



North Devon Council Equality Strategy

2023 - 2027

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Equality Strategy

Version 2.4 / November 2023

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1. Introduction

As an employer and deliverer of services, North Devon Council is committed to eliminate unlawful discrimination, promoting equal opportunities and fostering good relations between people from all communities and within its workforce. This Strategy sets out our commitment for progressing equality over the next four years.

The Strategy outlines our equality objectives, describes how we will fulfil our moral, social and legal obligations and what we will do to make North Devon a place where people get along with each other and treat each other with dignity and respect.

The Strategy covers inequality in terms of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation and is aimed at those who live, work in and visit the district, as well as elected Councillors and employees of the Council.

2. The Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty

The Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 came into force in October 2010 and legally protects people from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society. It replaced previous anti-discrimination laws with a single Act, making the law easier to understand and strengthening protection in some situations. The Act covers nine protected characteristics and these are the grounds upon which discrimination is unlawful. Every person has one or more of these protected characteristics, so the Act protects everyone against unfair treatment.

The characteristics are:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment (1)
- marriage and civil partnership (in employment only)
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

(1) The Equality Act 2010 states that “a person has the protected characteristic of gender reassignment if the person is proposing to undergo, is undergoing or has undergone a process (or part of a process) for the purpose of reassigning the person’s sex by changing physiological or other attributes of sex”.

As part of the Equality Act 2010, public authorities must comply with the public sector equality duty (the “equality duty”). The equality duty replaced the previous race, disability and gender equality duties and was developed to extend across all the protected

characteristics. It consists of a general equality duty, supported by specific duties and requires public authorities to consider or think about how their policies or decisions affect people who are protected under the Equality Act.

Public Authorities must publish information to show their compliance with the equality duty as part of the decision making process. The information published must have due regard to the need to:

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

In addition, public authorities also have specific duties and must do the following:

- publish equality information at least once a year to show how they've complied with the equality duty,
- prepare and publish equality objectives at least every four years.

The publication of our Equality Strategy will support us in meeting the general and specific duties placed on us as part of the Equality Act.

3. Why is equality important to the Council?

Equality is about ensuring that our residents, customers, workforce, Councillors, tenants and contractors are treated fairly and given fair chances. Equality is not about treating everyone in the same way but recognising that their needs are met in different ways.

North Devon Council is reviewing the way services are delivered to our customers.

This is about looking at what we do from the outside-in or from the customers and residents point of view; it means understanding the different and sometimes multiple needs, including those who do not actively engage with the Council.

As a public service provider, it is important we recognise that our residents and customers come from different backgrounds. This will enable the Council to design and deliver services that meet the needs of the communities we serve. By understanding these differences and encouraging others to do the same, we can improve the quality of life for everyone by ensuring people who live, work or visit our district are treated fairly, with respect and are given the same chances and opportunities by taking into consideration their different needs.

As an employer, we believe that it is in the Council's interests and in the interests of all who work for the Council, that we ensure that every possible step should be taken to ensure that individuals are treated equally and fairly and that decisions in recruitment and selection, training, promotion and career management are based solely on objective and employment-related criteria and that reasonable adjustments are made where feasible

4. Equality in the delivery of our services

Equality Impacts

There is no longer a specific legal requirement for the Council to undertake an equality impact assessment. However, we are legally required to demonstrate that we have given 'due regard' to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation; advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations. In practice this means that equality considerations still need to be evidenced in our decision-making processes and policies. Any potential impact on equality should be considered before any key decisions are made and should be integrated into day-to-day policy-making, business planning and other decision-making arrangements. This is particularly relevant when making difficult financial decisions; if we are proposing to stop, reduce or change a service then we must have relevant equalities evidence to justify this. We assess any potential impact on equality prior to decision making by consulting and undertaking equality impact assessments which are published on the Council's website.

Within the life of this strategy we will work towards ensuring that all appropriate data is presented to decision makers prior to taking a decision, which will include evidence based equality impact assessments and results of any consultations breaking down the protected characteristics and demographics for North Devon.

Our Dignity at Work Policy and Equality Assessment Guidance is available for officers on the internal website. Further guidance and assistance is available from the Head of Organisational Development.

Understanding our Community

In order to develop services that meet people's needs, the Council must understand our community. We publish Basic facts about North Devon on our website, which includes statistics from the 2021 Census and will also publish further Census 2021 data for the other protected characteristics. We will also look to publish additional data so that we can have a better understanding of our communities.

Within the life of this strategy, we will work towards a better understanding of our customers needs within the protected characteristics including issues accessing or using services and information.

Customer Feedback

We also welcome feedback from our customers and want to ensure that their views are noted and give the Council the opportunity to put things right and review the way we deliver services in the future.

Equality Monitoring

The Council has a requirement to publish equality information at least once a year to show how we have complied with the equality duty. The Council recognises this also makes good business sense as it can help local people assess the Council's performance on equality, the impact our policies and practices have had, tell us who is and isn't using our services;

understand why our services may not meet their needs and help us to improve the delivery of our services by identify any data gaps and address any issues. Any monitoring undertaken must be proportionate and relevant and of a benefit to our communities.

Procurement & Commissioning

The Council provides a wide range of services to residents and businesses in the area. In some cases these are provided directly by the Council, in other by our partners and contractors. When a supplier provides goods, services or works on our behalf, we will ensure the equality obligations are part of the terms of a contract so that we know they will monitor the impact on service users and those they employ. The ultimate legal responsibility for meeting the requirements of the Equality Act remain with the Council for any services delivered on our behalf.

Specifically we will;

- Communicate this strategy to all potential contractors and service providers,
- Look to ensure contractors and service providers have policies, procedures and practices that do not discriminate and deliver goods, facilities and services that are appropriate and accessible,
- Provide opportunities for all to be in a position to bid and win council contracts on an equal basis and
- Monitor the contracts and service arrangements to ensure they are meeting their equality commitments.

5. Equality in employment

The Council is working towards achieving a diverse workforce and offering equality of opportunity in employment, recruitment selection, training and development. We aim to ensure that the workplace is free from discrimination, victimisation or harassment of any kind where staff are treated with respect.

Employment policies

The Council has a wide range of policies and a Behaviour Framework in place for our staff and prospective employees. These policies support our staff and provide clear guidance to all employees about what is expected of them and what they can expect from us as an employer. We will continue to review the range of policies and be pro-active in promoting and supporting equality in the workforce. This includes eliminating bullying and harassment, addressing discrimination, ensuring equality in pay and creating a flexible work-life balance.

The Council's Recruitment Policy has been recently reviewed. Posts are shortlisted and interviewed on how well a candidate meets the essential and desirable criteria set out within the job specification. The protected characteristics are not considered when shortlisting applicants for a role. An applicant's characteristics are not used to positively or negatively discriminate within the recruitment process.

North Devon Council are a Disability Confident employer which means we ensure disabled applicants have the opportunity to apply for positions for which they are qualified.

Reasonable adjustments are made for any employee suffering from a disability in accordance with the 2010 Equality Act.

The Council's Dignity at Work Policy and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training reflect the 9 protected characteristics.

The Equal Opportunities Policy pulls together the Council's commitment to equality within the workplace. On the Council's employment application form and as part of equal opportunities monitoring of employees on the Council's IT software solution we ask for information relating to a person's sex identity.

Information on the Council's Workforce is published on the Council's website.

Equality Training

Equality training is provided to staff and Councillors to ensure they are made aware of their rights and responsibilities. In particular all managers will be trained on a regular basis in equalities matters such as unconscious bias concerning employment and on the completion of equality impact assessments

Equality issues are an integral part of our training and development programmes, regardless of whether the council uses internal or external trainers.

In addition to the generic equality training, tailored equality training to reflect the needs of specific services will be explored and encouraged, particularly for services engaging with external customers and / or where there is a significant engagement with protected group(s).

The Council makes a strong commitment to training and development for all staff. All staff having equal access to training and development and we will take positive action where appropriate for those who are underrepresented in our workforce.

6. Consultation and engagement

The Council wants to ensure that anyone who accesses council services as a resident, customer or employee feels well informed about local issues; has the opportunity to get involved, influence local decision making and gets the opportunity to tell the Council what they think about its policies, procedures, service delivery and work with partner organisations.

The Council's aim is to help everyone in North Devon have the opportunity to feel informed, consulted and involved in how their council makes decisions and delivers services.

The Council is currently in the process of reviewing its Community Engagement strategy.

To achieve this, the Council will:

- Develop a strategic approach that provides clear guidance and promotes successful engagement across all service areas

- Plan and co-ordinate activities, the use of resources and, where possible, work collaboratively
- Actively encourage involvement from all communities in North Devon, including those from traditionally 'hard-to-reach' groups so that everyone has a chance to represent their viewpoints on issues relevant to them. We will do this by developing positive relationships with community groups that support all members of the community
- Undertake stakeholder mapping prior to undertaking consultation to ensure that we engage with representatives for protected characteristics as appropriate
- Use the most appropriate method to consult and engage making the experience interesting, relevant and worthwhile for participants
- Monitor equality and diversity data to help identify current and future needs, possible inequalities including problems accessing or using services and information. We will also use this data to check that a cross-section of people have been reached and given their views.
- Ensure that all appropriate data is presented to decision makers prior to taking a decision which will include evidence based equality impact assessments and results of any consultations, breaking down the protected characteristics and demographics for North Devon.
- Develop and implement new approaches to how we carry out engagement activities.
- Communicate results and ensure that the outcomes are used to inform the Council's policies and decision-making processes
- Use the information from our engagement activities, alongside other evidence, to inform the design and delivery of effective and efficient services, within our current financial constraints.

We have sought the views of the community on this strategy and listened by amending the draft strategy where applicable to take into account the comments that have been made. We will publish the results of the consultation together with a note of the action taken for each consultation response made.

As a Community Leader and a public service provider, North Devon Council considers, as a matter of course, the needs, desires and aspirations of its people and the communities they form. This means:

- Providing information on current projects by a variety of different methods i.e. website, press releases, social media channels and through our partners
- Consulting with communities and involving them in what the council does
- Ensuring that all communities are able to influence the decisions and direction of the council.

If you would like to get involved taking part is easy and you can do as little or as much as you like e.g. from completing surveys on local issues to being part of a focus group. Your views can make a difference.

All of our current consultations can be found on our website at www.northdevon.gov.uk/consultations

7. Our successes and achievements

- The Council is a Disability Confident Employer.
- Disabled Facility Grants – Available to assist with costs of improving access to, and facilities within properties, eg installation of wet-rooms, stair-lifts and ramps.
- Community Safety Partnership – Working in partnership with a neighbouring Local Authority, Devon and Cornwall Police, Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service, and Dorset, Devon and Cornwall Community Rehabilitation Company to consider wider issues, such as crime prevention and anti-social behaviour, and how together we can respond to local issues and improve quality of life for residents.
- Freedom Centre – Following a successful co-location pilot a small number of NDC staff are now based full-time at the Freedom Centre along with Freedom staff, an NHS Nurse, Devon Partnership Trust Nurse, Together Drug and Alcohol specialist, Devon & Cornwall Partnership PC, M5 Welfare Security and Barnstaple PCN GP's to enable the best possible services are provided to some of our most vulnerable homeless clients. 8 units of temporary pod accommodation are available for rough sleepers and in addition two four bed shared houses totalling 16 units. There is also a 2 bed female only unit offering supported accommodation. All are provided through the rough sleeper partnership.
- Domestic Abuse – working in partnership with Devon County Council and North Devon Against Domestic Abuse with the employment of a specialist Domestic Abuse triage officer who works and supports those fleeing domestic abuse, this includes those from the LGBTQ community.
- Complex Care Leaver programme - working in partnership with Devon County Council and North Devon Homes in regards to the Complex Care leaver programme which supports young people and young people who may be within the LGBTQ community.
- Household Support Fund – a fund that has been available since 2021 to help individuals and families with rapid short term financial support to address economic vulnerability and financial hardship and is designed to ensure that people can access emergency short term support for those in most need with regard to food, energy, water bills and wider essential costs.
- Worked with partners and voluntary sector to deliver practical support to vulnerable individuals and those in temporary accommodation during the Covid pandemic and lockdowns in 2020 and 2021.
- Working in partnership with Devon County Council and the voluntary sector, supporting Ukrainian residents in NDC area living with hosts under the Homes For Ukraine scheme. Providing financial assistance and support.
- Working in partnership with Devon County Council, the Home Office and Ministry Of Defence in the re-settlement of residents from Afghan fleeing the war into short term and long term accommodation. Providing support via the voluntary services to settle and find employment in the area.
- Provided funding to community groups and organisations and charities through the Community Councillor Grant scheme to finance projects which benefit the local community including Braunton FC Ability Team, Living Options Devon, Sunrise Diversity, Community Resources (Devon) CIC, Pathfields School Activities Club, Age

Concern, Youth Clubs, Scout and brownie clubs, Wolf and Water Arts Company, and Adventure Therapy.

- Supported Go North Devon with shopmobility and ring and ride bus service. We are now supporting Mid Devon Mobility and Age Concern Barnstaple and North Devon with shopmobility and ring and ride bus service.
- Provision of equality training for staff and Councillors.
- Council Tax Reduction Scheme – Financial assistance for those in need of help towards the cost of Council Tax. This could be for students, those living alone, or those with a severe mental impairment.
- Assistance with applications to the 'Devon Home Choice' housing register.
- Redesign of council car parks to ensure they have good disabled access, along with accessible signage and payment machines.
- The installation of an element of inclusive play equipment when replacing equipment. Improvement of disabled access to public buildings where possible.
- Consideration of disabled facilities as part of development process for new projects.
- Make information accessible by considering the needs of potential and existing customers. We take steps to make all information as accessible and easy to read as possible, with the use of plain English and provision of alternative methods of communication when required. This includes large print letters, telephone calls, visits, translation and interpretation services and a range of contact methods on offer.
- When publishing content on the Council's website follow web-accessibility standards.
- Ensure accessibility of Council meetings and events by using venues that are accessible when possible and providing the opportunity for virtual attendance where possible.
- Provision of hearing loop systems at face to face Council customer service sites at Lynton House, the Ilfracombe Centre and the Amory Centre at South Molton.
- Provision of a Changing place facility at Ruda holiday park at Croyde, Green Lanes shopping centre and Arlington Court.
- Working in close partnership with Citizens Advice and customer-facing services which are open to the public at Lynton House.
- New Tarka Leisure Centre – provision of lifts, disabled changing room and toilets that meet "Changing Places" standards, changing places changing room with hoist allowing those with disabilities to change and access facilities, accessible changing room, pool pods to assist people with mobility issues using a special wheelchair to get in and out of the swimming pool which can be self operated, installation of "roman steps" to provide easier access in and out of the pool, gym equipment is designed to be used by customers with wheelchairs, signage has been designed so that its easier for people with visual impairments, sports hall basketball court with moveable and adjustable nets to support wheelchair basketball. There are mixed changing and shower areas. The mixed changing areas have individual cubicles and two group changing areas which are available for schools and clubs to book. All genders and sexes share the same spaces and facilities apart from toilets. The toilets are either classed as male or female. We don't specify whether male/female refers to gender or sex,

- Supporting and working with Northern Devon Voluntary Service to promote volunteering opportunities.
- We provide an annual grant to Northern Devon Foodbank for top-ups for gas and electric meters for the most vulnerable households.
- Ilfracombe Watersports Centre completed – design and layout meets current building regulation requirements and includes a passenger lift, ramps and disabled access toilets and changing facilities.
- Pannier Market – this is being delivered as part of the Future High Street Fund scheme and includes the reopening of the toilets, to include separate disabled facilities.
- Boutport Street – this is being delivered as part of the Future High Street Fund scheme – the design and layout is being designed to current building regulation standards.
- Museum Extension – Built to current building regulations facilities and includes a passenger lift and disabled facilities.
- Forches Avenue – Conversion to temporary accommodation – ground floor accommodation is a ‘wheel chair friendly flat’ to include rise and fall worktops, a wet room, low level basins etc.
- Adoption of a Cultural Strategy across Northern Devon, which seeks to include access to culture across our area.
- Supporting Young care leavers – the Council has recently adopted a scheme to support young care leavers up to the age of 25 years by providing a 100% discount on Council Tax from 1 October 2023.
- Keeping North Devon Connected Grants scheme – following the dissolution of Go North Devon, the Board of Go North Devon have requested to transfer excess funds to North Devon Council to provide a grant scheme with the aim of supporting old people or those with mobility issues or disability to keep people connected in North Devon. This scheme is for a 3 year period starting on 1 April 2024.
- Armed Forces Covenant – the Council has recently adopted an Armed Forces Covenant which is a promise that those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, should be treated fairly and should not face disadvantages when seeking to access public or private goods and services. The covenant demonstrates the Councils commitment to those who are serving or have served in the Armed Forces and how the Council will achieve this commitment.
- The Council has a cycle scheme provides racks for bikes and showers are provided at Brynsworthy Environment Centre for its employees. The Council has a cycle scheme which enables North Devon Council to buy a bike for an employee and then hire it back to them. They have the option to buy the bike at the end of the scheme. North Devon Council employees can also claim mileage for business journeys undertaken on their bikes within a 3 mile radius of their workplace.

8. Measuring our progress

We will inform the public and staff about our progress through:

- An annual equality report
- Our information and advice services
- Council website
- Media (including social media) for advertising and press releases
- Our community networks and through our partners
- Annual report on Gender Pay Gap for NDC employees and workforce data

9. How to contact us

To give us your views, get involved or for further information please contact equality@northdevon.gov.uk or 01271 388253

To find out about the councils engagement activities please contact us or visit www.northdevon.gov.uk/consultations

If you need this information in another language or format, please contact us to discuss how we can best meet your needs.