complaints seriously and encourage the highlighting of issues when things go wrong so that it can be addressed and lessons can be learnt. Responding to and learning from complaints will form a key part of the Council's drive for better local services.

We do not tolerate unlawful discrimination, harassment or victimisation and will take decisive and appropriate action against people found in breach of this policy. As set out in our **Harassment Policy**, employees found in breach of this policy may be liable to disciplinary action including dismissal.

Related Documents

Document	Link
	Domestic Abuse Policy
	CSP Strategy
	ASB Policy
Connected Policies:	Safeguarding Children, Young People and Adults Policy and Procedure
	Vulnerabilities Policy
	Harassment Policy
	Complaints Policy
Forms and Letters:	Risk Assessment
	Proportionality Statement
Leaflets:	

Version history

Version no.	1	Date effective:	
Full / partial review?			
Brief summary of changes:			
Staff consultation (teams):	Neighbourhood Housing Team Community Safety Partnership Public Health and Protection Equality Steering Group Safeguarding Steering Group Public		
Resident consultation:	Tenants Panel		
Approved By Cabinet / Council:			
Author:	Carla Claydon, Community Partnership Manager		