# Ashfield District Council Equalities Scheme

# 2022 – 2026

## Introduction

This scheme refreshes and replaces the previous Corporate Equality and Inclusion Policy 2017 – 2021.

Since the previous document was published in 2017 various challenges, including the Covid-19 pandemic, have meant that the Council has needed to both work differently to deliver services and provide additional support to our most vulnerable customers.

We know that we have, and have always had, a key role in building a more equal district and will identify and design accessible, inclusive, services that meet the diverse needs of our communities, along with being an excellent employer for people of all backgrounds.

This scheme does not attempt to set out everything that the council is delivering, alone or in partnership, to tackle inequality, but aims to provide an overarching framework for promoting and enhancing equality and diversity in the district.

## Definitions

### Equality

Equality is not about treating everybody the same, it is about treating everybody equally and fairly, regardless of their protected characteristics (see ‘Our Duty’ section below) and ensuring equality of access to our services based on their needs.

### Diversity

Within Ashfield we live and work in a district where our residents and customers have different identities, attributes, cultures, abilities and backgrounds. We are proud of this and, for us, diversity is about recognising, respecting and valuing these differences in people.

### Inclusion

For us inclusion means creating an environment where everyone feels welcome, valued and are enabled to participate.

## Roles and Responsibilities

Everyone working for, or on behalf of, the Council have a duty to behave in such a way to ensure that our equality and diversity responsibilities are met. A number of individuals or groups have specific roles in meeting our equality and diversity responsibilities.

### Councillors

All Councillors are responsible for demonstrating commitment to equality and diversity in their work, decision making and working to improve equality in the district. The Leader and Cabinet Members have responsibility for strategic leadership and policy setting ensuring equality considerations are taken into account when making decisions.

### Chief Executive

Responsible for encouraging continued proper regard for the scheme and duty at a strategic level within the Council, instigating action to address areas of concern.

### Corporate and Extended Leadership Teams

Responsible for; developing and encouraging a culture that promotes equality and diversity in employment and service delivery, compliance with and awareness of the scheme and duty within their service areas, including ensuring Equality Impact Assessments are undertaken, and to investigate any complaints in relation to equality and diversity fairly and effectively.

### Employees

All employees have a personal responsibility to act in accordance, and comply with law, the scheme, duty and other codes of conduct and Council policies govern acceptable behaviour. Failure to comply will always be investigated under the disciplinary processes.

## Our Duty

The Equality Act 2010 places general and specific duties on public bodies in respect of Single Equality Schemes.

The general duties require public bodies to have due regard to the need to:

1. eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other prohibited conduct;
2. advance equality of opportunity between people who share protected characteristics and people who do not share it; and
3. foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

Having ‘due regard’ requires the Council to consciously think about the above in decision-making processes. In particular, how equality issues influence the way in which the Council acts as an employer; how it develops, evaluates and reviews policy; how it designs, delivers and evaluates services; and how it commissions and procures services from others.

The protected characteristics under the act are;

* Age
* Disability
* Gender reassignment
* Marriage and civil partnership
* Pregnancy and maternity
* Race
* Religion or belief
* Sex
* Sexual orientation

Additionally, the Council, recognising the difficulties and potential disadvantages and discrimination that children and young people with care experience may suffer from, the Council has formally and voluntarily agreed to recognise care experience as a protected characteristic. Full details of the resolution, including definitions, can be found at;

* Link: [Notice of Motion 1 (formerly No. 3)](https://democracy.ashfield.gov.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=13017)

Under the specific duties, the Council is required to complete the following actions:

1. Publish information annually which demonstrates how it complies with the general equality duties in relation to the nine protected characteristics of age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief and sexual orientation.

2. Adopt and publish measurable equality objectives and review them every four years.

## Our Equality Objectives

Below are our refreshed equality objectives covering the period 2022-2026 and the actions required to deliver them. These are based on our duty and the needs of our communities.

1. **To maintain a modern and diverse workforce, that is reflective of the local community, who feel valued and treated fairly**

* Continually work to creating a workplace free from discrimination of any form and have effective internal policies in respect of this, taking action to mitigate any adverse impacts
* Annually review our Recruitment and Retention Strategy to identify focus of interventions to support an inclusive and representative workforce
* Provide a safe and inclusive environment for our staff
* As reflected in our People Strategy, ensure that equality and diversity is reflected in service provision and employment practices, ensuring recruitment processes are fair and accessible
* Employ a diverse workforce that reflects the community we serve
* Monitor, analyse and publish data in respect of our workforce
* Develop and train our staff to ensure ongoing development relevant to their roles, maximising their skills and potential.
* Champion equality, diversity and inclusion in the development of policies and procedures.
* Ensure staff regularly complete and understand equality and diversity training to understand how to meet the needs of customers, communities and colleagues
* To continue to work in different ways, for example hybrid working, to help with productivity and wellbeing
* Undertake Employee Surveys to monitor impact of interventions and perceptions of feeling valued and supported by the Council.
* To continue to review and refresh HR policies supporting being an Employer of Choice.

1. **To ensure community engagement and consultation is effective, enabling participation**

* Ensure that we understand our communities `
* Ensure that we treat our customers with courtesy and respect
* Be transparent and open in our decision making and ensure that we seek the views of, and engage with our customers
* Consult and engage with our residents, customers and businesses through a variety of approaches.
* To undertake a Place Survey to support review and refresh of the Council’s Corporate Plan and Priorities.
* Continue to engage with our tenants, including surveying and actively seeking feedback.

1. **To provide advice, information and services in a way that is effective, inclusive and accessible**

* Continue to ensure our website meets the Public Sector Accessibility Regulations.
* Make appropriate reasonable adjustments in accordance with our Reasonable Adjustment Policy.
* Undertake effective equalities impact assessments to understand and mitigate potential impacts of new or revised policies and changes to how services are delivered.
* Support customers in accessing all of our services, including assisted self-service for our digital services.
* Ensure that our consultations and engagement with customers is accessible to enable our customers to participate in the decision-making process.
* Through the Council’s Complaints Process and feedback mechanisms, assess and implement areas for improvement regarding inclusivity and accessibility

1. **To support individuals and communities to achieve a better quality of life particularly targeting resources at areas of most need**

* Support tenants to live independently in their own homes
* Adherence to Lifetime Homes Standards where reasonable and applicable to retrofitting/refurbishment works
* Ensuring the quality of our homes for our tenants
* Proving a fair Housing Allocations policy
* Ensuring targeted intervention to those most in need, including rough sleepers, and work to prevention, as well as support.
* Tackle anti-social behaviour
* Tackle hate crime
* Work with businesses and individuals to improve standards through our licensing, environmental health and strategic housing teams
* Work with the Integrated Care Partnership on targeted Placed Based Partnerships initiatives across the district to reduce health inequalities
* Work with partners to deliver our Education and Skills Improvement Plan
* Support the third sector, particularly around services for vulnerable residents,
* Work collaboratively on the N2D2 Devolution Deal to bring more resources and opportunities within the district e.g., housing retrofit and insulation schemes
* Work collaboratively through Discover Ashfield to create additional opportunities, skills and investment within the district.

An annual Equality Position Statement will demonstrate what progress has been made against the objectives each year.