

Equality Policy 2024-2027



If you would like help to understand this document, or would like it in another format or language, please call the Equality Officer on 01432 260216 or e-mail diversity@herefordshire.gov.uk.

An easy-read version of this policy is available from our web page.

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1. Foreword

Herefordshire Council has both a moral and a statutory obligation to reflect the needs of our diverse population and workforce, and this is a requirement in everything we do, which includes:

- providing services
- purchasing and procuring services
- recruiting and retaining staff
- working in partnership with other organisations
- engaging with our communities

We recognise that all individuals should have equitable rights in relation to employment and services so that they can participate fully as citizens. However, we understand that an individual's identity, background and their life experiences can impact on their ability and willingness to participate. We believe that promoting equality is essential for the creation of a cohesive society and for a strong economy.

This policy is designed to demonstrate our compliance with the Equality Act 2010. Its purpose is to:

- detail our equality objectives
- evidence the work across various council services which currently addresses equality issues
- highlight areas where additional actions are proposed

We will continue to keep abreast of relevant research and global events, and will be mindful of our legal and moral duties to challenge disadvantage and discrimination wherever we have the power to do so.

Our challenge as a local authority is to work towards a society:

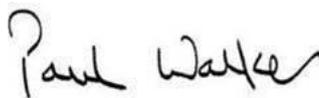
- where everyone is important, and is treated with respect, dignity and fairness
- which is fair and just, and empowers every person to secure the best possible standard of service from public authorities
- which supports people, communities and organisations to challenge the prejudices that can lead to unlawful discrimination
- which respects human rights
- which empowers individuals to take responsibility for their lives, and to live independently
- which rejects any form of extremism, discrimination, prejudice, harassment, victimisation or violence

We take our responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 seriously. We expect all staff and councillors to share in our zero tolerance commitment, and take personal responsibility and ownership for their actions and decisions.

An appendix with additional information accompanies this policy.



Clr Pete Stoddart
Cabinet Member Finance and
Corporate Services



Paul Walker
CEO Herefordshire Council

2. The legal requirement

The **Equality Act 2010** (the Act) protects people from unlawful discrimination in the provision of services and public functions, employment, premises, education and associations. Its broad purpose is to integrate consideration of equality and good relations into the day-to-day business of public authorities.

The Act brought into law the **public sector equality duty** which requires that, when exercising public functions, public service providers must have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it

The equality duty covers the nine **protected characteristics** (see Appendix 1):



The Act explains that 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 from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people
- encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low

The general duty is supported by **specific duties**, in which there are three sets of requirements for local authorities:

1. Publish gender pay gap information about their employees
2. Publish information to demonstrate their compliance with the general equality duty
3. Prepare and publish one or more equality objectives which will help the organisation to comply with the general equality duty

All information must be published in a way which makes it easy for people to access it.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission is responsible for assessing compliance with the equality duty. It has powers to issue a compliance notice to a public body that it believes has failed to comply, and can apply to the courts for an order requiring compliance.

We meet the Public Sector Equality Duty in the following ways:

- We provide mandatory equality training to all our staff members and councillors, raising awareness of their responsibilities under the Equality Act
- We publish an [annual analysis](#) of the protected characteristics of our workforce
- We publish our [gender pay gap](#) on our website and on the [government website](#)
- We consider the equality impact of any new services, amendments to services, new policies, etc, and provide this information to decision-makers
- We publish a 3-yearly Equality Policy (this document) which incorporates our equality objectives

The Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2)

Accessibility Regulations 2018 came into force in September 2018, and this will be superseded by WCAG 2.2 in October 2024. The regulations build on existing obligations for disabled people. They require public sector bodies to make all their websites, mobile apps, intranet and all documentation fully accessible and address the specific needs of users, both externally and internally, with impaired vision, motor difficulties, cognitive impairments or learning disabilities, and deafness or impaired hearing so they can be used easily by as many people as possible.

We are committed to making our content and design clear and simple enough so that most people can use it without needing to adapt it, while supporting those who do need to adapt things.

3. A look back at our last Equality Policy

In 2020 we set several Equality Objectives based around the following six focus areas:

1. Address social issues that impact on equality
2. Promote our values and acceptable standards of behaviour
3. Make fair and equitable decisions
4. Recruit fairly and support our workforce
5. Make our services accessible
6. Provide tailored support

A review of the progress we have made can be found at Appendix 2.

4. Changes and challenges

1. The 2021 Census provided us with some more detailed information about the make-up and protected characteristics of Herefordshire's population. Comparison figures with the 2011 Census can be found at Appendix 3.
2. In December 2021, Herefordshire started to accommodate families from Afghanistan through the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy.
3. In March 2022, Herefordshire started to accommodate Ukrainians who were forced to flee their country due to war.
4. Hate crime monitored by the police across the whole of England and Wales rose 26% from 2020/21 to 2021/22¹. Detailed statistics for Herefordshire can be found at Appendix 4.
5. Like many other councils across the country, Herefordshire Council is facing significant financial challenges, mainly due to rising costs and the increased demand for both adult and children's social care services.

¹ Source: [Home Office](#)

5. Our equality objectives

The specific duty of the Equality Act 2010 requires public service providers to publish at least one equality objective to demonstrate how it will meet the general equality duty. Our new objectives for the period 2024-2027 are:

1) To incorporate equality considerations into our service planning template

We will adopt a new “service planning” template. Service planning templates are currently completed annually by all service managers. However the new template form will require managers to record the consideration they have given to equality and inclusion, and encourage them to include new actions to address the General Equality Duty. This action will help to mainstream equality-based improvements across the authority, and improve ownership of equality within each service area.

The new template will be in place for the 2024/25 financial year. Responsibility will sit with the “Strategy & Transformation” team, and the completed forms will be reviewed to ensure that sufficient consideration is given to equality issues.

2) To improve the equality information available on our website relating to council decisions

We have a duty to consider equality when we make decisions within the authority. These decisions could be about any aspect of the council’s work, such as changes to services or processes, agreeing a budget, or refurbishing a public building. We also have a duty to make this information easily accessible to our service users.

Our website currently does not allow readers to easily find equality information about decisions. So we will improve the navigation on these web pages, and ensure that equality information is consistently available.

Work on this objective will commence in 2024, but is likely to go on until 2025. Responsibility will be shared between the ICT & Digital team, Equality, and Democratic Services.

Addendum

At the time of writing this document, local authorities are aware that they may be asked by central government to do some additional work relating to equality. Limited information is available as to what this may entail. However it is likely that local authorities will be required to produce productivity plans² in 2024 setting out how they will improve service performance and reduce wasteful expenditure to ensure the best use of taxpayers’ money. We will ensure that we comply with any and all requests from government.

² [Gove orders councils to produce 'productivity plans' as extra funding unveiled | Local Government Chronicle \(LGC\) \(lgcplus.com\)](https://www.lgcplus.com/news/gove-orders-councils-to-produce-productivity-plans-as-extra-funding-unveiled)

6. Our commitment to equality and inclusion

In addition to our Equality Objectives, Herefordshire Council makes the following commitments:

Social issues that impact on equality

We will:

- Address sexual violence, and violence against women and girls, through the [Herefordshire Sexual Violence Strategy \(2023-2028\)](#) by prioritising prevention, supporting victims and survivors, and pursuing perpetrators
- Tackle domestic abuse through [Herefordshire's Strategy for Addressing Domestic Abuse \(2021-2024\)](#) by focusing on prevention, provision, partnerships, and perpetrators
- Address community cohesion and hate crime through the [Community Safety Strategy \(2021-2024\)](#)
- Tackle child sexual and criminal exploitation through work led by the [Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership](#)
- Tackle health inequalities through the [Herefordshire Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2023 - 2033](#)
- Ensure that people feel safe and respected in their communities through the Herefordshire Council Plan 2024-2028
- Ensure that we use our powers, influence and responsibilities to prevent and act against modern slavery, as set out in our [Modern Slavery Statement](#)
- Provide a fair, transparent and accountable method of allocating caravan pitches on Herefordshire Council-owned Gypsy & Traveller sites through [the Gypsy and Traveller Site Allocation and Management Policy](#)
- Assess and deliver housing needs for vulnerable adults through the [Local Housing Strategy \(2021-2026\)](#)
- Safeguard people and communities from the threat of terrorism and radicalisation through our "Prevent" steering group
- Fulfil our legal obligation to support people who have served, or are serving, in the armed forces, and their families, through the [Armed Forces Covenant](#)
- Support schools to prevent and address incidents of child-on-child abuse and sexual abuse by providing [resources and signposting](#)
- Continue our efforts to increase representation of minority groups in our elected representatives, and monitor the protected characteristics of candidates and elected councillors (diversity monitoring results for councillors elected in 2023 can be found at Appendix 5)
- Continue to aid the educational attainment and welfare of "English as an additional language" (EAL) learners in Herefordshire schools through the [English as an additional language team](#)
- Continue to work in collaboration with a range of partners to make homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring, through our [Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-25](#)

Disability

We will:

- Continue to support people with learning disabilities to have choice and control and live healthy lives, through the [Learning Disability Strategy 2018 to 2028](#) and the [Learning Disability Partnership Board](#)

- Continue to improve services for people, families and carers living with autism through the [Herefordshire Autism Partnership](#) and the delivery of the new Joint All Ages Autism Strategy 2024-2029

Inclusive workforce culture

We will:

- Strive to achieve a truly inclusive workplace that embraces, celebrates and values the diverse backgrounds, perspectives, experiences and talents of our employees, through the council's 2024-2028 Workforce Strategy
- Promote a positive and inclusive culture and working environment with values, behaviours, policies and practices that enable our people to thrive
- Review and develop robust employment policies and practices that confirm the council as an employer of choice that attracts, promotes and retains diverse talent

Accessibility of buildings and built environment

We will:

- Aim for the highest level of accessibility in all our proposals, and work with user groups as appropriate, to ensure that the design improves access for all

Accessibility of services

We will:

- Continue to make our services accessible to non-English speaking residents of Herefordshire, and users of British Sign Language, by maintaining the efficacy of the [Herefordshire Language Network](#) through a continual programme of review and training
- Ensure that all Herefordshire Council-owned websites, intranet, documentation and apps comply with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2 by adhering to the four principles of accessibility: [perceivable](#), [operable](#), [understandable](#), [robust](#)
- Continue to ensure that alternative methods of engagement, communication and service delivery are available for people who do not use the internet, through our Customer Service Strategy
- Continue our "Co-production for Community Wellbeing" approach, and will develop an "experts by experience" group, using a [MEAM Approach](#) to identify and address gaps in our current systems to improve the way they operate and prevent people from falling through them