



# Harborough District Council Equality Plan (Strategy) 2025/28

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## Introduction

The aim of this Equality Plan is to explain how we, at Harborough District Council, intend to continue progressing our work regarding equality, diversity and challenging discrimination over the next three years. As a Local Authority, we have both a legal (statutory) and a moral duty to show fairness and promote equity 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.

Key to our work in this area is knowing our community and understanding how it is changing over time. Census 2021 statistics showed that over the previous 10 years our population grew by 14.3% and that our population is ageing, with 22% of our residents being 65 years of age or older. It showed that residents live on their own in 26% of our households and that 23% have a disability or long-term health condition. Sadly, 2022 statistics from the Acorn Wellbeing Survey also show that 2.7% of our district population (approximately 2636 residents) are worried about being attacked because of their skin colour, ethnic origin or religion. It is important for us to acknowledge this data, along with statistical information covering all characteristics across the district, and try to understand the context, so that we can develop our services with consideration towards future needs as well as those currently required.

Ensuring that equality and diversity informs key decision-making at every level within the Council, is a continuous responsibility and one that allows us to adapt and be responsive to change. By encouraging collaboration, community cohesion and giving everyone an opportunity to participate, we will achieve more than any single organisation, or person could achieve working alone. As a council, we continually seek to understand our communities' varying needs and ensure that we provide easy access to services that address those needs. We recognise that 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 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 equity 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 and cohesion within our district.

### What do the terms Equality, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusive Community mean?

**Equality** means making sure that everyone can access the same opportunities to reach their potential. **Equity** means recognising people may need to be treated differently, depending on their needs, to achieve **equality**. An equitable approach looks at how a person's individual circumstances impact what they can do and acknowledges that specific contexts can make it more difficult for people to achieve the same as someone not experiencing those circumstances. Whilst everyone should be able to access the same services and be protected by the same policies, the focus of equity is ensuring that everyone has what is needed to achieve this. It is not just about trying to level the playing field but actively taking steps to support people with less privilege achieve the same.

**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. When considering diversity, we think about representation from people of different backgrounds, identities, and abilities. This includes visible and non-visible characteristics.

An **Inclusive Community** is one where everyone feels welcome, of value and can contribute. Successful and lasting inclusion and cohesion 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, 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
- 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 Impact Assessment 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 community cohesion, 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, people who have care experience, 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 work with our communities, to build a future for the people of Harborough district that gives them the best life chances and opportunities through:

- Community leadership to create a sense of pride in our place
- Promoting health and wellbeing and encouraging healthy life choices
- Creating a sustainable environment to protect future generations
- Supporting businesses and residents to deliver a prosperous local economy

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**

- 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, selection, 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. Anyone can register a comment, compliment or complaint [online](#), by telephone 01858 828282 or text 07860 041908.

**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 leads from statutory organisations across 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 (HDCSP). The HDSCP contribute towards preventing hate incidents and improving community cohesion within our district. In Harborough, hate incidents based on the characteristic of race made up the majority of reported offences over the 12-month period up to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024, with almost 59% of reports in this category, followed by reports of incidents and crimes related to sexual orientation 18%, disability 14%, religion 6% and transgender status 1%.

In addition to these partnerships, Harborough District Council also helps to bring together and co-ordinate the work and contribution of other local organisations and local community groups, 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 equity 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 robust and 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** – a staff diary of significant dates and events has been developed and added to the staff intranet to encourage promotion and awareness of important dates for communities across our district. The calendar is used as a prompt to help celebrate and increase awareness and appreciation of dates such as Holocaust Memorial Day, Windrush Day and Pride Month.



**Active Together** – our Active Together team have been working across the district to increase levels of exercise for underrepresented groups to help reduce health inequalities and improve wellbeing. This includes Menopause Matters webinars, Falls Prevention Workshops, Active Mums Club walks and teaming up with the Canal and River Trust to develop a 'Waterways and Wellbeing' programme.



EMPLOYER RECOGNITION SCHEME

SILVER AWARD 2021

*Proudly serving those who serve.*

**Defence Employer Recognition Scheme** – to further develop our work in this area, we have permanently employed an Armed Forces Officer and are currently working towards achieving the Gold Award standard by March 2026.



**Disability Confident Employer** – new internal staff guidance has been developed including information for managers on 'recruiting and managing employees who are neurodivergent'. Staff have also been encouraged to attend courses such as Mental Health Skills for managers and Mental Health First Aider courses for employees to develop their understanding, knowledge and skills.



**Environmental Services** – our team have been redeveloping and creating new green areas and play spaces with wider pathways and inclusive play equipment to ensure that people with all characteristics can enjoy the outdoors and spending time with others in an accessible way. The work included the addition of a 'Changing Places' facility in Welland Park, Market Harborough.

**Supporting events** – Staff at Harborough District Council continue to support events and initiatives in recognition of significant dates such as Mental Health Awareness Week and Gypsy Traveller and Black History months. They continue to recognise and support people who are struggling financially by collecting donations of food for the district's foodbanks and toiletries for the hygiene bank. Individual officers have also taken part in fundraising activities to raise funds for charities such as Bliss for babies born premature or sick, Marie Curie, RNID – National Hearing Loss Charity, Cancer Research and the British Heart Foundation amongst others.

## 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 2025/28:

### General Equality Objectives

**Objective 1.** Monitor performance of the Council within the Equality Framework for Local Government

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

**By when:** April 2026

**Measure of Success:** 'Achieving' category is reached for each theme as a minimum

**Support Required:** Equality and Diversity Officer will need support from managers across the organisation to complete work and provide evidence relevant to their service areas

**Next Steps:** Framework document to be shared

**Objective 2.** Improve quality of equality impact assessments to ensure data is current and relevant to the local area

**Led by:** Heads of Service

**By when:** April 2026

**Measure of Success:** Equality Impact Assessments are completed for changes to services and include data regarding known community impacts and any gaps in knowledge

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

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

### 2024/25 Employment Equality Objectives (these are updated on an annual basis)

**Objective 1:** Assess effectiveness of the data we hold and consider if it would be beneficial to strengthen reporting by reintroducing an anonymous staff equality monitoring survey

**Led by:** R Jenner, Head of Human Resources

**By when:** March 2025

**Measure of success:** Percentage of staff who have completed 5 or more of the sensitive information questions on their personnel record increased from 48% to 55%

**Support required:** Assistance from equality and diversity officer and service managers to encourage staff to complete personal information and to identify any potential concerns

**Objective 2:** Use data from this report to inform and develop our Workforce Strategy

**Led by:** R Jenner, Head of Human Resources

**By when:** April 2025

**Measure of success:** Workforce Strategy is responsive to annual report and objectives aligned

**Support required:** Assistance from Equality and Diversity Officer with regards to community statistics and ITrent link officer for report generation