

# Corporate Equality Policy for Malvern Hills District Council

## 1. Context

“A comprehensive Equality Policy involves a commitment to review and change local authority practice. This is considerably more than the production of a policy statement and should extend to planning and initiation of a series of processes across the local authority and in partnerships with other groups and organisations”.

*(The Equality Standard, the Employers Organisation for Local Government)*

In promoting equal opportunities, the Council is acting within both the word and the spirit of the law on Equality. That is to say within the requirements of:

- Sex Discrimination Act 1975.
- Race Relations Act 1976.
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995.
- Human Rights Act 1996.
- Employment Regulations on Religion/Belief and Sexual Orientation 2003.

These all provide a framework outlawing discrimination.

The Race Relations Amendment Act 2000 puts a positive duty on the Council to promote race equality and equality of opportunity. The Council is also working within the Equality Standard for Local Government with its five levels of change to promote equality.

## 2. Council Objectives and Equality

The Council has the following main objectives:

MO 1 To improve the economic, social and environmental quality of life of the local community in a way that is sustainable, inclusive and contributes to community safety and development.

MO3 To develop and promote effective community engagement and involvement.

In everything it does, the Council and its officers and members seek to:

- Be approachable and accessible.
- Have a customer focus.
- Have effective communications.
- Behave with equity, fairness and mutual respect.

These are equality objectives

## Recognising Inequality

This policy framework has been developed in order to recognise and value the diversity that exists and is evolving within local communities. It is based on principles of mutual respect, fairness, social inclusion and a commitment to tackle inequality and injustice.

- Malvern Hills District is an area with a higher than average elderly population, thus a higher than average likelihood for people to be disabled. More than half the population are female. It is an area with a lower than average number of black and minority ethnic people. This means that the issues that isolated groups of families or individuals face may not be recognised, or it is harder for people to find support.
- Malvern Hills District Council acknowledges that the experience of discrimination is a reality for its people. Because of race, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation and other issues people are denied life opportunities, find access to services more difficult, and suffer inequalities as a result.
- Malvern Hills District Council acknowledges its responsibility to challenge all forms of discrimination wherever they exist, and to provide leadership in partnership with organisations in the statutory, not-for-profit and private sectors. In doing so, it is committed to tackling injustice that is the result of discrimination.
- The Council's commitment extends to its functions as fair employer, provider of services and community partner.
- The Council recognises it is not enough to rely simply on legislation to ensure fairness and equality. It is committed to achieving the very best outcomes that it can, rather than merely complying with legislation.
- Promoting the principles of equality, valuing diversity and inclusion are core strategies that lie at the heart of the Council's strategic objectives. Those objectives will not be met unless the reality of discrimination and the injustice that results is addressed and reduced.
- Action is required at all levels of the organisation, from the front-line to the corporate and member-led forums.
- Members, managers, and employees need to make sure that the commitments within this policy are translated into action. Breaches of this policy will be treated seriously and may lead to disciplinary action, in accordance with agreed procedures.

## **Shared Responsibility**

- The Chief Executive has overall responsibility to ensure this policy is consistently applied.
- Each Councillor is accountable to the electorate for ensuring equality of opportunity in all District Council services areas and in employment.
- Each Strategic Director is responsible for co-ordinating the operation and monitoring of the Policy on behalf of the Council.
- Every manager has a responsibility to ensure that service delivery and employment decisions are always in accordance with this Policy.
- All employees are responsible for their own behaviour being acceptable within the terms of the Policy.
- The Trade Unions and employee representatives also have an important role in pursuing equality of opportunity.
- This work needs leadership at the highest level. A Diversity Working Group will meet regularly including a member Equality Champion.
- The Working Group will consist of a small central team including a nominated senior officer with ultimate responsibility, senior representatives from each of the directorates, staff representatives and Trade Union involvement.

## **Equal Opportunities in Employment**

- Malvern Hills District Council seeks to secure genuine equality of opportunity in all activities undertaken by the Council as an employer. Employment policies, practices and procedures will be subject to and consistent with relevant legislation and codes of practice, and good practice to ensure a valued and respected workforce.
- All recruitment and selection procedures will comply with this Corporate Equality Policy.
- All advertisements for job vacancies carry a standard brief statement showing the Council's commitment to Equal Opportunities and are widely advertised to maximise response from minority communities.
- Job Application forms used for recruitment ask for relevant information needed for monitoring equal opportunities which is separated for analysis before short listing.
- Person specifications detailing minimum qualifications, characteristics and experience essential for the job to be done satisfactorily will be drawn up for all vacant posts to enhance objective selection and facilitate monitoring.
- The responsibility for co-ordination of the operation and monitoring of this Policy and employment falls to senior managers.

- Advice on equal opportunities in relation to employment matters will be provided by the Personnel Manager as will the provision of initial and ongoing training in relation to equal opportunities.
- The Personnel Manager will ensure that procedures are put in place for the consideration of any complaints of discrimination or unfair treatment in relation to employment.

### **Mainstreaming in Service Delivery**

- The Council will have a coherent strategic approach to equality issues, which is effective, adopts appropriate mechanisms for strategic planning and performance management, providing continuous challenge to the way services are delivered.
- The Council operates a Performance Review and Development Scheme, which links employees' personal objectives, with the performance management framework and Management Plans.
- The Council will also ensure that our approaches to equality issues, and to valuing diversity, are incorporated into service planning and delivery, becoming part of the mainstream. Individual managers and directorates need to build in their day-to-day activity the commitment to fairness and justice for all people, acknowledging that for some the experience of injustice is a current reality.
- Learning and development opportunities will be provided for staff and elected members to enable them to fulfil the organisation's commitment to equality, recognising that the choices they make every day affect people's lives.
- This mainstreaming is a long-term process and will need leadership, support and challenge.

### **Social Inclusion and Anti Poverty**

The issues in Equal Opportunity relate very closely to those of Social Inclusion, as discussed in Malvern Hills Social Inclusion Policy Statement (adopted 11.5.04)

“Our overriding aim as a Council is to improve the quality of life for the people of the District.”

We will not achieve that aim if individuals or communities are left behind or are left to fend for themselves. Our work on ensuring a District that is fully inclusive of all its communities and citizens will form a major part of our approach to deliver quality services and in our work to ensure other service providers and partners share this view”

*Social Inclusion Policy*

In particular the Social Inclusion Policy recognises the following barriers:

- Access to a decent standard of living
- Access to transport
- Communication
- Discrimination resulting from sexual, religious, ethnic differences
- Low Income
- Poor physical or affordable access to public buildings and open spaces

The Council will support and initiate Anti-Poverty measures which improve access to services to those most in need in the District. Again, this policy relates to the Equality Agenda.

### **Conclusion**

Equality Objectives need to be integrated into every aspect of the Council's work, to ensure that people do not face discrimination and inequality in the services they receive from the Council.