Essex County Council’s Equalities Strategy 2015-18

April 2015
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We are proud to have been rated as excellent under the Equality Framework for Local Government in 2012, a national benchmark coordinated by the Local Government Association. This is based on five performance areas for which we were judged as being excellent: knowing our communities; leadership, partnerships and organisational commitment; involving our communities; responsive services and customer care and a skilled and committed workforce.

We are now pleased to share the County Council’s revised Equalities Strategy which sets out our ambition and commitment to advancing equality across Essex over the next three years. The Strategy outlines what we will do to make Essex a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together providing a foundation for strong and cohesive communities.

Essex County Council is fully committed to tackling the root causes of inequality rather than reacting to the symptoms associated with it. This is why we will ensure that we actively promote equality of opportunity through our commissioning, policy development and employment practices.

Our aim is to secure the best outcomes for the residents of Essex according to their individual needs. To do this we fully recognise that we need a modern and diverse workforce that allows us to employ the best people. We are also clear that we want a workforce that reflects the communities of Essex we serve.

The Strategy makes it very clear that we must target our finite resources to those people and places most disadvantaged, whilst ensuring that we work towards removing barriers to opportunities and to narrow the inequalities gap between those most in need.

Examples of the continuous improvement we have made to embed the principles of equality and fairness flow through the examples in this Strategy. However, we cannot become complacent in tackling inequalities within our communities.

We would like to thank Essex residents, partners, members and County Council staff for sharing their views, ideas and experiences in shaping this strategy. We have now used what you have told us to shape our equality objectives and priorities over the next three years.
Section 1

Introduction

1.1 Purpose of this Strategy

The purpose of Essex County Council’s Equalities Strategy is to set out our vision, approach, key activities and monitoring arrangements in relation to tackling inequalities in Essex. It outlines how we will advance equality of opportunity, tackle discrimination and foster good relations between different communities and groups. It also describes what we will do to advance equality within our workforce.

The Strategy has been informed by research and data, as well as evidence gathered from public engagement and focus group activities. It also outlines how we arrived at our equality objectives.

Details of the high-level activities that we will be undertaking to tackle the issues that are most relevant to the nine protected characteristics are provided in the appendix. The appendix is subject to an annual review and is a living document.

The Strategy should be serving as a guide for the Council in directing its general strategic activities around:

- commissioning
- policy and strategy development
- business transformation
- service delivery
- planning and budget allocation
- recruitment and training of staff
- democratic engagement.

1.2 Who is this strategy aimed at?

This Strategy is for our residents and partners so that we can demonstrate what we will do over the next three years to make the county a fairer place for everyone. It is also for our employees to demonstrate the value we place in them.

1.3 Equality, diversity & resilient communities

At Essex County Council we are clear about the links between equality, diversity and resilient communities. We know that as the demography of Essex changes, so will our need to ensure that we create the conditions for a fairer Essex, one where individuals have the same chances to fulfil their potential. This also means individuals being able to fully participate in the economic and social life of the communities in which they live. We want communities across Essex to get along well together, recognising each other's differences, whilst treating each other with respect and dignity. This is what will support communities to be resilient.

1.4 Our vision for equalities

To ensure that fairness is part of everything we do.

Our Equalities Strategy complements the Vision for Essex 2013-17 (where innovation brings prosperity). We know that our county faces unprecedented financial challenges, yet we are determined to sustain the most vital services and protect those groups and communities
that are most vulnerable. The challenges ahead strengthen our resolve to:

- increase educational achievement and enhance skills
- develop and maintain the infrastructure that enables our residents to travel and our businesses to grow
- support employment and entrepreneurship across Essex
- safeguard vulnerable people of all ages
- keep our communities safe and build community resilience
- respect Essex’s environment.

Creating a fairer Essex is at the heart of this vision.

We want to ensure that we engage with our residents and communities, recognising the changing demography of Essex and its impact. This will help target those most in need.

Tackling inequalities in Essex sometimes means empowering communities to help themselves. Individuals, families and communities have a vital role to play in taking responsibility for what happens in their area.

1.5 Responsive services and customer care

Having achieved the ‘Excellent’ level of the Equality Framework for Local Government in 2012, we have embarked on continuously improving and embedding excellent equalities policy and practice. This has helped improve outcomes in some areas for those most in need, whilst working towards improving outcomes for many others, something which is much more long term and requiring longer term investment.

1.6 Examples of our achievements

- In 2014, we celebrated recruiting our 3,000th apprentice since the launch of the Essex Apprentice programme five years ago. This has helped young people and adult learners earn and gain a qualification at the same time.
- We continue to support the Young Essex Assembly (YEA), the youth council for Essex. The YEA is made up of 75 young people from Essex aged between 11 and 19 from diverse backgrounds who have been elected to represent young people in the county and campaign to make a positive difference to their lives. As part of the YEA, members are listened to by the County Council and by other groups working with or for young people.
- We continue to engage regularly with a number of longstanding community groups. These groups allow us to co-produce, providing valuable insight and knowledge on issues such as disability, equality and issues which affect older people. The groups represent the views of residents and service users across Essex.
- Since 2013 we have held over 100 citizenship ceremonies in our Council Chamber to welcome people from across the world that have been accepted for naturalisation or registration as a British citizen.
- We continue to provide support and value carers across Essex. This has resulted in signposting carers to information and advice or Carers Direct Payments (CDP). In 2013/14 10,208 carers were assessed for CDP by Essex County Council. Of these 28% received a Carer's Direct Payment.
In 2012 we installed the UK’s first ‘sensory wall’ in the main County Library in Chelmsford, in conjunction with Inclusive Communication Essex (ICE). This was as a result of feedback from parents and carers and parents of children with disabilities. Research shows sensory and interactive experiences can help build a child’s development and learning and prepare for school readiness. Since 2012 over 400 public sessions have been booked to use the facility.

Inclusive Communication Essex continues to support the needs of people with a learning disability by loaning communication equipment from any Essex library. Loans average 118 per month. These can range from simple switches and buttons to more high tech items like the Megabee which enables a person to communicate using no more than blinking/eye gaze.

Award winning and accessible changing facilities were opened in Clacton and Walton for children with disabilities. During the first summer season in 2014 over 100 requests to use the facilities were made.

In 2013, Essex County Council and its partners were highly commended in the Public Sector Partnership Award by the Local Government Chronicle for the Essex Countywide Traveller Unit and the work it undertakes with gypsies, travellers and the settled communities.

Over the past two years we have continued to support gypsy and traveller adult learners into further education and apprenticeships across Essex.

Our elected members have been actively involved in developing and piloting a ‘bite-size’ briefing session aimed at raising member understanding of the inequalities in their localities. Feedback highlighted that the session was informative and challenging. Further sessions will be rolled out in 2015-2016.

Last year we reviewed each of the 12 district, borough and city area profiles across Essex. These profiles painted a broad picture around the lifestyles, health, education, housing and broader inequalities in a given place. These profiles support our commissioning intensions and direct further, more detailed analysis in certain areas.

The Black and Minority Ethnic Employees’ Network, Christian Fellowship, Disabled Employees’ Network Group, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Employee Network Group continue to advance equality by supporting their members and Essex County Council.

Your Voice 2014, our employee survey, showed that perceptions amongst our employees that Essex County Council is an equal opportunity employer have increased from 83.7% to 84.6%. The survey also showed showed a 3% reduction in perception of bullying (from 11% to 8%) compared with previous years, exceeding the target and 5 points above the Local Government benchmark; and perceptions of bullying by disabled employees fell below 20%, meeting our original target.

Since 2013 we have worked with over 200 school governors to raise their awareness and outlined their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010.

In 2014 we established a new Joint Domestic Abuse Triage Team to improve how we share information and improve our risk assessment processes for those that suffer domestic abuse.

Our Equality & Diversity e-learning module was launched in 2012. Since then 91% of our staff have successfully completed it. This has resulted in staff understanding their

• Since 2013 we have continued to approve more same-sex couples for adoption. This is a result of our targeted campaign programmes.

• We have implemented a new Equality Impact Assessment toolkit for our employees setting out the business benefits of considering the equality implications of our decision-making on those protected under the Equality Act.

• Over the past three years we have continued to ensure that bi-lingual children in preschools and child-minders have access to visual and audio materials that promote their learning in their home language and English. Research shows that adopting this approach helps the child’s development and school readiness.

• In early 2015 we produced brief guidance on supporting transgender pupils in schools following a number of requests to Essex Legal Services from schools. The guidance provides information and resource links to help school staff deal with a range of questions that may arise in schools and other settings in relation to gender identity.

• As the corporate parent for children in care we have pledged to ensure that children in care and care leavers receive the very best chances possible to go on and lead fulfilled and successful adult lives through the Essex Corporate Parenting Pledge. The ‘It’s My Life-Essex Children in Care Council’ continues to provide opportunities for children and young people in care and care leavers to voice their opinions and concerns about the social care services they receive. The outcomes from this group ensure regular dialogue and engagement between children in care, care leavers and the Corporate Parenting Panel and our Family Operations Directors.

• Our Maternal Early Childhood Home Visiting Service is delivered across Essex. The service improves transition to parenting by supporting mothers through pregnancy and helping mothers care for themselves. The service also promotes parental aspiration for themselves and their child.

1.7 Knowing our communities and equality mapping

As one of the largest counties in the UK, the population of Essex is close to 1.74 million with Chelmsford and Colchester being the largest conurbations. It is socially, culturally and economically diverse, benefiting from close links to London.

As the county’s demographic profile changes, with it come wide differences between the health and wellbeing of different groups of people and between different parts of Essex. For example, we know that Essex residents in the most deprived parts of the county tend to have lower life expectancy due to poorer health. The life expectancy of females living in the most deprived areas of Essex is 80.4 years, compared to 85.5 years in the least deprived. The life expectancy of males is even wider in the most deprived areas (most deprived: 75 years, least deprived: 82.9 years).

We know that gypsies and travellers continue to have the lowest life expectancy of any ethnic group in UK. This trend also applies in Essex.

Based on the 2011 Census there are variations of the age profile of Essex residents. Within specific districts of Essex these differences are clear. Understanding the age profile of our population is vital in order to ensure we commission the right service according to people’s needs.
In Tendring over one-in-four people (27.0%) are aged 65 or over. This is expected to increase to 37% in 2037. This compares to under one-in-five (18.3%) for Essex as a whole. The lowest area is Harlow District where under one-in-seven (15.0%) are aged 65 or over.

Across Essex, the older population (65+) is expected to grow from 28% by 2033, with a 5% reduction in the working age group. This will require us and our partners to think radically about how we support and care for an aging population. Analysis shows that there is also an association between physical disabilities and age. It is estimated that of the people in Essex with a physical disability, 60% are aged 65+. With the number of people of a retirement age set to rise substantially in the coming years, so will the number of people with physical disabilities.

We know that there is a correlation between dementia and ageing, with dementia projected to increase by 38% by 2021. This will have a significant impact on public services across Essex.

By contrast, Essex has just over 328,000 children and young people aged 0-19 representing 23% of the total population. The district of Harlow also has the largest proportion of children under 16 years (21%).

There are around 207,000 school aged children in Essex. This equates to 14.7% of the population of Essex. Of these, around just over 20,000 (9.6%) are from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds. This compares with 5.7% BME population in Essex.

We have seen a rapid shift in the diversity make-up of the school population. There are now over 170 different languages spoken in schools in Essex.

We are aware of the differences in Essex in educational achievement at GCSE level linked to ethnicity. For example, we know that Indian, Chinese, Bangladeshi and Mixed White Asian pupils do well across Essex. However, there remains a challenge for schools and their partners to improve overall progress for White British pupils, Irish Travellers, Gypsy Roma, Mixed Black Caribbean, Black Caribbean pupils.

Tendring has the largest proportion of young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETs) (8.6%) and Uttlesford the lowest (2.9%). This compares to 4.9% across Essex and 5.3% across England.

We know that Children who are NEET have lower future earning potential and this is a proxy indictor of further deprivation. This has potential implications for child poverty and other poor outcomes. Overall, there are more males than females that form the total number of NEETs in Essex. Areas with low educational attainment tend to have more young people who are NEET as well as higher levels of teenage pregnancies.

Although Essex is a relatively healthy place to live and grow up with lower levels of children living in poverty than the national average (15.4% in Essex compared to 18.6% nationally), there are pockets of deprivation across the county. Although fewer children live in poverty in Essex, there are still in excess of 46,000 children living in poverty in our county.

Our definition of child poverty is based on the Government National Child Poverty Strategy 2014-2017, which is a child living in a family with an income below 60% of the median national income. The median national income is £21,905.
In Essex, progress in reducing poverty since 2009 has been made in all districts, boroughs and the city with the highest levels currently found in Harlow (19.7%), Basildon (21.5%) and Tendring (23.6%). In some wards in Tendring the figure is close to 50%. We know that there are a number of wider determinants associated with poverty across Essex, including low paid work or even worklessness. Whilst these are sometimes the root causes, this complex issue has longer term consequences such as a cycle of debt, poor health and isolation.

Predicted demographic change, reduced mortality rates, increased survival rates and improved health care will lead to an increase in the number of people with learning disabilities. As of 2014 there are estimated to be 32,724 adults 18+ living with a learning disability in Essex. Areas with the highest number of people with a learning disability are Colchester, Southend and Basildon.

Over a quarter of people in Tendring (25.7%) have a long-term limiting illness or disability. This compares to 3.8% for Essex and 4.4% for England. There are estimated to be 32,724 adults living with a learning disability in Essex (including Southend and Thurrock). Colchester is estimated to have the largest number of adults with learning disabilities and Malden the smallest.

We know that informal care and support is provided to a range of people across Essex by carers, including those with short and long term disabilities, older people and those with mental health issues to name but a few. In Essex an estimated 145,000 people provide unpaid care. Many carers are vulnerable to stress and breakdown. We know that there are around 32,000 unpaid carers providing care of more than 50 hours per week.

Caring is not just something that is done by adults. An estimated 10,000 carers across Essex are aged between 11 and 18, combining the role of supporting and caring for someone as part of their childhood. Around 40% of this group will be caring for someone with complex needs – often drugs and alcohol related. Supporting young carers is crucial if they are to get the best start in life and have opportunities for the future.

Although we have supported carers in Essex for many years, the Care Act 2014 now places carers on an equal footing, giving carers the same rights as those for whom they care. Additionally, the Children and Families Act 2014 makes sure that young carers, and parent carers, get the support they need.

It is estimated that across Essex that around 150,000 residents will be living with a mental health illness, with almost 50% of them having developed this condition in their early teens. Although our understanding is limited locally, we know that nationally lesbian, gay and bisexual people are at higher risk of depression and anxiety disorders with lifetime prevalence of suicide attempts higher in gay and bisexual men than the general population.
Our approach to tackling inequalities

Our approach to tackling inequalities is to ensure that our resources are targeted to those most in need, focusing on tackling those inequalities that will have the most lasting impact.

Our focus is on what works best for those that are most vulnerable and hard to reach, rather than who delivers the services to them. As a local authority our approach to equalities is underpinned by a moral imperative and a legal duty on behalf of the citizens of Essex, our service users and also our staff.

2.1 Our legal obligations – Equality Act 2010

Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 (Public Sector Equality Duty) places a general duty on the Council and others carrying out public functions to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- advance equality of opportunity between different groups
- foster good relation between different groups.

The general duty is supported by a number of specific duties.

The Equality Act reminds us that there can be no fair society if some groups and communities remain disadvantaged because of their legally protected characteristics:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race/ethnicity
- religion and belief
- sex
- sexual orientation.

The Equality Duty requires us to take a pro-active approach to embedding equality into everything we do. We have a responsibility to ensure that as a commissioner of services our suppliers take the same positive approach to equality as we do.

The Equality Duty encourages us to understand how different people will be affected by our decisions.
2.2 Community engagement and satisfaction

We continually want to improve the relationship we have with groups and communities across Essex so that they can help shape the places where they live. We want to ensure that services are designed to take into account customer needs.

This can only be achieved through effective and meaningful engagement where people feel listened to on a range of issues that affect them. As part of our regular engagement with customers to assess satisfaction with the Council, 75.8% surveyed in April 2014 stated that Essex County Council treats people fairly. This compares to 70.1% in January 2013. This demonstrates our commitment to continuously ensure services are delivered in a fair way.

We formally bring together our service user voice through a number of longstanding service user groups which are made up of Essex residents and partner organisations. These groups support people with specific requirements, often charitable organisations contributing their own everyday lived experiences, influencing the Council’s decision-making process.

The groups are supported by our Community Involvement and Engagement Team. We know that we have more to do and we are keen to ensure that our service user voice reflects the communities we serve across Essex. The groups include:

- Deafblind
- Deaf Essex Access Forum
- Hard of Hearing
- Older People
- Options for Independent Living
- Physical Impairment
- Vision Impaired
- Young Essex Assembly

2.3 Our engagement findings and equality objectives

In early 2015, we undertook an engagement exercise to seek the views of service users, the wider Essex public, our partners and our staff to ensure that our equality objectives were the right ones. Overall, those that engaged with us agreed that they were. To meet the requirements of the Equality Act 2010, and in particular the Public Sector Equality Duty, we have now adopted and published 7 equality objectives. These underpin the delivery of this Strategy over the next three years.

The Council’s Corporate Governance Steering Board approved these objectives and the high-level activities that form part of this strategy.

Based on our engagement, our equality objectives state that:

- We will take into account the equality impacts of our emerging proposals and seek to mitigate any adverse impacts where possible
- we will ensure that equality is at the heart of our thinking as we strive to deliver the seven outcomes for the residents of Essex, and it is reflected in our commissioning strategies
- we will consult and engage with our communities on matters of service delivery, training
and education and take into account the diverse needs of our residents and businesses

• we will identify, and where possible address the root causes of disadvantage and
discrimination
• we will embed equalities in all we do and make it part of our business as usual practice
• we will recruit and retain a diverse workforce that reflects the communities we serve and
we will ensure our people feel valued and respected.
• we will foster good relations between different groups and communities.

Our service users, partners and staff told us that in order to ensure Essex residents are
treated fairly we need to:

• ensure we listen to the people’s experiences of accessing public services,
• provide information that is accessible, particularly for those most in need who need to
access services
• ensure that equality impact assessments are a genuine and relevant tool that includes
the views of people that could be affected by our decision making processes.

To help people from different cultures and communities to understand each other better we
were told that Essex County Council needed to:

• support communities come together in order to help them to integrate in order to break
down barriers.

We were also told that there are specific groups that could face disadvantage.

The groups are:

• Disabled people
• Black and minority ethnic groups
• Children (particularly those living in poverty)
• Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgender (LGBT) people
• Older people
• Young people leaving school without qualifications

We were also told that some places were disadvantaged, for example:

• Some coastal towns
• Rural areas
• Some urban conurbations

Based on the experiences of those we engaged with, the following are examples of where
people thought we should consider focusing our resources on tackling inequalities across
Essex.
We should focus on:

- Ensuring that public transport is accessible
- Education, training and employment for those most in need
- Health services
- Ensuring that services are accessible for those in rural areas
- People with disabilities & accessing employment
- Older people
- Families experiencing problems
- Support for LGBT young people
- Support for carers
- People on low incomes
- Gypsies and travellers.

2.4 Links to other strategies

The Equalities Strategy complements a range of related strategies. For example, amongst others it supports the Health & Wellbeing (H&WB) Strategy 2013-2018. The H&WB strategy sets out how partners will work together to improve the overall health and wellbeing for the communities of Essex over the next five years and in turn help to reduce health inequalities across the county.

This Strategy also supports the work the Council is doing to support Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs & Disability (SEND). The SEND Strategy 2014-2019 sets out to ensure that children and young people with SEND have the full range of support and opportunities available to them and are provided with opportunities to maximise their life chances, goals and aspirations.

Embedding equality is also central to the Council as we implement the requirements of the Care Act. For example, there is now a need for us to actively promote wellbeing whether or not a person is eligible for support.

In terms of prevention, we will have to commission services that help to prevent or delay the development of care and support needs. Many of these things we are already doing. There are new rights to support carers - carers are usually family or friends who provide unpaid care or support to loved ones. In terms of information and advice, we will be required to provide information and advice to all residents in Essex, regardless of whether they have eligible care needs.

The Equalities Strategy also compliments the Council’s Child Poverty Strategy 2015-2020. The focus of this strategy is to ensure that targeted interventions are prioritised as part of a holistic approach to tackling inequalities that often have a disproportionate affect on children and young people.

Tackling inequalities across Essex also means improving the average skill base across the county. This will improve the overall employability of people across Essex. The Equalities Strategy has synergies with the Essex Economic Growth Strategy 2012.

Skills is a high priority for Essex County Council and building on the outstanding success of
our Apprenticeship Scheme we are working further with employers and colleges to ensure we deliver the right qualifications for young people to increase their employment chances.

2.5 **Leadership and organisational commitment**

Figure 1 below shows Essex County Council’s equalities governance.

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2.6 **Our approach to partnership working**

Our external partnership working with the voluntary and community sector is based on the principles of co-production, working with the sector to enable engagement from a wide range of groups, valuing their input and differences of opinion. Partnership working is a key element in advancing equalities across Essex.

We have a strong track record of partnership working with organisations and groups that support and campaign on equality for their members and service users. For example, our key equality partners include, Age UK Essex, Essex Coalition for Disabled People, Essex Police...
and Essex Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Alliance. We also work very closely with the Essex Association of CVS and the Voluntary and Community Sector Alliance.

2.7 Equalities and our corporate outcomes

Embedding the principles of equalities into our strategic priorities is part of our overall ethos. For example, Our Vision for Essex 2013-17 is supported by a range of commissioning strategies for the period 2014-2018. The commissioning strategies have been developed to ensure that we help improve the lives of those most in need by focusing on a range of activities.

This Framework sets out the seven high level outcomes that we want to achieve, to ensure prosperity and well-being for our residents.

The strategies help us to pay due regard to equality by helping us to understand how best we can, with our partners, remove and minimise disadvantages faced by the most vulnerable.

The outcomes listed below are supported by a series of outcome indicators against which we will measure our progress.

- Children in Essex get the best start in life
- People in Essex enjoy good health and wellbeing
- People have aspirations and achieve their ambitions through education, training and life-long learning
- People in Essex live in safe communities and are protected from harm
- Sustainable economic growth for Essex communities and businesses
- People in Essex experience a high quality and sustainable environment
- People in Essex can live independently and exercise control over their lives.

We therefore want to pursue an outcomes based approach to securing equalities, rather than a process driven one.

In 2014 the Council undertook a consultation exercise to determine whether the commissioning strategies and the activities to ensure the outcomes are met were the right ones. The consultation was extensive, involving Essex residents, community groups, Essex County Council staff and partners. Over 500 online responses were received to help develop the final strategies.

The strategies have been developed based on analysis of historic trends and future forecasts of the key issues affecting residents, families and businesses across Essex. They set out what issues need to be addressed and the strategic actions that set out what we propose to do, with partners, to secure progress. The outcomes describe what we want to achieve for Essex as a whole.

As part of the development of the commissioning strategies, detailed equality impact assessments were undertaken to ensure that the outcomes contained within the strategies focused on addressing customer needs and removing disadvantages suffered by people because of their protected characteristics.
Foundations for equality

All of our service areas within the Council have a role in embedding excellent equalities practice. The following section describes some of the key cross-cutting organisational disciplines that are the foundations of excellent equalities practice.

3.1 Equality Impact Assessments

Public bodies such as Essex County Council must have ‘due regard’ to the Equality Duty in setting and implementing policy, which means we must consciously consider the needs of groups protected under the Equality Act 2010. Paying ‘due regard’ to the need to advance equality means we must:

• remove and minimise disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristic
• take steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people.

Having due regard to the need to foster good relations also requires us to:

• tackle prejudice
• promote understanding between and within communities.

At Essex County Council we understand the importance of considering the needs of groups or communities that are likely to be affected by our decision-making. We do this by undertaking Equality Impact Assessments (EqIA) as part of continuous improvement on new and/or revised policies. This informs and underpins good decision-making.

EqIAs help us to:

Engage and create opportunities for dialogue with groups and communities whilst assessing any potential impacts before decisions are made. This is so that we can ensure services are targeted in the right way.

Plan how negative impacts can be reduced, making sure that our decision making is justified and transparent.

Improve the delivery of services to our communities.

We publish all our EqIAs [here](#).

3.2 Workforce diversity data

The Specific Duties of the Equality Act require us to publish our workforce diversity data. We do this annually. The data collected is analysed to check whether any particular group protected under the Equality Act is being disadvantaged by our employment policies.

To deliver our corporate outcomes and to strive to embed equalities into everything we do we are committed to creating a positive working environment where employees from all backgrounds can fulfil their potential, giving excellent service to the residents of Essex.

As one of the largest employers in Essex, we want to remove barriers people can experience in employment – we understand that creating equality of opportunity is about individuals
and is not the same as treating everyone identically. For example, we make adjustments for disabled job applicants and employees wherever reasonable to do so. We take action against all forms of bullying, harassment or victimisation, respecting those we work with and ensuring that our employees are treated with respect.

We regularly review all employment policies and practices, including pay, our offices, information protocols and technology, to remove inequality. We work closely with the employee diversity network panels, employee forums and trade unions to listen to and engage with our employees. As part of this we monitor diversity throughout recruitment and employment and publish this information on our website.

All of our managers, employees, members and those working or volunteering on behalf of the County Council are expected to follow these principles, as part of our Code of Conduct.

This robust approach to strengthening equality into the Council’s day to day employment practices is set out within our equality and diversity employment policy. This provides our people managers and employees a suite of further information, resources and toolkits to ensure our staff are treated with dignity and respect.

Click here for our detailed workforce equality information for 2013-2014.

3.3 Learning and development

Equipping our employees and members with the right skills and knowledge to understand the business benefits of equality and diversity is vital if we want to deliver person-centred public services.

Essex County Council is committed to effectively managing and developing its people in ways which will enable them as individuals and the organisation as a whole to be successful.

As part of our corporate governance offer, all employees are required to complete the Equalities e-learning module. 91% of all employees have so far completed the module.

A range of additional e-learning modules related to equality and diversity are also available within the Council for our employees to access. These modules include: An Introduction to Reasonable Adjustments, Respecting Others, Equality in Recruitment and Equality Monitoring.

Our Member Development Steering Group is also committed to understanding the needs of their communities and the changing demographics from an inequalities perspective. A number of information events for members are planned in 2015-16 to support their community leadership role around tackling disadvantage in their respective areas.
3.4 **Equality and our commercial strategy**

If we are to deliver our Vision for Essex 2013-2018 we will need to ensure that we continue to be commissioning led and outcomes focused. Our commercial strategy 2014-2017 aims to develop the Council's procurement capability. This includes what we buy, who we work with and what services we provide.

As a council we want to ensure that when procuring services we are meeting the needs of different service users. Our commercial strategy sets out the importance of paying due regard to equality so that we can ensure that equality outcomes and practical improvements can be made in a relevant and proportionate way for people who may suffer disadvantage. Our commercial strategy makes it clear that:

- Equality impact assessments are key in determining activities prior to and during any contractual agreements. This will help us ensure that we are meeting the needs of people from different backgrounds.
- Increasing supplier diversity should be a consideration as part of the procurement cycle to help widen the pool of bidders. This is something we are keen to strengthen if we are to build on the relationship we have with the community and voluntary sector.

Our principles for embedding effective equality considerations into the procurement cycle will ensure that:

- We work and do business with suppliers who meet their obligations under the Equality Act 2010.
Conclusion and monitoring

This Equalities Strategy reinforces our commitment and responsibility to our communities and workforce. We recognise the need to continuously improve and build on our past achievements. The Equality Act 2010 makes it clear that taking into account the needs of our communities is key to removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by those most in need. This is something we are passionate about.

A key element of delivering against this strategy will be to ensure the effective monitoring of our equalities performance. The associated activities outlined in the next section will support the delivery of our equality objectives. The activities will be reviewed on a quarterly basis to ensure that excellent equalities practice is being embedded both within the Council and across Essex by working with our partners. This will also help inform service planning, identify gaps and agree future activities.

A key driver of ensuring that our equalities performance is managed effectively will be to ensure that linkages are consistently and regularly made across our commissioning strategies and outcome indicators.

Equalities performance will be managed and monitored by the Council’s Diversity Champions Group, with oversight being provided by our Corporate Governance Steering Group on areas of corporate governance including equalities.
Appendix 1

Equality objective 1

We will take into account the equality impacts of our emerging proposals and seek to mitigate any adverse impacts where possible.

We will:

• strengthen our approach to undertaking equality impact assessments by launching a simplified and accessible online tool
• provide bite-size briefings and an e-learning module for employees, creating a culture whereby EqIAs are ‘business as usual’
• ensure that EqIAs are undertaken for all our political and senior officer decisions to create a culture of openness and public transparency
• improve the consistency and quality of equality impact assessments to influence and affect decision-making
• share our equality impact assessments approach with our voluntary, community and statutory sector partners
• ensure that the Corporate Governance Steering Group have effective oversight of equality impact assessments throughout the organisation
• publish our equality impact assessment for the public and partners to view
• develop an e-learning tool for our employees setting out the importance of engaging and consulting with communities when changes will impact on them.

Equality objective 2

We will ensure that equality is at the heart of our thinking as we strive to deliver the seven outcomes for the residents of Essex, and it is reflected in our commissioning strategies.

We will:

• explore how best to reach out to those under-represented groups across Essex where we need to get better engagement
• use the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment report into inequalities and disadvantage in Essex to strengthen and target our commissioning arrangements.
Equality objective 3

We will consult and engage with our communities on matters of service delivery, training and education and take into account the diverse needs of our residents and businesses.

We will:

• work smarter with our existing planning groups to ensure they can support us deliver our seven outcomes
• explore the opportunities to strengthen inter-faith dialogue across Essex to help us meet our outcomes
• engage and consult with parents, carers, teachers and pupils on how to ensure that access to learning for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities are best met.

Equality objective 4

We will identify, and where possible address the root causes of disadvantage and discrimination.

We will:

• ensure that health inequalities that are further compounded by a group’s protected characteristic are highlighted so we can commission services to meet their needs
• work to reduce child poverty by identifying vulnerable families wherever they are in Essex through intelligent use of data and effective, collaborative partnership working
• build individual, family and community resilience to nurture lasting success for families by addressing day to day challenges and forming stable foundations
• aim to reduce worklessness and low income through improving access to training skills and meaningful regular and well paid employment
• use our organisational intelligence capability to interrogate data and research inequalities across Essex linked to the protected characteristics. This will help us commission the right services based on need.
Equality objective 5

We will embed equalities in all we do and make it part of our business as usual practice.

We will:

- include ‘bite-size’ briefing sessions on inequalities for all our members as part of their community leadership role in the annual Member Development Programme
- publish all equality impact assessments as part of our decision-making process
- make sure that we use a range of appropriate and accessible methods of communication to ensure people with different needs get information about our services
- maintain our multi-faith facilities at County Hall
- consider how we can best work with key suppliers to address equality gaps
- develop a ‘buyers guide’ that will support our commissioning and procurement intentions from an equalities perspective
- consider and mitigate any potential adverse impact on equality for our customers when we move some services online
- develop an e-learning tool for our employees setting out the importance of engaging and consulting with communities when changes will impact on them
- implement the Essex Carers Strategy 2015-2020, creating a new relationship with carers and a new model of support. This will support carers of all ages to maintain their own quality of life
- develop and launch a new information, advice and guidance portal that is accessible for those requiring adult care and their carers as part of our responsibilities under the Care Act. It will be available to all citizens and provide high quality and impartial information and advice to support them to optimise their health and wellbeing, prevent or delay additional needs and navigate the care and support system
- encourage staff to complete the corporate governance equality & diversity e-learning module
Equality objective 6

We will recruit and retain a diverse workforce that reflects the communities we serve, and we will ensure our people feel valued and respected.

We will:

• support organisational transformation through embracing mobile and flexible working by taking into account the diverse needs of our employees
• monitor employee performance between different groups across the Council, highlighting where interventions and support is needed
• continue to encourage and welcome increasing numbers of job applications from disabled candidates where we are currently under-represented
• encourage and outline the business benefits to our employees of completing their personal diversity records so that we can measure in what areas we are supporting our employees and those areas where we need to invest
• continue to work with the employee diversity networks to ensure that the needs of employees with specific protected characteristics are met. This also includes our wider employee forums
• analyse the 2015 ‘Your Voice’ (staff survey) equality and diversity data to determine whether there are perceptions of inequality that we need to address
• engage young people in the workforce, ensuring that they feel valued and supported
• publish our Workforce Diversity Report 2014-2015 on our website.

Equality objective 7

We will foster good relations between different groups and communities.

We will:

• develop and deliver our PREVENT action plan by working with communities to help deter young people and vulnerable adults from becoming radicalised
• ensure that we signpost new arrivals and migrant communities to the right information, advice and guidance that they need when they come to live and work in Essex
• ensure that we balance the rights and responsibilities of both gypsies, travellers and the settled communities across Essex when responding to unauthorised encampments.
References

• Care Act 2014
• Child Poverty Strategy 2015-2020
• Children with Special Educational Needs & Disabilities Strategy 2014-2019
• Essex Carers Strategy 2015-2020
• Essex Insight (neighbourhood information system and data observatory for Essex)
• Equality Act 2010, s149 (Public Sector Equality Duty)
• Equality Framework for Local Government Guidance issued by the Local Government Association
• Essex County Council Tracker Survey 11 and 12, 2013-2014
• Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2013-2018
• Vision for Essex 2013-2018 Where innovation brings prosperity
• Your Voice Survey data 2014
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The information contained in this leaflet can be translated, and/or made available in alternative formats, on request.

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