



**Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
Strategy
2025 - 2028**

1. Introduction

This Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy demonstrates our continued commitment to tackling inequality and promoting diversity and inclusion over the following three-year period (2025-2028) and to ensure we meet our equality duty under the Equality Act and Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED).

It outlines our clear vision for an inclusive council including the work of our councillors in their communities, the provision of services, work with partners and within our workforce.

This strategy should be read and understood alongside:

- EDI Policy
- EDI Action Plan 2025-2028
- Armed Forces Covenant
- Modern Slavery Statement
- Accessibility Statement
- EDI in Employment Policy
- Housing Accessibility Statement
- Employee Code of Conduct
- Bullying and Harassment Policy
- Equality Impact Assessment Policy and Guidance
- Safeguarding Policy
- Complaints Policy

2. Equality Objectives

This strategy is based around four equality objectives that the council has chosen to priorities. These priorities have been developed to reflect the four improvement modules of the Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG) from the Local Government Association.

Our objectives are as follows:

- (1) **Understanding and working with our communities.**
We will embed diversity in decision making processes, ensuring representation from all sections of our communities and making sure our decisions are based on good quality data. We will improve and develop our consultation and engagement processes and seek to inform and involve all sections of the community, but particularly disadvantaged and excluded groups, in the development of our policies and the services we provide.
- (2) **Leadership, partnership and organisational commitment.**
We are committed to delivering effective leadership at every level and developing partnerships which prioritise equality, diversity and inclusion.

(3) Responsive services and customer care

We are committed to ensuring everyone can access our services and that any barriers are promptly identified and eliminated. Resources are directed to where residents need them most.

(4) Diverse and engaged workforce

We recognise the value and significance of a diverse and inclusive workforce. We will take positive steps to promote equality in employment by developing a flexible, professional and skilled workforce that is representative of the communities that we serve.

Our Equality Action Plan has been developed from these four objectives.

Progress against these objectives will be monitored by Executive Leadership Board (ELB) the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Forum and EDI Officer Group. These equality objectives pay equal regard to each of the protected characteristics.

3. Definitions

Equality, diversity and inclusion are interrelated yet separate concepts.

Equality	Equality ensures that individuals and communities are not treated less favourably than others because of the characteristics they possess.
Diversity	Diversity means we recognise the value of different perspectives, backgrounds and characteristics of people that make our district a vibrant place to live and work.
Inclusion	Inclusion is the commitment that everyone in the district feels welcomed and valued for who they are.

4. Legislative Context

The council is legally required to ensure its employees and those who use its services are treated fairly and equally, including but not limited to the following laws:

The Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act has two main purposes – to harmonise discrimination law, and to strengthen the law to support progress on equality.

Protection from unlawful discrimination is provided by the Equality Act in relation to the following characteristics, which are defined as ‘protected characteristics’:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment

- Pregnancy and maternity (which includes breastfeeding)
- Race
- Religion and belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation
- Marriage or civil partnership

Every person has one or more of the protected characteristics, which means that the Act protects everyone against unfair treatment. When considering the impacts on service users of our policies and procedures, the council also takes into account other axis of disadvantage including social or economic disadvantage and rural living.

Under the PSED, public sector bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:

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

Having due regard for advancing equality involves removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their 'protected characteristics'; taking steps to meet the needs of people with protected characteristics where these are different from the needs of other people; and, encouraging people with protected characteristics to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low. The practical effect is that public bodies must consider how their policies, programmes and service delivery will affect people with protected characteristics.

The Equality Act 2010 allows an employer or service provider or other organisation to take positive action in order to alleviate and prevent any disadvantage experienced by people with protected characteristics. For example, in relation to recruitment and the provision of certain services.

The Human Rights Act 1998

This confers a range of rights including, for example, the right to family life, which have implications for the way that we as a council deliver services and manage our workforce.

5. Equality Statement

Winchester City Council is committed to integrating the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion into everything it does. Our ambition is to develop a district where no-one faces discrimination, and everyone can reach their potential regardless of race, disability, gender, age, sexuality, religion or belief, gender reassignment, marital status or pregnancy and maternity.

We recognise and value all people in our community and believe that diversity is central to the provision of effective, modern, quality services.

This strategy is for residents, visitors to our district, partners and stakeholders, council employees and elected councillors and all others acting on behalf of the council, including contractors and volunteers.

6. Policies & Services

We will ensure our policies and services meet the needs of all our service users and are delivered in a fair, flexible, efficient and accessible way. We will achieve this by:

- Assessing all policies and services in order to identify any direct or indirect discrimination, un-met needs and opportunities to improve the delivery of services to specific groups of service users.
- Developing specific and measurable outcome-based equality objectives, including equality actions in service and business plans and monitoring progress using the performance management system.
- Ensuring that, where appropriate, all voluntary sector organisations with which the council has contracts with, or which are in receipt of significant funding from the council actively promote their project/service to all sections of the community and can demonstrate that they do so.
- Using a range of media to communicate with our service users.
- Making our services accessible to all by improving physical access to buildings and developing inclusive digital channels. Auxiliary aids (for example hearing loops) will be provided wherever a need is identified or anticipated.
- Establishing appropriate policies, structures, procedures, monitoring systems, and reporting requirements to deal promptly and effectively with any complaints of discrimination, harassment, and victimisation or bullying by service users, members or employees.

7. Employment

We will take positive steps to promote equality in employment by developing a flexible, professional and highly skilled workforce and ensuring staff are

culturally competent and able to provide quality services to all our service users. We will achieve these aims by:

- Ensuring that recruitment and selection methods are fair, systematic, unbiased and based solely on merit using only rational, objective and job-related criteria.
- Providing appropriate equality training and support for managers who are responsible for recruitment, induction and training.
- Providing appropriate equality training for all employees in respect of their conduct and behaviour to other employees and service users.
- Ensuring that all employees have equal opportunity to access training and development activities, regardless of their job role, working hours or any special needs or circumstances.
- Applying national and local conditions of service fairly.
- Adopting and implementing appropriate policies and procedures in respect to harassment, bullying and unlawful discrimination that are consistent with Codes of Practice and guidance.
- Taking appropriate action where harassment, bullying or unlawful discrimination is alleged to have occurred including but not limited to disciplinary action, where appropriate
- Supporting employees from minority or disadvantaged groups by raising awareness of local support groups and through the development of appropriate internal support mechanisms.
- Liaising with the recognised trade unions as part of our monitoring processes for achieving equal opportunity in employment.
- Working with our partners to encourage job applications from underrepresented and disadvantaged groups.
- Promotion and prioritisation of work life balance and allowing flexible working where possible.

8. Information & Engagement

The council already consults with the local community, local voluntary groups, partner agencies and businesses as part of the process of developing its policies and services. We will always look to develop and improve our consultation processes and seek to inform and involve all sections of the community, but particularly disadvantaged and excluded groups, in the development of our policies and the services we provide. We will achieve these aims by:

- Working with our partners to obtain and share information in order to improve our collective knowledge and understanding of the composition and needs of the local population
- Developing a variety of ways to inform and engage with local people in making decisions that affect them.
- Publishing and regularly updating equality information and showing how this is informing council decision-making

9. Partnership Working

The council works in partnership with a range of public, private and voluntary organisations to promote equality and share our shared vision for an inclusive district by:

- Sharing good practice
- Pooling information and data to reduce duplication
- Supporting joint-working and co-delivery where possible
- Sharing budgets and resources to achieve common aims

We will continue this work through established and emerging partnerships such as the Social Inclusion Partnership and characteristic-specific networks such as the Older Persons Partnership.

