

Closing the Gap

Working towards greater equality for all



Public sector equality duty

The Council is subject to the public sector equality duty (the equality duty). The equality duty is made up of a general equality duty which is supported by specific duties. The general equality duty requires public authorities, in the exercise of their functions, to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act;
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it; and
- Foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it.

Rights and responsibilities

- This policy statement is developed in partnership with Members and adopted by Cabinet.
- The Chief Executive has overall responsibility for implementing this policy statement.
- Senior managers will make sure their service areas comply with this document.
- Each member of staff has responsibility to read, understand and implement this policy statement and to take responsibility for their own behaviour.
- Each Councillor has responsibility to read, understand and make sure their behaviour has regard for this policy statement.
- Implementation of this policy statement will be monitored by the Corporate Equalities Monitoring Group and Senior Management Team and progress will be reported to Cabinet.

Policy statement

We want people to reach their potential and be able to use our services in a way that meets their needs. We aim to take an inclusive approach in our roles as a community leader, service provider and employer. The commitments in this document apply to Councillors and staff and set standards for others who deliver services on our behalf.

As a community leader we will:

- Seek to understand the needs of all our residents by listening and responding to the views of our communities;
- Seek to make good decisions by taking in to account a range of views and information and being accountable for them; and
- Seek to help people to take part in community life and exercise their democratic rights.

As a service provider we will:

- Seek to help everyone to use the services which are there for them;
- Seek to give information and advice in clear and suitable ways; and
- Review services to identify whether they are meeting people's needs.

As an employer we will:

- Select, appoint and promote individuals on the basis of merit;
- Encourage all staff to develop and reach their potential;
- Provide a safe and accessible workplace;
- Provide fair and open pay and reward systems; and
- Ensure people work in a place where everyone treats each other with dignity and respect.

To deliver our commitments we will:

- Update our equality information and make progress against our equality objectives;
- Use equality impact assessments when we take important decisions or make changes to our services; and
- Not put up with inappropriate or offensive language or behaviour to Councillors, staff or customers.

Equality information

Under the Equality Act (2010) we must publish information to show how we comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty. This must include information about people, who share a protected characteristic, who are our employees and people affected by what we do.

Information about our population is provided below. We collect information about the protected characteristics of people that use our services and our employees, only where this is relevant to what we do and the decisions we take.

Our population

Sevenoaks District has a population of 117,800 living in 47,020 households. The Office for National Statistics says that the districts population will increase by 13,000 more people by 2026.

Disability

The 2011 Census recorded that 13,404 households (28.5 per cent) in the District include people with a long-term health problem or disability. Of these, 2,651 households (5.6 per cent) include two or more people with a long-term health problem or disability.

17,091 people (14.9 per cent) in the District have their day to day activities limited a little or a lot by a long-term illness or disability. This is lower than the Kent average of 17.6 per cent and lower than the national average of 17.9 per cent.

The percentage of people with a disability remains similar to that recorded in the 2001 Census.

Age

The average age of the District's population is 41.7. This is slightly higher than the Kent average of 40.7 years and the national average of 39.6 years.

20.6 per cent of the District's population was aged over 65. This has increased from 17.2% in 2001.

Population forecasts suggest that 28 per cent of the District's population will be aged over 65 by 2033. This is in line with population forecasts for the Kent area.

Sex (gender)

51.6 per cent of the population is female and 48.4 per cent is male. There has been little change in these proportions since the 2001 Census.

Race

The 2011 Census said that 4,864 people (4.2 per cent) in the District are from a Black and Minority Ethnic background. This is lower than the Kent average of 6.9 per cent and the national average of 14.6 per cent. The largest ethnic minority group is 'other white' representing 3.6% of the population in the District.

The percentage of people in the District from a Black and Minority Ethnic Background has increased by 2.8% (2,957 people) since 2001.

Religion or belief

The 2011 Census said that 65.4 per cent of the population is Christian. This has decreased by 10.7% since 2001 but is the highest amount of any district in Kent and higher than the national average of 59.4 per cent. 25.2 per cent of the population have no religion. Small proportions of the remainder of the population are Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh and Jewish.

Sexual orientation

Data from the Integrated Household Survey estimates that 1.6 per cent of adults in the UK identified their sexual identity as lesbian, gay or bisexual.

Pregnancy or maternity

There are 64.3 births per 1,000 of the population. This is higher than the Kent average of 62.4 and the national average of 62.1. There has been an average of 1,271 births in the district, per year, over the past 34 years. In 2014, there were 1,298 births.

Marital or civil partnership status

The 2011 Census recorded that 54.5 per cent of the District's population are married. This is higher than the Kent average of 48.9 per cent and the national average of 46.6 per cent.

Gender reassignment

At present, there is no official estimate of the trans population. Gender reassignment data is not captured by the Census.

Equality objectives

Under the Equality Act (2010) we must prepare and publish one or more objectives to show how we will achieve any of the things mentioned in the aims of the general equality duty.

The Council's Community Plan sets out a long-term vision for Sevenoaks District and sets out the community's priorities for action. It was developed after consultation with Members, residents, town and parish councils, a wide range of voluntary and community organisations and partner agencies.

A workshop with Councillors was also held to determine our equality priorities as a community leader, service provider and employer.

The information gathered through these consultations has been used to determine our equality objectives for 2016-2020 which are set out below.

Equality objective one

As a community leader, we will advance equality of opportunity by seeking to remove barriers to people with disabilities, and their carers, to participate in community life.

Why we have chosen this objective:

Our Councillors said that these things need improving:

- Access in and around Sevenoaks District by walking, cycling and public transport;
- Transport links for rural communities;
- Enabling people with learning disabilities to participate in community life;
- Understanding the support needs of carers; and
- Physical accessibility for people with disabilities.

Councillors' priorities are reflected in the Sevenoaks District Community Plan which includes the following priorities for action:

- Review and promote voluntary and community transport and lobby to represent District transport concerns;
- Increase parking capacity in Sevenoaks Town;
- Use the community grant scheme to support groups who provide social opportunities and reduce social isolation of vulnerable people; and
- Increase the numbers of carers assessments and respite placements offered.

Our planning service will be considering rural isolation and transport as well as access to the town by cycling and walking as part of the emerging evidence base for the new Local Plan.

Our housing service will be carrying out a detailed analysis of the needs of older people and people with physical disabilities to inform a new Housing Strategy for the District.

The Council's Grant Scheme will continue to be used to support organisations that support the aims of the Community Plan, including supporting access to community services.



Equality objective two

As a community leader, we will foster good relations by promoting understanding of issues affecting people with disabilities and older people.

Why we have chosen this objective:

Our Councillors said that understanding the whole community is a priority and that our work to deliver dementia friendly communities was working well. Councillors also said that improving disability awareness is a priority.

Councillors' priorities are reflected in the Sevenoaks District Community Plan which includes the following priorities for action:

- Work with residents and business partners to deliver dementia friendly communities and provide support for carer's families;
- Support people and vulnerable groups with mental health and raise awareness of mental health issues; and
- Implement a multi-agency service signposting scheme for older and vulnerable people.

In terms of disability awareness, our Health Inequalities Action Plan places a focus on raising awareness of mental health issues.



Equality objective three

As a service provider, we will advance equality of opportunity by improving access to leisure facilities, health activities and other services for people with disabilities, younger and older age groups and men and women.

Why we have chosen this objective:

Our Councillors said that we could do more to promote health activities that are already available. Councillors also said that access to parks, open spaces and leisure facilities could be improved.

Councillors' priorities are reflected in the Sevenoaks District Community Plan which includes the following priorities for action:

- Improve access to leisure, parks and open spaces.
- Complete an Open Space, Sports and Leisure study and deliver a Leisure Strategy.
- Encourage people with disabilities to take part in sport and volunteering.

Our communities and business team have funding in place to provide sports activities for people with disabilities and are looking at doing more. They are also looking to increase the number of health walks and other healthy activities on offer.

Our planning service will be considering 'access for all' to leisure facilities as part of the emerging evidence base for the new Local Plan.

Our elections team will carry out a further review our polling places to ensure that wherever possible they continue to be suitable for the communities needs.

Equality objective four

As a service provider, we will advance equality of opportunity by investigating whether we can improve access to information about our services for people with disabilities and across different age groups.

Why we have chosen this objective:

Our Councillors said that our services are not digital enough but also that we need to consider the needs of people who do not use technology and provide information in different formats.

The Sevenoaks District Access Group have told us that they would like the Council to do more to help people get the information they need in the format that is right for them.

Councillors' priorities are reflected in the Sevenoaks District Community Plan which includes the following priorities for action:

- Produce and implement a digital inclusion strategy focusing on the needs of vulnerable groups.
- Improve broadband connectivity and promote digital inclusion.

The Council will deliver a new website in 2016 and Council services are committed to providing more transactions on line. As the website is developed an option for people to register online to receive the information they need will be considered.

The Council will seek to put in place a policy in the coming year to set out the standards of service that customers can expect.



Equality objective five

As an employer, we will advance equality of opportunity by encouraging a broader range of people to apply for Council vacancies including apprenticeships and increase transparency around pay, including the living wage and gender pay gap.

Why we have chosen this objective:

Our Councillors said that proactive and open recruitment policies are a priority and that we need to continue to make sure that we demonstrate that discrimination does not take place.

They also said that gender pay gap reporting is working well and that we need to continue to show our good practice as an employer which should also include demonstrating our compliance with the Government's Living Wage requirements.

Councillors' priorities are reflected in the council's human resources policies and the commitments the council makes as an Investors in People employer accredited at gold level.

To deliver on our objectives we will:

- Monitor and publish information on the Council's recruitment practices, including information about older people and those with caring responsibilities;
- Review our approach to apprenticeships including how and where opportunities are advertised;
- Enhance the Council's equal pay reporting, demonstrating how lowest and average hourly rates compare to the national living wage.

