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Foreword

Equalities within Wealden is a priority issue for the Council, both across the community, in our dealings with partners and within our own organisation.

We recognise the value of diversity and the importance of embracing differences so we can benefit from a variety of perspectives and experiences.

We are committed to providing equal access to services and opportunities, allowing for individuality. The same end result and outcome should be available to everyone whilst recognising that the paths taken to get there will be different based on individual needs.

And we know that, as community leaders, it is critical we set a positive example and actively demonstrate leadership on equalities issues across Wealden.

Which is why equality is a priority issue for the Council.

Cllr Claire Dowling
Portfolio Holder for Equalities
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1. Welcome to Wealden District

Knowing Our Communities

In order to ensure we are meeting the needs of our diverse communities the council recognises the importance of equality mapping which will help provide a better understanding of local issues to deliver positive outcomes. Equality mapping emphasises the importance of understanding difference in the context of other major issues such as health, education, community safety and access to work. Wealden District Council has produced an evidence base which has been used by the Wealden Local Strategic Partnership to develop the Community Strategy. This is available on the website or by contacting Customer Services - further details at the end of Page 35.

• Population

Wealden is classified as one of the most rural districts in England. It is the largest of the East Sussex districts and boroughs with 28% of the county's total population and 324 square miles of extremely attractive countryside - 48% of the East Sussex area.

Wealden has a population of just over 143,300 comprising 63,800 households. Half of the population lives in the five market towns, Crowborough, Hailsham, Heathfield, Polegate and Uckfield.

The total population is made up of males representing 68,776 of the population and females representing 74,567 of the population.

• Age

Wealden has average levels of young people up to the age 14, but a lot fewer residents in the 15-44 age range and a significantly above average population of pensionable age.

By 2011, Wealden’s population is expected to increase to around 148,000, and its make-up will change. There will be fewer school age children, and more young people aged between 16 and 29. The elderly population (65+) will have grown by over 4000, mostly in the 65-74 age group.

• Ethnic and Cultural Origins

In Wealden the 2001 census provided the only up to date source of information on the ethnic composition of the population. Only 6,618 (4.73%) of the population belonged to other ethnic groups. The largest non-white
ethnic minority group living in Wealden was Chinese, with a population of 664 (0.47%).

• Religion / Belief
Of the population who have declared a religion or belief, the majority are Christian. The next most prominent faith group is Muslim.

• Sexual Orientation
There is a visible community of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGB &T) people but we recognise that there will also be a significant invisible LGB &T community which we must serve. There is currently no accurate data available on the number of LGBT people. However, Stonewall and our local LGB network suggest some 6% may be lesbian, gay or bisexual.

• Disability
At Wealden District Council we believe the Social Model (Disability Equality Duty) of Disability is the most helpful and constructive way to consider disability. This Model takes the view that it is the ‘barriers’ in society which disable people and prevent them from fully participating; barriers such as people’s attitudes, the built environment and the policies and practices of organisations. However we also recognise the definition of disability in the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) as:

Someone with physical or mental impairment which has substantial and long term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

In East Sussex Downs & Weald there are approximately 51,760 wheelchair users, 528 registered as having hearing loss and 73 people who are deaf. There are also 629 people who are registered blind and 587 who are registered as having hearing impairment. Nationally, there are over 6.9 million disabled people of working age which represents 19% of the working population. (Labour Force Survey, June 2006).
Policy Statement and Corporate Objectives

In line with our corporate values, set out in the Wealden Corporate Plan, Wealden District Council is committed to ensuring that all our services and employment opportunities are provided with equity and fairness to everyone.

Our Corporate Objectives

In March 2010 the Council reviewed and agreed three Corporate Objectives. These have been shaped through consultation with local people.

- **Putting People First** by providing quality services and promoting Health, Prosperity and Community Safety.
- **Pride of Place** through the preservation and enhancement of our environment for us and future generations.
- **Working together with Partners** to ensure maximum benefit to the community of our joint resources.

Our objectives are all about the People we serve, keeping the Place we live in special and Working Together to provide the highest quality services we can afford.

Our Vision, Culture & Values

Our Vision, Culture and Values have recently been reviewed as part of our Transformation Programme. This programme will seek to change the way we do things to continue to ensure we provide quality services to our customers in difficult financial circumstances. Alongside changing the Council's approach, it is also about changing the culture of the Council and looking at doing things differently. Members have determined that "Wealden District Council will be a streamlined organisation commissioning and delivering essential customer focused services in a way which provides excellent value for money."

We

- Focus on customers and deliver quality accessible services within available resources.
- Deliver increasing levels of efficiency and effectiveness and an ethos of continuous improvement.
- Adopt a commercial approach and principles to ensure excellent value for money and ongoing low council tax.
- Encourage an entrepreneurial and innovative approach within a framework of effective risk management.
• Promote collaborative working and constructive challenge within a culture of respect for others and self.
• Base decisions on evidence and analysis.
• Are even-handed, open and accountable and operate with integrity and to the highest ethical standards.

As part of that review, a specific commitment was given to assess changes to service provision and staff arrangements for equality and diversity implications through an overall equalities impact assessment and specific equalities impact assessments as part of the implementation process for the individual options.

Current Good Practice and Achievements in the Council's last 3 years.

Benefits

• The Benefits Service consulted the Wealden Disability Involvement Group (WDIG) on the design, layout and readability of its newsletter, 'For Your Benefit'. As a result, those with partial sight or other reading difficulties find the newsletter easier to read. In addition, we have improved access to the newsletter on the website by improving the quality of the text only version. This is now easier for Read Aloud browsers to read.

• Our application forms have been redesigned to take into account plain English principles and the principles of form layout which we have learnt from our work with plain English techniques. The forms are printed on a coloured paper that suits those with partial sight or reading difficulties.

Involvement and Engagement with disabled people

• The Wealden Disability Involvement Group (WDIG) was set up in October 2008; the Council worked in partnership with East Sussex Disability Association (ESDA) to recruit Wealden disabled residents who had taken part in the Disability Equality Scheme.

• The group meets once a month and there is currently a membership of 25 residents which includes representatives from a number of clubs and groups in the Wealden District.

• The Group helps the Council monitor the progress of our disability equality work and review polices and practices.
Housing

- The Housing Service has implemented a full equality monitoring system at the initial contact stage and on satisfaction questionnaires. This has been combined with a "Help us to help you" survey to all our existing tenants which to date has provided comprehensive data on over 50% of our tenants. This has resulted in identifying individual needs including the provision of large print on written correspondence and translation into another language. This has now been complimented by the production of a Supporting our Customers booklet for district officers, to ensure they have the relevant information and tools to hand in the field to effectively communicate with our customers.

- In addition, all our forms, information packs and leaflets have been or are in the process of being redesigned to ensure they are accessible to all our customers. Staff have received a comprehensive training programme on equality and interaction with BME, disability and voluntary groups, resulting in improvements to the Housing Service including the Housing Application form and improvements to the website.

- The Housing Service has worked directly with members of the travelling community to establish a site criteria and accommodation needs requirements for new permanent traveller sites.

Communication

- Since the 2008-2011 Communications Strategy was approved by Cabinet in December 2008, Plain English training has been provided for over 60 members of staff, and a style guide has been approved for all Wealden publications which is supervised by the Print Room. This style guide stipulates the use of clear fonts, a minimum font size for all publications, the need to Plain English proof copy so it is jargon-free and needs the use of clearer design to assist colour-blind readers. A Quick Guide for Producing Wealden Publications is available for all staff and Members on our intranet site which includes a section on Getting the tone right to avoid any unintentional discrimination by using unsuitable words and phrases in publications.

- All Wealden publications now include an Accessibility Box offering alternative versions whenever needed. Also this includes Cantonese, Bengali and Turkish. This has resulted in a number of requests for both large print and audio versions of Council publications, a Braille copy of recycling information and translation help for a Polish resident.

- The possibility of producing a district-wide magazine to reach all residents has been explored but not pursued because of cost in the current economic climate. Alternative avenues including parish
magazines to help the Council involve residents have been utilised where necessary.

Website

- As part of the redesign of Wealden's website (to be launched in the second half of 2010), we have incorporated a new accessibility bar at the top of each page. This allows users to view pages in a variety of ways, including large text and high contrast colours. There is also a link for screen reading technology; allowing the content of a page to be listened to and a link to translate the website into a number of different languages.

- We presented the new Wealden website at the Wealden Disability Involvement Group. Based on feedback from the group we have incorporated an extra colour combination option (making four in total), which will make viewing the website easier for partially sighted users. Also, as a result of feedback, we increased size of the text in the large text size option.

- This year we have purchased a new Content Management System which will give greater control over web page creation; allowing stricter adherence to usability and accessibility guidelines. Part of the new system allows us to run off reports to highlight any accessibility issues.

Employment

- Annual staff surveys have been carried out and response from them has confirmed an increase by staff who think they are treated with fairness and respect regardless of race, religion, gender, age or sexual preference.

- Two Staff Focus Groups were set up to identify improvements and as a result of this a Recruitment & Selection Guide has been produced and training provided on recruitment and selection.

- Training on Equality & Diversity has been provided for all staff and councillors.

- A partnership has been set up with Jobcentre Plus who notify all disabled and unemployed people about Wealden District Council vacancies.

- We have enabled recruitment through the Future Jobs Fund of long term unemployed young people.
• We are working towards improvements in diversity and hold the Two Ticks symbol. The disability symbol is made up of two ticks and the words 'positive about disabled people'. If an employer uses this symbol it means they are positive about employing disabled people and are keen to know about their abilities.

• Changes have been made to the Council's website to assist people with dyslexia to access the website.

Finance
• The Council's new Financial Management System went live on 1 April 2010. The system includes the ability to produce remittances, invoices and statements in sans serif fonts which are more legible. These documents can also be e-mailed to people in portable document format enabling them to use the zoom function to make them easier to read. The software was acquired with a licence that enables this technology to be used with other systems elsewhere within the Council. We plan to extend its use to Housing Benefit notification letters in 2010/11 so that we can produce a summary sheet as well as the standard letter in sans serif font.

Planning Policy
• Over the past three years the Planning Policy Team has primarily been involved in the development of the Core Strategy, housing delivery and Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showpeople provision.

• In 2009 the Team produced the Spatial Development Options Consultation Document with a summary document, in accordance with the Equalities Impact Assessment action plan. In addition, demographic data was collected in association with the consultation, and a reference was provided as to other formats being made available. As part of the consultation a member of the team presented to the Wealden Disability Involvement Group and as a result of feedback changes were made to the consultation, including larger print summary documents and changes to the consultation system. This feedback will also lead to future changes in LDF consultation. In addition to this, a leaflet was sent to every household publishing the consultation, and 'drop in sessions' took place on Saturdays and evenings so that residents and businesses were able to speak to officers in person. Each 'drop in session' took place in an accessible building. The proposed Core Strategy, which will be reported to the Local Development Framework Sub Committee on 7th July, indicates the key issues facing the residents and businesses of Wealden with an associated strategy to assist in tackling issues, including the provision of affordable housing and Gypsy and Traveller provision. The Core Strategy is subject to a sustainability appraisal which assesses each element against 22 agreed sustainability objectives including social objectives, including issues such as social inclusion.
• It is intended that the Statement of Community Involvement will be refreshed, and as part of this procedure an equalities impact assessment of consultation will be included. The Team has engaged with a number of stakeholders throughout the preparation of the Core Strategy, and have also been involved in consultation in relation to the site assessment for Gypsy and Traveller provision. This consultation will also be incorporated into the Core Strategy.

Public Health and Community Services
This Service offer a range of projects and on-going work to support the Equality Scheme.

• The 'Active Play' scheme, which is funded by a successful National Lottery bid, provides play facilities to young people in Wealden. The key to the project is that the facilities are mobile and can therefore be taken to support play in the rural areas of Wealden, offering young people, including disabled young people, an opportunity to participate in a variety of active play activities. Recently the range of activities have been extended to include Friday late-night basketball for 12 to 17 year olds. This element of the scheme is aimed to act as a diversionary activity for young people to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour.

• The Council, in partnership with Freedom Leisure, offers free swimming for the over 60's at all three of its leisure centres. This project forms part of a national scheme, for which the Council applied successfully for Government funding.

• Sports Festivals have now been running for two years in the District. They offer an opportunity for people of all ages and abilities to get active and receive taster sessions in relation to a number of sports and physical activities. Disabled people are also catered for at these events.

• 'Active for Life' is a new project which started in April 2010. It offers amusement and gentle exercise sessions for older people. It is currently based in five of the Council's sheltered housing schemes but is open to any older person; it is run once a month at each centre.

• 'Active for All' will commence in the Summer of 2010. It is undertaken in partnership with Freedom Leisure in Uckfield and is aimed at young disabled people (under 19 years). This project is sustainable for a year with the funding it receives and includes dance and movement sessions and free swimming.
• ‘Walk Wealden' events is a programme of short health walks in Wealden organised at a parish and town level, but co-ordinated by Wealden District Council. It is planned to hold 42 of these walks between now and the 2012 Olympics. To date two have been held and four more have been planned. All are welcome at these events.

• The first 'Older People's Event' took place earlier this year in Polegate. This is a partnership event aimed at providing information and advice on a range of subjects relevant to older people and from a variety of providers from the public and private sector. Funding for this first event was provided by the East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service. Due to its success repeat events are already being planned for other parts of the District.

• An electric blanket testing week is held every year in the district. This project offers free testing of older people's electric blankets. Last year for example over 40% of blankets failed the tests and the owners were persuaded to part with their potentially dangerous blankets; vouchers were given to those people to buy a new blanket at a reduced price. Once again this is a partnership event including the District Council, Age Concern, East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service, Sussex Police, East Sussex Trading Standards and others.

• Working with Sussex Police and East Sussex Trading Standards the Council have introduced a number of 'No-Cold Calling Zones' in the district. These well advertised and highlighted zones are aimed at protecting older and more vulnerable people from distraction burglaries.

• Safety in Action has now been running in Wealden for 19 years. This multi-agency project, co-ordinated by the Council offers young people (aged 11 to 10 years old) personal and community safety advice in a practical ‘hands-on' way. Approximately 600 children, including children with special needs experience the project each year.

• Each year the Council organises a Youth Forum with the East Sussex Youth Cabinet Members for the area. The event involves young people from all over the District and issues of interest to them are discussed and where practical a way forward is worked out. Many young people with learning difficulties and other special needs have been welcomed over the two years that this initiative has been running.

• A Youth Website has now been operating in Wealden for over five years (www.w4y.co.uk). It is jointly managed by a group of young people and the Council to ensure that the content remains relevant to the target group. The website offers advice and information and acts as a platform for two-way communication with young people.
• The Community Safety Co-ordinator has visited both the Wealden Disability Group and the East Sussex Blind and Partially Sighted Headquarters to provide information on crime prevention, some of the initiatives that are happening locally, and gave Safer Wealden Partnership funded handbag alarms.

• The Council has recently completed an action plan for National Indicator 35 on preventing violent extremism. The Council works with other partners across East Sussex to improve engagement with various communities across the district.

• The Public Protection Team regularly visit food related establishments operating in the district to ensure compliance with food safety laws. Not only are they able to offer advice and guidance on food safety, but have that advice printed in a variety of the more common languages. The visits also have another important role in that they provide the owners and staff in those establishments with a human face from the Council with whom they can raise other important issues if they wish.

• The Council offer training in food safety and health and safety at work to local businesses. The training courses, which have been offered for over 20 years, welcome delegates from a range of ethnic backgrounds and many with both mild or severe learning needs. Exam papers and course material is available in a variety of languages and on occasions entire courses have been run in both Bengali and Cantonese. In addition candidates can take the exam which concludes some of the courses orally, if they would find that easier.

Corporate Assets
• **Car Parking Survey** - The survey was created in 2009, to gage the views of all customers relating the Council's car parks. A new survey will be done in 2011, to highlight any further changes required.

• When creating the survey, there was great emphasis on how to ensure the survey complied with Wealden Equalities Scheme. The survey looked at all aspects of the car parks, to include volume of usage, signage, different types of parking i.e. short stay, disabled parking etc and surface/markings. The last part of the survey was dedicated to equality monitoring, race, age, disability etc. Before publishing the survey via the Wealden Panel and website, Corporate Assets asked the Wealden Disability Involvement Group to comment on the presentation/usability of the survey. The response was favourable and the survey was published.

• The feedback from the surveys have resulted in the introduction of further bicycle racks within the car parks. The information gathered will
also be used to improved car parks, as part of the car park signage review.

- **Committee Room Bookings**- In April 2010, a new procedure for booking committee rooms, was also introduced. When creating an all encompassing booking system, ensuring the colours and flow on the forms were a major factor. We had to make sure that the system was accessible to all members of staff. Feedback from Debbie Peters, Equalities Officer was invaluable to the process.

- The system is now fully up and running.

- **Future**- In the second half of 2010, the re-writing of the Corporate Assets Web Pages, will take priority and will coincide with the release of the new Wealden Website. Attention to colour, font size and screen reading technology will be taken into account. Prior to publication of the web pages, I will be working with Wealden Disability Involvement Group and the Equalities Officer to ensure accessibility for all.

- A consultation will be produced in 2010 regarding office satisfaction. The results will help to improve office accommodation.

**Customer Services**

- Met with Wealden Disability Involvement Group for a question and answer session regarding Concessionary Travel
- Expanded criteria to make Concessionary Passes available to a wider section of the disabled community
- Made information on translation services, large print and braille available in the Receptions
- Ensured all staff have received equalities awareness training
- Hosted displays in both receptions for events such as Holocaust Day
- Complaints against Wealden District Council are reducing and the introduction of the Customer Relations Role will ensure rigorous recording and monitoring of activity.
- Almost 90% of office based staff have received customer service training
- Our first cohort (10) of Institute of Customer Service (ICS) trainees are about to complete their qualification - June 2010 and the programme is being rolled out across the authority.

**Planning and Building Control**

- The service undertook a user survey with a pilot group to assess how the planning web site could be improved.
• An improved web site has now been developed in conjunction with our software suppliers to ensure greater access for users.

• On large developments and affordable housing schemes local parishes/town councils have been involved in pre-application discussions.

• Building Control have provided advice to planning officers at an early stage on planning applications on physical disability access issues. They have also continued to control the built environment as have planning officers in terms of delivering developments which meet disability access and facilities requirements.

• All officers have been on an equality awareness course. Building Control Surveyors have been on disability awareness courses.

• The Building Control Manager continues to work (as the access officer) in conjunction with the five other East Sussex authorities on joint approaches to disability issues in relation to the built environment

• Customer surveys are regularly undertaken where equality matters are monitored

• The level of Local Government Ombudsman complaints has fall sharply with no misadministration found on those cases investigated

Waste and Commercial Services

Publicity

• We have produced a version of our calendar in large print or braille as required

• We have recently liaised with disability support groups to ensure all our literature is readable

• All of our literature colour schemes are prepared to take into account the needs of the visually impaired

Bins and Containers

• We are considering using tactile bin stickers to help the visually impaired differentiate between the different containers

• We are looking into the possibility of hot-stamping stickers e.g. X and 0 to help the visually impaired differentiate between the different containers
Neighbourhood recycling points

- we have developed a new checklist for all our sites

Launch

- Community Toilet Scheme makes disabled facilities available until late evening in commercial establishments without the need to purchase goods
2. Equality, Diversity & Community Cohesion

Lines of responsibility and decision making
The Equality and Diversity agenda is led within the Council through the following structures:

- The lead councillor for Equality and Diversity is the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services who has responsibility for the effective delivery of Council policies in relation to equality.

- The corporate lead officer for Equality and Diversity is the Director of Corporate Services who is responsible for the review and progress of the Wealden Equality Scheme.

- Service Heads are individually responsible for implementing the Wealden Equality Scheme actions and principles within their service area.

- The Internal Equalities Group is formed by representatives from each service area and oversees the development of the Wealden Equality Scheme.

The responsibility to promote equality of opportunity and to take action to identify and address possible discrimination, whenever and wherever it occurs, is the individual responsibility of every Councillor and employee of Wealden District Council.

Equality and Diversity
We live in a changing society and we can take pride in our traditions and tolerance, fairness and the rule of law. As an equal opportunities employer, we are committed to the values of integrity, impartiality, courtesy and helpfulness, in our dealing with staff, members of the public and other partner organisations.

Diversity involves recognition that everyone is different, and that this is valued and promotes respect. Promoting diversity within Wealden District Council involves creating an environment that capitalises on everything that makes us unique - our gender, race, ability, sexuality, beliefs, age, lifestyle, family status and giving everyone a fair and equal chance to be successful.

The Purpose of the Single Equality Scheme

This is the second Single Equality Scheme for Wealden District Council and we will ensure that, in everything it does, it continues to promote diversity and equality of opportunity, eliminate discrimination and bring about positive change. This policy seeks to enhance and promote the high quality services
we already provide and to assist in creating a productive, safe and prejudice
free work environment which treats all employees fairly and with dignity.

This scheme serves two purposes:
To set out our overall commitment to equality and diversity:
  • our approach to equality and diversity in Wealden
  • how we will manage, plan, mainstream and embed equality and
diversity in our day to day work

To cover the statutory and non statutory duties:
  • our statutory duties as a Local Authority under the current Disability,
    Gender, Race legislation and the Equality Act 2010
  • our non statutory and general legal duties in relation to Age,
    Religion/Belief, Sexual Orientation and Transgender
  • our responsibility to build strong and cohesive communities

The Single Equality Scheme will help us to ensure that we focus more on the
positive outcomes for people in Wealden and that our services are more
accessible and delivered effectively and efficiently. It will support and
supplement the Council’s corporate priorities, as set out in the Corporate Plan
and also links with the Sustainable Community Strategy.

How we developed Our Single Equality Scheme
Encouraging participation and involvement is a specific requirement of the
Disability Discrimination Act. Wealden District Council firmly believes that the
only way to ensure we are delivering positive outcomes is to ensure we listen
to the views, experiences and ideas of the communities we serve. Therefore,
we have applied this requirement across all the equality strands to ensure we
had listened to as many people as possible in developing our scheme.
Our engagement and participation will be with local organisations and
partnerships within Wealden, with our Wealden Disability Involvement Group
and Peoples Panel, the panel is made up of residents of Wealden that have
agreed to look at consultation and set up forums for engagement on topics
that need feedback.

Legislative Framework

Over the last ten years the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, Race Relations Act
1976, and Disability Discrimination Act 1995 have been expanded, and new
laws have also been introduced to cover discrimination on grounds of religion
or belief, sexual orientation, age and transgender.
The Equality Act 2010

As a result of the new Equality Act there will be some changes in the field of discrimination law and the Act maintains protection from discrimination on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. These are known in the Act as 'protected characteristics'.

The Act extends the current public sector equality duties from separate ones to a single one for all 'protected characteristics' except for marriage and civil partnership. It will be an integrated duty to make it simpler and more efficient for organisations and will bring all the grounds of discrimination within one piece of legislation. The Act aims to simplify and strengthen legislation.

Local Authorities will be under a duty to consider reducing social and economic inequalities when taking strategic decisions.

Disability discrimination

The Act strengthens protection for those with a disability. For example it makes it unlawful to discriminate against a person because of their association with a disabled person. Another change is that a prospective employer cannot ask about a candidate’s health before offering them work unless the reason is a permitted one. Some changes will need to be made to procedures at the Council in line with this.

Positive action

The Act allows the use of positive action when promoting or recruiting. It will be lawful where two candidates are both 'as qualified' to select one from a disadvantaged group. This is a new action.

Information

From April 2011 the Council will be required to publish annually details of their gender pay gap (the difference between the average hourly pay of male and female employees). This will be new for Wealden. There will be a need to publish the percentage of the workforce of people from ethnic minority groups and who have a disability. This already takes place.

Combined discrimination

From April 2011 the law outlaws combined discrimination where a person suffers unfavourable treatment because of a combination of two protected characteristics, for example age and sex.

Legislation, legal frameworks, equality impact assessments and equality schemes can't hope to tackle all of these issues. Although important they require commitment from everybody at all levels to make all feel welcome, accepted and valued for their different perspectives and the joy and achievement that they can all bring if given the right environment.
For Wealden District Council, creating that environment is a priority using the local government equality framework and the single equality scheme to reinforce the values and the actions that many services are already taking to engage with and provide services for the community. However, we need to ensure that people aren’t falling through the net and services need to think about who their vulnerable customers are -

- how we can find out what their needs are
- how we can deliver services in a common sense way providing value for money for all residents
- treat everyone with dignity and respect

The Council values everyone’s contribution and wants to make Wealden the place where they want to live.

**National Framework**

**New Equalities Framework for Local Government**

The Improvement and Development Agency (IdeA) launched a new Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG) which builds on and develops the work councils have done on the Equality Standard for Local Government (ESLG).

The Equalities Framework uses a wider definition of equality, to that originally set out in the Equalities Review, based on the idea of equal life chances. Local authorities therefore, need to continue to consider the impact of race, gender, transgender, disability, age, sexual orientation and religion or belief. It will also encourage councils to understand the relationships between these and socio-economic status and the experience of vulnerable groups.

There are three levels of performance within the new Framework (Developing, Achieving and Excellent) which are designed to allow authorities to benchmark their performance. At present the Council has self-assessed at level 2 under the old standards that means at present the we are currently at 'Developing' level of the new Framework.

**New Equalities Framework for Local Government and Wealden’s Single Equality Scheme**

We will use the Single Equality Scheme Action Plan to help provide the evidence of the positive outcomes for people in Wealden to move from the ‘Developing’ merging in to ‘Achieving’ level as below
New Equality Framework → Our Single Equality Scheme

Knowing your Communities → Welcome to Wealden
Place shaping → Leadership
Community Engagement → Communication & Service
                    Delivery and Customer Care
Responsive Services → Service Delivery and
                    Customer Care
A Modern and diverse workforce → Diversity in the workplace

Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA)

CAA replaces the previous Comprehensive Performance Assessments for local authorities and with an area assessment focusing on how well local public services are delivering services together against locally agreed priorities and how likely they are to improve in the future. Local authorities and other public bodies, are, however, also individually subject to individual organisational assessments. The three key questions asked in the area assessment are:

- How well do local priorities express community needs and aspirations,
- How well are the outcomes and improvements needed being delivered to meet those needs and aspirations.
- What are the prospects for future improvement.

Tackling inequality, disadvantage and discrimination is one of the themes underpinning the assessment.

There are clear links between the New Equalities Framework and the Comprehensive Area Assessment framework, particularly in terms of equality mapping and community engagement and involvement. The term ‘equality mapping’ has been added to the more familiar ‘knowing your communities’ to emphasise the importance of understanding difference in the context of other major issues such as health, education, community safety and access to work as well as identifying where the equality gaps are for different groups.

It is the stated intention of the current Government to abolish CAA however it is not yet clear what, if anything, will replace it.
National Indicator Set

The National Indicator set has been established to measure local performance by public bodies, particularly with regard to meeting Local Area Agreement (LAA) targets. In developing our comprehensive evidence base to develop the priorities for the LAA, partners have taken into account the needs of different groups in the community. They have assessed the extent to which priorities have impacted on them.

The Government Office has an important role to challenge partnerships to ensure that they have considered outcomes for particular groups in managing the Government's role in the LAA. The Equality and Human Rights Commission’s representatives located regionally, have also worked collaboratively during the negotiation process for the agreement.
3. Leadership

Corporate Commitment

The corporate commitment to this agenda has been vital to ensure that Wealden District Council continues to deliver the high standard of services and care. All our Members are accountable for championing and promoting equality and diversity within the Council and externally.

We have a Member Champion for Equalities, and there are also a number of existing arrangements that help deliver the Council’s vision and promote diversity:

- All Councillors have a collective responsibility to promote and deliver the Equalities objectives
- The Chief Executive leads the Corporate Management Team (CMT) that has the collective responsibility for driving the equality and diversity agenda throughout the organisation
- The lead councillor for Equality and Diversity is the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services who has responsibility for the effective delivery of Council policies in relation to equality;
- The corporate lead officer for Equality and Diversity is the Director of Corporate Services who is responsible for the review and progress of the Wealden Equality Scheme
- Service Heads are individually responsible for implementing the Wealden Equality Scheme actions and principles within their service area
- The Internal Equalities Group is formed by representatives from each service area and oversees the development of the Wealden Equality Scheme.

Equal Opportunities Statement

Equality of opportunity is central to the Council’s objectives and values as stated in the Wealden Corporate Plan. Wealden District Council is committed to ensuring that all our services and employment opportunities are provided with equity and fairness to everyone.
The Council acknowledges that there are many forms of prejudice and is committed to taking action to ensure equality for everyone, whatever their disability, family status, gender, race, religion, belief, martial status, sexual orientation, age, responsibility for dependants and transgender.

A socially inclusive society is one where every individual is able to attain a decent standard of living and to access the services they need easily, free from discrimination and fear. The failure of some people to integrate fully into society can be the result of one or more factors, including low income, lack of skills, fear of crime, poor housing, family breakdown, experience of discrimination, lack of transport or physical access difficulties. The Council aims to tackle the causes of social exclusion so that we can improve quality of life for everyone in our district.

The Council is committed to
- Promoting equality of opportunity and good race relations for all individuals and communities in Wealden.
- Collecting data and information on the impact of our policies and practices.
- Eliminating any unlawful discrimination or harassment in the provision of our services and employment.
- Improving the accessibility of our services and employment opportunities for all and tackling the causes of social exclusion.
- Ensuring effective implementation of equality duties across all service areas.

**Reporting and Monitoring Structure**

**Councillors**
An annual report is provided to Cabinet and the Council setting out the progress over the past year and forthcoming actions and outcomes to continue to deliver the Equalities objectives.

**Corporate Management Team**
This is chaired by the Chief Executive and comprises of three Service Directors. This group provides leadership and takes corporate responsibility for ensuring that the Council not only complies fully with all the equality legislations, but that Equality and Diversity is embedded into everything that the Council does. Through the lead director for Equality and Diversity, the group is regularly updated on new policy initiatives as well as on progress being made.
The Internal Equalities Group
The Wealden Internal Equalities group meets every 8 weeks and is made up of members of staff representing all Council services. In addition we have a number of community groups that are involved in the group. Chaired by the Director of Corporate Services and attended by the Portfolio holder this group has continued working on the progress in delivering our equalities objectives and improving our services to the public for minority groups in our community.

The Wealden Disability Involvement Group
The group was set up in October 2008; the Council worked in partnership with East Sussex Disability Association (ESDA) to recruit disabled Wealden residents that had taken part in the Disability Equality Scheme. The group meets on the first Thursday of each month and currently has a membership of 25 residents. The group decided to look at eleven areas to address within the Council including access to information and communication, bus passes, customer services, car parking, leisure services, community safety, benefits, transport, housing, waste services and access to new and existing buildings. This group will monitor the council's service delivery to make sure that it is accessible for all disabled people within the Wealden District.

Partnership Working
Wealden Local Strategic Partnership
The Wealden Local Strategic Partnership is made up of regional, public and local agencies, the voluntary and community sector, business, young people and equality and diversity communities.
Partners work together to meet local needs and improve the quality of life in Wealden.

East Sussex Equality Scheme Co-ordination Group
The Council is a member of a county-wide group which includes representatives from the County, District and Borough Councils, Sussex Police, Primary Care Trusts (covering East Sussex), East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service, Terrence Higgins Trust and the East Sussex Disability Association. The group meets quarterly in order to share information and good practice, progress equality work and discuss issues, with the aim of working together to find solutions.

Hate Crime
The Council is committed to the reporting of Hate Crime in all its forms and has worked with Victim Support to develop training in order to ensure that all staff are able to identify and report incidents of hate crime. This service is currently delivered County-wide by Victim Support. The Council is involved in steering and monitoring the new Hate Crime Service across East Sussex. A hate incident is any incident perceived by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by prejudice or hate. This includes discrimination against a
person's race, sexuality, gender identity or disability. It can include criminal offences.

Sussex Translation & Interpreting Partnership
The Council is a member of the Sussex Translation & Interpreting Partnership (ESTIP). The partnership has been working together to procure translation services that can be accessed by public authorities across the east and west of Sussex.
4. Diversity in the Workplace

We are committed to valuing and supporting our employees to realise their full potential and creating a diverse workforce that broadly reflects the community in which we operate.

Our commitment to Members and employees is one of continuous development through training and awareness raising, helping to make this policy fully effective.

Our Human Resources policies set out our commitment to fair employment, equal opportunities, learning and development and valuing diversity. We will continue to work hard to ensure we attract, recruit and retain staff from diverse backgrounds.

We expect our Councillors and staff to:
- provide a high standard of service to local people and to those they come into contact with
- respect others regardless of who they are
- undertake training and self development as identified to help improve our services to users, including equality and diversity training
- promote equality of opportunity and help build cohesive community relations
- adhere to all appropriate Council policies, procedures and codes of practice
- demonstrate these values in the way they work and interact with the community
- challenge behaviour or attitudes which are contrary to this policy

Workforce Development

The Council has a Workforce Development Framework and Plan which was agreed by Cabinet in June 2009. This will be regularly updated in line with national best practice and is available on the Wealden website.

The Equality Act 2010
The requirements of the new Equality Act 2010 will be implemented as required. For example there will be changes to pre-employment medical questionnaires and information on the gender pay gap will be published.

Surveys
The annual staff survey includes equality issues and the most recent survey in 2009 showed an increase in the number of staff who thought that "my
manager treats me with fairness and respect", "I receive the respect at work I deserve from my colleagues" and that "people at Wealden treat each other with fairness and respect regardless of race, religion, gender, age or sexual preference" The results of the annual survey will continue to be monitored.

**Recruitment and promotion**

Policies on recruitment and promotion are regularly reviewed to factor in changing circumstances. During the current Transformation Programme all jobs are advertised internally first for staff ‘at risk’ of redundancy, then made available to current staff who are looking for different job opportunities, then they are advertised externally if necessary. Job descriptions and essential and desirable selection criteria are carefully checked to identify whether they are necessary for the job. The Council provides a Recruitment and Selection Guide for managers and staff.

**Equal Pay**

An equal pay audit took place in 2007 and action was taken to increase the harmonisation between manual and officer staff terms and conditions of employment. From April 2011 details of the gender pay gap will be published on an annual basis.

**Disability**

The Council is working with Jobcentre plus to attract disabled applicants to jobs. By using the two ticks symbol all disabled applicants who meet the basic criteria for the job are shortlisted so that they have a better chance of being recruited. The number of disabled employees has increased since the scheme was implemented and annual statistics are published as part of the scheme.

**Employee Consultative Group (ECG)**

ECG is an effective way of consulting with members, managers and staff on various issues, including equality and the meetings takes place 5 times a year. ECG representatives are invited to Focus groups and comments on employment practices are made.

**Job share and flexible working**

The Council encourages flexible working practices and the number of people able to work from home has increased since the flexible working policy was introduced. Information on processes is easily accessible and where possible these practices will continue to be promoted.

**Monitoring information**

Statistics on recruitment and selection and other areas of employment will continue to be collected and analysed on a quarterly and annual basis to
ensure that discrimination does not take place. They will be published as part of the scheme.

**Training**

**Member Training**
Specific Equalities and Diversity Member training has been delivered since 2007 and is ongoing. Some sessions were held jointly with staff and received very high satisfaction ratings. These sessions are considered to be essential for all Members of the Council. The purpose of the programme was to provide Members with relevant knowledge and information about what is expected of them in their role. All Councillors are expected to attend.

**Staff training**
Training takes place on equality awareness and recruitment and selection for employees and managers on an annual basis. This helps to ensure that procedures are implemented fairly. Only employees who have undertaken recruitment and selection training may make recruitment decisions.
5. Service delivery and Customer care

The council provides many services, as well as being responsible for commissioning services from other agencies and organisations and it is important that the community is aware how they can access them and knows that the services will be delivered efficiently and without prejudice. We are committed to the principles of Best Value in our service delivery and we will ensure that we are responsive to the needs of our communities.

Our Equality Officer works to support the services with their equalities work programme and also works closely with our key partners and community groups to ensure that our services are fair and accessible to all in Wealden.

The Access Officer is responsible for ensuring that all our buildings are compliant with the DDA.

**Participation, Engagement and Consultation**

The Council works with our partners to significantly improve the quality of life for people in Wealden. Our plans and strategies and key services are shaped by residents views gathered through consultation and engagement.

**Consultation**

The Council has a range of mechanisms that it uses for consulting with the residents of Wealden. We are committed to carrying out high quality, useful and timely consultations that both engage and empower them. We encourage local residents to become involved with our activities and are committed to building positive relationships with people from all parts of our society.

We will only conduct a consultation when it is appropriate
When the information gathered will be used and when decision makers are in a position to act on the findings.

We will be clear on the purpose of the consultation
The consultation will have clear aims and purpose. We will clearly state what can be achieved through the consultation, what can’t be influenced or changed as a result and what questions are being asked.

We will wherever possible coordinate consultations with services/partners
We will work with services and partner organisations to ensure that people aren’t over consulted and that we make the best use of resources. All partners will check the consultation diary at the initial planning stage of all consultation
to see if links can be made with other services or previously gathered information can be used.

We will ensure a reasonable consultation period
Wherever possible a 12 week consultation period will be used. We will be clear on when the consultation period starts and ends.

We will provide feedback
Clear feedback will be given to all participants and where relevant a wider audience.

We will use plain English
Consultations will be jargon free wherever possible and wherever it is used a glossary will be provided.

The Wealden Panel
We have established The Wealden Panel - a forum of local people from around the district representing various user groups, interested parties and members of the public. The panel members are asked to give comments, views and suggestions on policies and services delivered by the Council. The ideas they put forward are then used to shape services to ensure they are of the highest quality and meet the needs and concerns of local people. The Wealden Panel is a chance for the residents of Wealden to have a real say in the decisions that affect them - and for local people to get involved in the design and delivery of our services.

Listed below are some of the ways people can get involved:

**Panel survey** – a survey of local residents' views of the Council's services.

**One-off consultations** – view our past, present and future consultations

**Council meetings** – most of our council meetings are open to the public

**Rural**
Wealden District Council is active in local, regional and national rural partnerships which aim to address the needs of businesses and residents in rural areas. The Leader of the Council represents District Councils on South East Rural Board. Many of Wealden's services offer outreach facilities in rural areas, for example the Active Play Team's mobile play facility or Housing officer surgeries at parish council offices.

In collaboration with members of the Wealden Local Strategic Partnership, we are carrying out a study of social issues in rural Wealden. Data, much of it
LSP partners' unpublished local data has been analysed with a rural focus. The analysis will enable partners to better understand the nature and location of social issues in order to strategically plan services that meet rural needs. The project also involves social research to explore and explain the quantitative analysis and a workshop to bring together different partners' frontline and strategic commissioning staff. This project will be a very important guide for addressing rural access to service issues.

Community engagement

Wealden District Council's Community Engagement Action Plan includes actions to involve 'hard to reach' groups. Our toolkit for staff planning consultations describes 'hard to reach' groups who should be considered, contacts we have with representatives and aspects of consultation design that help make them accessible to all. We also regularly consult the Wealden Panel, which is made up of 1,100 residents from across the District who are representative in terms of age, ethnicity and gender. The Wealden Disability Involvement Group and www.w4y.co.uk are successful examples of our commitment to engaging equality groups. One of our current aims is sharing the good practice seen in many of our services to those who are less experienced in involving 'hard to reach' groups.

Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)

An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) is a tool to ensure our policies, services and projects do not have an adverse impact on any particular group. The assessment offers us an opportunity when appropriate to refocus services or employment practices on the needs of diverse communities or diverse groups of staff.

An EqIA is a process of analysing a proposed or existing service, strategy, policy or project. The aim is to identify any effect or likely effect on different groups within the community. The outcome is to make sure that, as far as possible, any negative consequences for minority groups are eliminated or minimised and opportunities for promoting equality are maximised. Managers must ensure that all outcomes of their EqIA programme are implemented into service plans and monitored.

Wealden District Council’s EqIA programme covers:
- Race
- Disability
- Gender
- Sexual Orientation
- Age
- Religion/Belief
Our EqIA programme is performance managed via our Corporate Plan quarterly reporting cycle to our senior managers and elected Members and our Internal Equality Group is responsible for monitoring and reviewing the EIA programme.

**Procurement**

The Council's procurement strategy describes the Council's equality and diversity policy in procuring supplies, services and works. The strategy also sets out the principles relating to equality and diversity.

The Council will:

- include a requirement within contracts for agencies delivering services on our behalf, to deliver effective and appropriate service fairly and without unlawful discrimination
- ensure that all contractors commit to service delivery following the principles set out in the Council's procurement policy and strategy
- establish mechanisms for ensuring that equality targets are met by suppliers through contract management
- require contractors to supply monitoring reports on service delivery and take up
- establish mechanisms for managing equality issues by monitoring these reports and taking appropriate action to resolve any shortcomings

**Value for Money - The Transformation Programme**

We are undertaking a Transformation Programme in order to maintain or improve service to the customer whilst reducing costs by examining different ways of working. All service areas across the council have been tested to ensure they are working most efficiently and effectively by considering moving the service to a private supplier (outsourcing), working in partnership more (for example through a shared service) or keeping the service in-house but improving it by process improvement and restructuring. Equality Impact Assessments will be carried out for all significant Transformation Programme changes.

**Comments, Compliments and Complaints**

The Council welcomes all feedback from customers. It is their feedback that helps us to improve the way we do things and learn from where things have gone wrong.

**Comments** – we want to hear customers suggestions and ideas about our services.
Complaints – if our customers are unhappy with something we have done they can make a complaint. We want to provide a good quality service. If things go wrong we need to know so that we can put them right.

Compliments – we want our customers to tell us when they think a council employee or service has done well.

How you can give feedback:
We value feedback and want to be able to tell the customer how we dealt with the issue, however if the customer chooses to remain anonymous we cannot do this. Customers can give us feedback in a number of ways:

By telephone - Customers can call our Customer Services team on 01323 443530
In writing - Customers can send their letters to Customer Services team
Email - Customers can email to info@wealden.gov.uk
6 Communication

Good communication is key to providing high quality, responsive council services in Wealden. It is essential to understand the needs of local people, to provide and communicate details of how services can be accessed and will respond. This can help develop strategies for improving life in Wealden, and to ensure that we play an effective role in community leadership. Two way communication gives a voice to local people and helps them shape the services delivered in their communities.

Access to Information
Wealden District Council acknowledges that the provision of appropriate information is a key milestone in the promotion of equalities and diversity and the Council is committed to ensuring that all information it produces is accessible to all members of the community.

We recognise that some sections of the public may not enjoy equality of opportunity in access to information and we will continue reviewing our methods of communication. We seek to raise awareness of services available to residents and look for new ways to improve communication with a range of diverse communities, including those that we have traditionally found hard to reach.

The main access points for information on the Council services are as follows:

- The Council website www.wealden.gov.uk
- The Council Offices - Crowborough 01892 653311 or Hailsham 01323 443322
- Community Help Points:- Uckfield library and Heathfield library
- Public Information Points at 17 locations around the district.
- Community and Voluntary sector organisations

Translation and Interpretation
We offer translation and interpretation services for people who communicate in a language other than English and services for people who have sensory impairment, learning difficulty or limited reading ability.
7. Monitoring Performance

Annual Review of the Scheme

On an annual basis we will publish a report containing a summary of the steps taken to fulfil our priority objectives, the results of the information gathered in this time period and what action we will take as a result. This will form part of an annual review on all equality work and will be reported to Members and published on the Council’s website.

The Wealden Equality Scheme will be reviewed every three years and will take into account the information gathered to date, the results of impact assessments and any feedback from stakeholders on the effectiveness of the preceding scheme.

This scheme will be published on the Wealden District Council website and available in a hard copy or alternative format.

We will implement the actions identified to gather and use information to meet our equality objectives.