

Thanet District Council Equality Policy

Equality Objectives Action Plan

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Section 1 - Welcome

Welcome to Thanet District Council's Equality Objectives Action Plan. This document supports the delivery of the Equality Policy and will also support the Corporate Plan, ensuring our priorities are delivered in a fair and inclusive way and by highlighting specific equality issues to be addressed.

As stated in our Equality Policy, Thanet has a different demographic make-up than the majority of Kent and those who suffer disadvantage can be affected more significantly by changes in the services they rely on. Therefore, we will focus on dealing with social deprivation, health inequalities, unemployment and low level of education and skills that impact on the life chances of our residents.

We also want to help our community understand that to create a fairer society we need to recognise that:

- Equality is an issue for us all
- We don't all start from the same place
- To create a fairer society we need to recognise different needs¹

We will use the techniques detailed in our methodology to underpin the projects that will make our Corporate Plan 2012-2016 priorities reality. There will also be projects specifically aimed at furthering the equality and inclusion agenda, integrating it into every activity.

The methodology explains how we will work, how we will deliver, how we will design, review and engage. We have also explained why each focus area is important and the benefits of each for the people of Thanet and visitors alike.

The methodology has been designed to reflect the 'developing' level of the Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG). This is a nationally recognised quality standard and is an excellent method to inform and develop our practices.

We have already made significant progress leading up to the publication of the new policy and action plan, these achievements have been recognised by our auditors and as such our assurance level has increased. This is a positive start that we are keen to build on and as we develop we want to work and deliver within the higher levels of the EFLG standard as part of our commitment to continuous improvement.

We want to bring everyone together in this important work to create a community where people's different needs, situations and goals are recognised and barriers that limit what people can do and be are removed¹.

¹ Equality Framework for Local Government definition of equality.

Section 2 - A picture of the Thanet Community

Our people

To be completed when new census equality data is available.

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Section 3 – Methodology

The methodology has been designed to reflect the 'developing' level of the Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG).

There are five performance areas

1. Knowing Our Community and Understanding its Needs
2. Leadership, Partnership and Organisational Commitment
3. Community Engagement and Satisfaction
4. Responsive Services and Customer Care
5. A Skilled and Committed Workforce

Each performance area has specific focus points to guide and inform our activity to ensure we deliver upon the Equality Policy as a whole.

1 - Knowing Our Community and Understanding its Needs

Why is this important to all of us?

Understanding our community plays an important role in helping us match our services to your priorities and needs. It also helps us plan for the future using projections and trend mapping to target our limited resources in the right areas.

It's about knowing who does and doesn't use our services, identifying and addressing areas of inequality, disadvantage and under-representation. Knowing our population and working with other organisations is vital to ensure that any decisions made are based on high quality intelligence.

We will focus on:

- 1.1 Collecting information** - Ensuring information on the profile of our communities and the extent of inequality and disadvantage within the local area is gathered and priorities are identified across the council accordingly.
- 1.2 Analysing and using information** - Ensuring systems are developed corporately and across services to collect and analyse soft and hard data/intelligence about the community, its needs and aspirations.
- 1.3 Sharing information between partners** – Developing processes to collect, share and use equality information with partners.

Why is data and feedback important?

Successful businesses use customer data, feedback and projections to design and target their products. From a public service delivery perspective, service user data and feedback is important in helping us ensure the services you need are accessible, inclusive and relevant, both now and into the future.

We also want to make sure that we reach people to gain their input to help plan and shape Thanet in a way that reflects the diverse and changing needs of its community. We pride ourselves on being a listening council, our success is reliant on reaching people and engaging with them in the right way.

It is also important for us to know our staff, what their needs are and whether our workforce is reflective of the local community. This helps us ensure that our employment practices are fair and

that we have an excellent range of skills, gifts and talents to deliver high quality services to the community.

Data and feedback yields results

Data can tell us a great deal but it can also raise important issues that we need to investigate further by engaging directly with people, for example:

Data could tell us that particular groups of people are not using one of our services. The questions we would ask include:

- “Do they need the service?”; or
- “Can’t they access the service?”

These questions could only be answered by asking people directly and responding to what they tell us.

Another example would be: data telling us that particular groups do not engage with us as part of our consultations, meaning that we cannot benefit from knowing what they think or what matters to them.

For example, when we analysed responses to our consultations we found that certain groups were under-represented in the responses we received. As a result of these findings we liaised with other organisations and took the consultation to those groups in a format that worked for them.

This has been a really positive outcome for the community and us as previously under-represented groups enjoy more opportunities to influence, shape and prioritise the services that are important to them.

How we gather, use and store information

Your right to privacy is very important to us. We will only ask questions that are relevant to the work we are doing or to help us ensure that we are reaching everyone and gaining their input.

All information you give us is treated with the utmost respect and confidentiality. We gather, use and store personal information in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. Any information we are required to publish under the Public Sector Equality Duty will not identify individuals nor will it be possible to deduce the identity of individuals.

We learn about what’s important to you by:

- Analysing what you tell us in surveys or engagement exercises
- Listening to what you tell us at community meetings
- Talking to you either in person or on the telephone
- Your written correspondence with us
- Listening to what your Ward Councillors tell us
- Analysing comments, compliments and complaints

We want you to trust that the feedback you give us is important and does make a difference so please talk to us, participate in our surveys and tell us what’s important to you.

2 – Leadership, Partnership and Organisational Commitment

Why is this important to all of us?

It is vital that we have a robust equality framework with clearly identified roles and responsibilities to ensure that both Members and officers can perform their equalities roles well and champion equality issues within their wards/service areas and empower others within the local community.

Our goal is to challenge discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and understanding and foster good relations within our community. This will involve working closely with our public and private sector colleagues and those in the voluntary and community sectors who work hard to promote the rights and needs of those they represent.

We can learn a great deal and deliver significant positive outcomes by strengthening relationships, sharing resources, knowledge and experience. It is important that we work together to deliver the best possible outcomes for the people of Thanet and ensure that everyone can participate in public life and be rightfully proud of who they are and the contribution they make.

We will focus on:

- 2.1 Leadership and vision** – displaying leadership and vision to improve equality outcomes, foster good relations and respect human rights.
- 2.2 Organisational and partnership commitment** - Ensuring Members and officers have an understanding of what 'equality' means and why it matters locally. Working with local and national organisations and the wider community to ensure that local equality priorities are addressed.
- 2.3 Equality Analysis** - Continuing with and developing further, our approach to conducting equality analysis of policy and service decisions to assess community impact and to target resources effectively.
- 2.4 Equality Objectives** - Equality objectives have been set and published in accordance with the requirements of the specific duties to support the Public Sector Equality Duty.
- 2.5 Monitoring and Review** - Ensuring corporate and service level structures are in place to ensure delivery and review of equality objectives.
- 2.6 Effective communication** - Ensuring our communications consistently promote a clear commitment to promoting equality and fostering good relations across all local communities.
- 2.7 Commissioning and procuring services** - Ensuring that procurement and commissioning processes and practice take account of the differing needs of users and citizens.
- 2.8 Participation in Public Life** - Ensuring local people are encouraged to participate in public life and/or volunteering in other activities where they are under-represented.
- 2.9 Fostering good relations** - Developing the structures that are in place within the council and across partnerships to foster good relations, enable different groups of people to get on well together and deal with harassment and hate crimes effectively.

3 – Community Engagement and Satisfaction

Why is this important to all of us?

Community empowerment is seen as a priority for Thanet, there are many references to community engagement throughout the 2012-2016 Corporate Plan. Our residents' views are important to us and the main challenge in the years ahead will be to ensure people feel they can influence the decisions made in their district by increasing participation in public life.

An empowered Thanet community is more likely to be engaged in local activities and feel satisfied with local services, in fact, our residents' feedback strongly influenced our Corporate Plan.

Engaging directly with our residents will provide an excellent opportunity to foster good relations and promote understanding, ensuring Thanet is a place where everyone can make a meaningful contribution to their community and shape the services that matter to them.

We will focus on:

- 3.1 Engagement structures** - Developing inclusive community engagement structures throughout the council, which include engaging with communities of interest and vulnerable and marginalised groups.
- 3.2 Effective engagement** - Ensuring our community is involved and consulted with appropriately, including those who share the protected characteristics, on an on-going basis before priorities and equality objectives are agreed.

4 – Responsive Services and Customer Care

Why is this important to all of us?

Our staff have great pride in the service they provide. People often come to us at times of difficulty or when they need help and we must be able to respond to those issues, with care, respect and utmost professionalism.

We need to offer services that are relevant and inclusive so that our limited resources are targeted where you need them most. To achieve this we will talk to you, we will ask your views and listen and respond to what you tell us.

We will also assess our current services and new proposals to ensure that they are fit for purpose and do not exclude anyone on grounds of a protected characteristic (as defined within the Equality Act 2010).

This work is ongoing and we will ensure our staff have the skills and support they need to perform their equality and inclusion roles with confidence. This will include training programmes to raise awareness and develop skills in catering for different customer needs and development of skills to assess the impact of our proposals and services on those in protected and vulnerable groups.

This will combine to ensure we enhance your experience with us: - right service, right time, right way.

We will focus on:

- 4.1 Integration of equality analysis into service review** - Ensuring our services have undertaken, or are undertaking, analysis upon the potential effects of planned changes to policy or service delivery on different communities, including vulnerable or marginalised groups.
- 4.2 Integration into service planning and delivery** - Developing the structures in place to ensure equality outcomes are integrated into service objectives.
- 4.3 Service level procurement** - Continuing to ensure commissioning, partnering and procurement contracts include a requirement to deliver an effective and appropriate service fairly and equitably, in accordance with our public duties.
- 4.4 Access to services** - Further developing systems to collect, analyse and measure data on how all sections of the community access services to ensure services are accessible, relevant and continually improving.
- 4.5 Human Rights** - Developing mechanisms to ensure that human rights considerations are identified when planning services and that customers and citizens are treated with dignity and respect.

5 – A Skilled and Committed Workforce

Why is this important to all of us?

The success of any organisation is dependant on the dedication, skills and talents of its workforce. We have a moral and legal responsibility to ensure our employment practices are fair and that we make every effort to recruit a workforce that is representative of the community that we serve.

We recognise that this can only be achieved by engaging with staff and understanding their needs to help us ensure everyone has equal and fair access to a rewarding and enjoyable career at Thanet District Council.

In the current economic climate we recognise our role in providing, supporting and encouraging employment opportunities in the district. Some groups face more barriers to employment than others and we will work towards our vision that everyone in Thanet has the same opportunities to access work and an income close to the Kent average, while ensuring that the momentum of economic growth is maintained.

As an employer we have policies in place that ensure that staff and applicants are treated fairly and have equal access to recruitment and development opportunities. Where required, reasonable adjustments are positively encouraged to enable staff to contribute fully to the organisation and undertake meaningful roles. We also have robust systems in place to ensure that issues are resolved positively and lessons are learned.

We have a code of conduct to ensure that our staff conduct themselves in an exemplary manner both towards each other and our service users. The code of conduct will be underpinned by a performance management framework that focuses on behaviour in addition to completion of work based targets. We believe that demonstrating positive and respectful behaviour is of equal importance to our staff's practical achievements.

Through a series of Culture Change workshops, all staff have been fully involved in designing the values and associated behaviours that they feel are important in their working environment and in the delivery of excellent public service.

We also want to make sure that our staff have the skills needed to tackle the challenges facing local government but also respond to the diverse and changing needs of our community. The right training is key to ensuring this happens. This means that development opportunities must be allocated fairly and training provision must be inclusive in it's own right, catering for staff with different needs.

We will focus on:

- 5.1 Workforce Strategy** - Ensuring our workforce policies and procedures identify key equality issues to be addressed.
- 5.2 Local Labour Market** - Maintaining our understanding of our local labour market, the barriers faced by vulnerable or marginalised individuals and groups and the impact these have on achieving a diverse workforce.
- 5.3 Workforce monitoring** - Ensuring that all employment procedures comply with equality legislation and employment codes of practice.

- 5.4 HR Policies and Procedures** - Continuing to analyse the potential effects of planned service changes or employment policies on employees, particularly those from under-represented groups.
- 5.5 Staff Engagement** - Further developing a range of inclusive structures to engage and involve staff before priorities are set.
- 5.6 Promoting a positive working environment** - Continuing to assess all aspects of the working environment to ensure that the needs of all our employees are met.
- 5.7 Equal Pay Review** – Continuing with progress on our pay review and working towards reaching agreement with unions.
- 5.8 Harassment and bullying** – Ensuring policies and systems identify, prevent and deal effectively with harassment and bullying at work.
- 5.9 Appraisals** - Ensuring equality issues are integrated into the appraisal system.
- 5.10 Learning and Development** – Developing our approach to assessing the training, learning and development needs required to ensure our Members and officers are equipped to understand their equality duties and take action to deliver equality outcomes.

Objective/Task	Arising from	Lead Officer	Directorate	Section	Target Completion Date	Status	CP Priority	EFLG Criteria	PSED Aim	PC
Develop equality/service user impact analysis approach to enhance other service planning & design processes	Ongoing enhancement of internal procedure	Claire Grant	Corporate Services & Transformation	Business Services	Before July 2013		All	To be mapped	All	All
Create a database of equality stakeholders arising from pre and full equality policy consultations	Ongoing enhancement of internal procedure & feedback from pre-consultation	Claire Grant	Corporate Services & Transformation	Business Services	Before July 2013		All	To be mapped	All	All
Full public consultation upon draft equality policy 2-30/4/13	Service Plan activity	Claire Grant	Corporate Services & Transformation	Business Services	2 – 30 April 2013	On target	All	To be mapped	All	All
East Kent Audit Partnership review of equality and inclusion at Thanet District Council	Ongoing audit activity	TBC	EK Audit Partnership	EK Audit Partnership	2013/14		All	To be mapped	All	All
Produce an annual equality and inclusion report to be considered by SMT and Members. To be forwarded to stakeholders.	Ongoing enhancement of internal procedure & feedback from pre-consultation	Claire Grant	Corporate Services & Transformation	Business Services	2014/15		All	To be mapped	All	All
Develop a schedule of equality/service user analysis, prioritised in accordance with relevance to the PSED and keep under review.	Ongoing enhancement of internal procedure & feedback from pre-consultation	Claire Grant	Corporate Services & Transformation	Business Services	TBC		All	To be mapped	All	All
Progress Equality Policy through the Council's decision making process	Service Plan activity	Sarah Carroll & Claire Grant	Corporate Services & Transformation	Business Services	11 July 2013 for final approval	On target	All	To be mapped	All	All
Transfer service plan actions and corporate projects which progress equality and inclusion on to the equality objectives action plan	Ongoing enhancement of internal procedure	Claire Grant	Corporate Services & Transformation	Business Services	TBC		All	To be mapped	All	All
Integrate equality outcomes into performance reporting	Ongoing enhancement of internal procedure	Claire Grant & Adrian Halse	Corporate Services & Transformation	Business Services	TBC		All	To be mapped	All	All
Delivery of an ongoing training and awareness raising programme for Members and Officers in PSED requirements	Ongoing enhancement of internal procedure	Claire Grant	Corporate Services & Transformation	Business Services	TBC		All	To be mapped	All	All
Ongoing capture of staff and service user data for publication within statutory deadlines	Statutory requirement	Claire Grant	Corporate Services & Transformation	Business Services	31 st January (annually)	On target	n/a	To be mapped	n/a	All
Updating of equality objectives and action plan	Statutory requirement	Claire Grant	Corporate Services & Transformation	Business Services	Ongoing	On target	All	To be mapped	All	All
Championing the Council's equality and inclusion agenda at Member level	Ongoing enhancement of internal procedure	Cllrs Fenner & Worrow	N/A	N/A	Ongoing		All	To be mapped	All	All
Horizon scanning/policy updates	Service plan activity	Carol Cook	Corporate Services & Transformation	Business Services	Ongoing		All	To be mapped	All	All

Updating of State of the District Report/demographic data	Service plan activity	Steve Tebbett	Corporate Services & Transformation	Business Services	Ongoing		All	To be mapped	All	All
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