

Equalities Policy

Ashford Borough Council

June 2026

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1. Policy Statement

- 1.1. Ashford is a growing and increasingly diverse borough. Our communities are made up of people of different ages, abilities, ethnicities, faiths, sexual orientations, and social and economic backgrounds. We value this diversity and see it as a strength.
- 1.2. The council is committed to ensuring that everyone who lives, works, visits, or does business in Ashford is treated fairly, with dignity and respect. Our aspiration is for a borough where everyone can thrive, feel included, and share in its prosperity.
- 1.3. We will lead by example, work in partnership with others, listen to our residents, and act on feedback. By embedding equality, diversity, and inclusion into all that we do, we will remove barriers, tackle discrimination, and create a more welcoming and caring borough.
- 1.4. This policy sets out our responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010, explains how we will meet them, and identifies our equality objectives for the coming years. It guides the work of councillors, employees, contractors, and partners as we deliver services and shape the future of the borough.
- 1.5. The council will ensure fairness, equality and professionalism in all its dealings. We will not tolerate discrimination and indirect discrimination, harassment or victimisation based on an individual's status or perceived status with regard to any of the protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act 2010.
- 1.6. We seek to understand the causes of inequality and exclusion in the borough so that we can focus our resources on addressing them. Equality is about valuing a person 'as an equal' and treating people according to their needs and characteristics to achieve an equal or fair outcome, it's not necessarily about treating everyone the same. We recognise that some of our employees and service users may, through their protected characteristics, face additional challenges in workplace and service user capacities.
- 1.7. We also recognise the intersectionality of discrimination. The interaction of these protected characteristics can result in unique challenges and barriers to inclusion, and we consider this in our decision making.

- 1.8. We are committed to tackling racist and religious hatred, xenophobia, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny, ableism, and all other forms of discrimination. We recognise the value of Council leadership in this area, including support for educational initiatives such as History Months and Awareness Days.
- 1.9. Our commitment to learning about equality, diversity and inclusion means that we strive to improve our awareness and keep up to date with the latest understandings of discrimination. We seek to consistently update our practices as a council with our improving understanding of equality so that our actions always represent our dedication to equality and fairness.

2. Scope of the Policy

- 2.1. This policy applies to all council services, staff, contractors, and agents acting or delivering services on behalf of Ashford Borough Council.

3. Relationship with Other Existing Policies

- 3.1. This policy is part of a wider framework of council policies designed to ensure consistent, effective, and high-quality service delivery across all areas. The following policies and procedures are closely linked to this policy and should be referred to where relevant:
 - a. Borough Plan 2024-2028
 - b. Safeguarding Policy
 - c. Unreasonable Conduct Policy
 - d. Anti-Social Behaviour Policy
 - e. IT, Digital and Communications Strategy
 - f. Recruitment and Employment Policies and Guidance
- 3.2. As part of the Borough Plan 2024-2028 we have adopted four Equalities Objectives, which are guiding this policy. The council is legally required to set at least one equality objective every four years to help focus attention on priority equality issues. We choose to align our objectives with our Borough Plan, which is also reviewed every four years. This helps to ensure that our equality and corporate objectives are aligned.

- 3.3. As a public body, Ashford Borough Council is subject to the Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010. Please see section 5 for more details.
- 3.4. This policy follows the guidance as set out in the Local Government Association Equality Framework for Local Government.

4. Definitions

- 4.1. The definitions below provide clarity on key terms used throughout this policy to ensure a shared understanding of the terminology used in the policy:
 - a. **Diversity:** Refers to demographic differences of a group and is commonly at team or organisational level. Often, diversity references protected characteristics in UK law: - age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership.
 - b. **Equality:** Means equal rights and opportunities are afforded to all. The 2010 Equality Act in the UK protects those with protected characteristics from direct and indirect discrimination in the workplace.
 - c. **Inclusion:** Is often defined as the extent to which everyone, regardless of their background, identity or circumstance, feels valued, accepted and supported to succeed.
 - d. **Intersectionality:** Recognises that individuals with two or more of these protected characteristics will experience unique forms of discrimination and lack of opportunity. Intersectional discrimination cannot be addressed by separating the characteristics but instead we must consider them as a whole.

5. The Public Sector Equality Duty

- 5.1. The Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') was brought into force to bring together and strengthen existing equality legislation. The Act aims to ensure that all people are treated fairly and equally in the workplace and has equal access to services.
- 5.2. As a public body, Ashford Borough Council ('the Council') is governed by the Act both as a provider of services and as an employer.

5.3. The Public Sector Equality Duty ('the Duty') came into effect in 2011 and sets out additional obligations on public bodies and others carrying out public functions. The obligations are to have due regard to:

- a. Eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- b. Advancing equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not share it; and
- c. Fostering good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

5.4. The Act extends protection from discrimination based on nine protected characteristics:

- a. **Age:** A person belonging to a particular age or range of ages.
- b. **Disability:** A person has a disability if they have a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on that person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.
- c. **Gender Reassignment:** A person has the protected characteristic of gender reassignment if the person is proposing to undergo, is undergoing, or has undergone a process (or part of a process) for the purpose of reassigning the person's sex by changing physiological or other attributes of sex.
- d. **Marriage or Civil Partnership:** Marriage is the union between two people. Same-sex couples can also have their relationship legally recognised as 'civil partnerships'.
- e. **Pregnancy or Maternity:** Pregnancy is the condition of being pregnant or expecting a baby. Maternity refers to the period after the birth and is linked to maternity leave in the employment context. In the non-work context, protection against maternity discrimination is for 26 weeks after giving birth, and this includes treating a person unfavourably because she is breastfeeding.
- f. **Race:** Refers to the protected characteristic of race. It refers to a group of people defined by their race, colour, and nationality (including citizenship), ethnic or national origins.
- g. **Religion or Belief:** Religion refers to any religion, including a lack of religion. Belief refers to any religious or philosophical belief and includes a lack of belief. Generally, a belief should affect your life choices or the way you live for it to be included in the definition.
- h. **Sex:** A reference to a person who has a particular protected characteristic is a reference to a man or a woman.
- i. **Sexual Orientation:** Whether a person's sexual attraction is towards their own sex, the opposite sex or to both sexes.

6. Intersectionality

- 6.1. We recognise that people's lives and identities are shaped by the interaction of multiple social categories, such as race, gender, disability, age, and socio-economic status. These categories do not exist in isolation but overlap, creating unique experiences and, at times, multiple layers of disadvantage. Structural inequalities often emerge from these interactions, which can result in barriers that are different from those faced when considering each category on its own.
- 6.2. Our approach to equality therefore takes intersectionality into account. This means:
 - a. **Holistic Analysis:** We do not prioritise one inequality over another but consider how different characteristics combine to affect people's opportunities and experiences.
 - b. **Awareness of Power Dynamics:** We reflect on how power, privilege, and lived experience can shape the development, delivery, and evaluation of our policies and services.
 - c. **Contextualisation:** We ensure evidence and data are considered alongside the historical and present-day realities of inequality.
- 6.3. By embedding an intersectional approach in our decision-making, we aim to deliver more inclusive, fair, and responsive services that reflect the complexity of people's lives.

7. Our Borough in Context

- 7.1. This section is informed by the 2021 Census data and the [Census Analysis](#) and [Local Indicators](#) from the Office for National Statistics (ONS). Together, these sources provide an up-to-date picture of Ashford and the changes shaping our communities.
- 7.2. Ashford is a borough that continues to grow and change rapidly. Between 2011 and 2021 our population increased by 12.5%, from around 118,000 to 132,700 people. This was a faster rate of growth than both the South East (7.5%) and England (6.6%) as a whole. More recent estimates suggest our population continues to rise each year.

- 7.3. As our population grows, so does its diversity. The proportion of residents identifying as from minority ethnic backgrounds has doubled since 2011, now standing at around 12%, with the largest increases among people of Southern Asian heritage. The borough is also home to an increasing number of residents who identify as LGBTQIA+ (2.6%) and people with disabilities (6.9%). Religious affiliation is changing too, with a significant rise in those stating they have no religion, reflecting broader national trends.
- 7.4. We are also an economically diverse borough, as shown in the recent [English Indices of Deprivation 2025](#). 8 of our 81 neighbourhoods are among the 20% most income deprived in England, with 3 of those in the 10% most income deprived. Whereas 15 neighbourhoods are in the 20% least deprived, with 2 of those in the 10% least deprived. This borough disparity is also seen when examining the Index of Multiple Deprivation, which measures data across several forms of deprivation, such as crime, education, housing, and others. Alongside this, the borough has an ageing population, with the proportion of residents aged 65 and over set to grow significantly in the coming decades.
- 7.5. Ashford's location and connectivity also play a major role in shaping its future. With high-speed rail links to London and continued development across the borough, Ashford has become an attractive place to live for people commuting to the capital as well as for those moving here from other parts of the UK and abroad. This trend has brought new cultures, skills, and experiences to our communities, adding to the richness of borough life.
- 7.6. These social, cultural, and economic changes highlight our responsibility to ensure that our services remain accessible, inclusive, and responsive to everyone who calls Ashford home. The borough's future is one of increasing diversity, and this presents us with both opportunities and challenges as we continue to build a fair and caring community.

Commented [CH1]: Can you check this as the latest deprivation list has come out this week.

Commented [TA2R1]: Updated.

8. Ashford's Successes

- 8.1. As a council we have made considerable strides in advancing equality and inclusion not only within borough, but also in our services and organisation as a whole. Moreover, Ashford as a borough council continuously expresses support for advancing equality through several community run projects that promote diversity and inclusion. These actions demonstrate a strong commitment to equality, and act as a foundation to build upon as our borough seeks to lead by

example.

8.2. Some examples of activity led either directly by our communities, by us, or with support from us are provided below:

8.2.1. The dedicated refugee resettlement team at Ashford Borough Council offer inclusive and wide-reaching support to individuals and families under the various resettlement schemes. The team demonstrate their commitment to inclusion and removal of barriers in the comprehensive package of support they offer, including housing services, healthcare arrangements and language classes. They also organise social events to connect families on the scheme, such as the Resettlement Fun Day and Women's events. The support offered by our award-winning resettlement team helps families find their footing to live an independent and fulfilling life. We continue to prioritise long-term integration and community relations through the improvement and delivery of these schemes.

Commented [CH3]: Has this been recently updated? Have you checked with housing what work they are currently doing? The award was quite a long time ago.

8.2.2. Ashford celebrated its first Pride in June 2024 and held a second annual celebration in 2025. Pride allows a safe space for individual expression where all can be welcomed, we recognise the importance of demonstrating solidarity with the LGBTQIA+ community here in Ashford. As a council, we are proud supporters of Pride Ashford and the work they do in fostering the celebration of diversity within the community.

Commented [CH4]: What terminology does Pride use? I can check with Heather if you can find

8.2.3. The community-led Ashford multicultural forum provides a space specifically for underrepresented groups in the community. The forum provides the opportunity to raise awareness of issues, promote community events and improve local relations.

Commented [AS5]: This isn't a council led forum so may be better to just refer to as Ashford multicultural forum

8.2.4. In our commitment to extending inclusion for public spaces, we conducted an Accessibility Audit of the Town Centre in 2023. This sets out informed recommendations to improve usability and fair access that guides our strategy and priorities in development.

8.2.5. We provide high quality face-to-face training in equality diversity and inclusion for all our staff and councillors. This ensures that we all have the knowledge and understanding to appropriately target areas of concern and meet the needs of our diverse community.

- 8.2.6. We are committed to reducing barriers to access and communication, we aim to meet all requirements including multiple formats (such as Braille, large font and SignLive technology). This is a free service that connects users with professional interpreters.
- 8.2.7. The council's recent move to International House provided an opportunity to improve the accessibility of our workplace both for employees and in the civic space.

9. Equalities Objectives

- 9.1. Our Equality Objectives were adopted as part of our Borough Plan 2024-2028. This allows for our approach to equalities to be considered at the most strategic of levels. When we are setting our aims and objectives for the borough, we are also ensuring they complement our equalities objective and vice versa.

Equalities Objective 1: Improve our understanding of our diverse communities and make it easy for all residents to have a say in decisions about local services.

Why This Matters

- 9.2. Understanding the people that live and work in the borough and those that visit it allows us to better anticipate and meet their needs. Ashford is increasingly diverse, and we must recognise this by offering services that are responsive to local needs. Improving our knowledge of our community gives our work greater direction and focus, leading to better outcomes for all. This also ensures we are using our resources in the best possible way.

Our Next Steps

- 9.3. We will improve our understanding of the community through the continued collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative information. This is used to inform the decisions we take about service delivery. We share our improved understanding of the needs of people with different characteristics within our communities to Members and officers through training.

- 9.4. We also seek to improve our understanding through increased engagement with residents. This ensures a thorough understanding of how our proposals may affect different people in different ways. We will implement findings from consultations into our services to increase customer satisfaction.
- 9.5. We will continue to develop community engagement schemes such as the Citizens' Panel, to hear from residents about a wide range of issues. Furthermore, we seek to improve accessibility and inclusivity of local democratic arrangements, including council meetings, civic life and mayoralty.

Accountability

- 9.6. We will measure our progress with understanding the community by monitoring the use of data from the borough profile and consultations in Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs).

Equalities Objective 2: Deliver inclusive services so every resident can live a healthy, fulfilling life.

Why This Matters

- 9.7. All our residents are equally important to us. Our services should be equally accessible and responsive to local needs, so that we can increase equality outcomes for all.
- 9.8. Our Borough Plan 2024-28 sets out our objectives and how we will deliver them over the lifetime of the plan. Understanding the impacts of new initiatives or service changes on protected groups will enable us to define actions to reduce negative impacts and increase positive outcomes.
- 9.9. Within our Borough Plan we demonstrate our commitment to being a listening council. Our primary purpose is to serve the Ashford community. We will make best use of available resources to put the heart back into our town. The health, safety and wellbeing of everyone is central to our thinking as we strive to create a place in which both families and business can thrive. We endeavour to always put our people first and collaborate with the community to consistently improve our services.

Our Next Steps

- 9.10. In delivering the best for our people we must ensure we take opportunities for engaging with communities in projects and service design are not missed through the completion of considered and targeted Equality Impact Assessments. In keeping a record of how decisions are reached, it helps us to show we have considered the impact on service users of any decision we take and actions we take to ensure the needs of our community are met. We also listen carefully to customer feedback and review this to improve our approach to equalities.
- 9.11. The annual Tenant Satisfaction Measure survey results provide us with the opportunity to understand the perception of our tenants about satisfaction across all Housing service areas. This regular direct feedback from tenants ensures that we understand what we are doing well and where improvements might need to be made, the results will feed into a continuous improvement service plan, and tenants will be updated of our progress against this plan on a regular basis. In addition, we are committed to meeting the needs of our tenants who have disclosed that they have a vulnerability or disability, information that has been gained through our tenant profile and our stock condition surveys.
- 9.12. The Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard ensures social housing providers operate openly, treat tenants fairly, and enable tenants to influence decisions and hold landlords accountable. One of the six core outcomes of this standard is centred on equitable service delivery, which is landlords using data and information to understand tenants' diverse needs and ensure fair access to housing and service. The Housing Service is committed to collecting, verifying and regularly updating key tenant profile data for all our tenants on an annual basis, to ensure that we know our tenants and we meet the expectations of this standard, providing an accessible, fair and equitable high quality housing service, this work has commenced from March 2026. This data will help shape how we adapt our services and communications by taking into account our tenants' needs
- 9.13. We will continue to use our expanded community events grant scheme to support events that foster positive relations between communities, building on the success of Pride Ashford in 2024 and 2025 and support for other community initiatives, such as the Nepalese community football day funded through the Capital Grants Fund.

- 9.14. Working with our health partners to nurture a health alliance for Ashford which delivers public health priorities tailored to our local needs.

Accountability

- 9.15. Community engagement can be measured through public participation levels at council meetings, participation of underrepresented groups in consultations and the uptake of our BSL translation service.
- 9.16. Inclusivity of our services can be measured through our continued use of EIAs, monitoring participation of under-represented groups in council run consultations, and feedback given to customer services.

Equalities Objective 3: Listen carefully to customer feedback to make sure their needs are met, and services are accessible and improved for all.

Why This Matters

- 9.17. Active participation in local democracy and within communities builds relationships, improves accountability and gives residents a chance to influence and shape decisions that affect their daily lives.
- 9.18. Active participation will also improve our understanding of our diverse community through the inclusion of more varied voices in consultations. This will inform our decision making, ensuring that all our services are accessible and tailored to local needs.

Our Next Steps

- 9.19. Building on the investments we've made in technology to increase participation in council meetings. Increasing accessibility can help to attract a diverse councillor membership and encourage people to attend meetings. Attending meetings online can help people such as those with caring responsibility to be involved in the democratic process.
- 9.20. Consultations provide the opportunity for people to have their say on how services are run and ensure we are targeting our resources in the right way. We are aiming to increase accessibility of our consultations by providing printed

Commented [AS6]: Could one action we consider is aim to adopt accessible versions of consultations?

versions and taking consultation responses verbally. We also aim to further develop ways of engaging individuals and communities with the work we do. This encourages a collaborative approach to service design, where all voices within the community can be heard and understood.

- 9.21. We will always consider accessibility and inequalities at the offset of project delivery and service design. Our accessibility audit was commissioned to inform future projects that take place in the town centre.
- 9.22. Accessibility will remain at the heart of our continuing digital journey. Our website is key to delivering this as we strive to make it as accessible as possible for people to use. Whilst our digital offer makes services more accessible for many people, we provide alternative solutions when this is not the case and make steps to improve digital literacy. For example, we will continue to offer PCs with assistance in our reception area. We will also continue promoting how to access translation services and providing alternative formats including easy read, alternative languages braille and SignLive.
- 9.23. Listen to what our customers tell through our complaints process, capture the lessons and consider what we can do to change how we do things to best serve our people.
- 9.24. We also seek to improve the visibility of cultural events and celebrations within our community. We recognise the importance of events that bring communities together, and we aim to increase tolerance, respect and understanding through our Festivals and Events Framework.

Accountability

- 9.25. To monitor our progress for this objective, we will monitor the use of EIAs and their outcomes, track equality related complaints and collect customer feedback on our services.

Equalities Objective 4: Continue to develop an inclusive and diverse workplace that reflects the communities we serve.

Why This Matters

- 9.26. Everyone is entitled to a working environment that promotes dignity, equality and respect for all.
- 9.27. Creating a culture of inclusivity will help to attract retain talent and increase the diversity of the organisation. A diverse organisation that is representative of the borough it serves, helps to ensure a broad range of experiences, ways of working and perspectives to inform the services we design and deliver. We recognise how important mandatory training in equalities, diversity and inclusion is for all our employees and Members in delivering organisational change.

Our Next Steps

- 9.28. New ways of working, including remote working, have shown us the great potential for making the council a more accessible and inclusive workplace. We want to build on what we have learnt and ensure the positive impacts continue as we move forward with a hybrid way of working.
- 9.29. All staff are required to complete regular training to help create a welcoming environment. This training is vital in maintaining a culture of respect and ensuring that all our members and staff are familiar with the types of discrimination so that we retain our diversity. We seek to regularly build upon and update our training materials as our understanding of equality and discrimination improves.
- 9.30. Hybrid working arrangements could be credited with our gender pay gap reduction, and this will be continued and expanded where possible to remove barriers to employment and career opportunities.
- 9.31. We will continue to review our policies, provide safe and welcoming spaces and take suggestions from staff so that different viewpoints are both heard and understood.

Accountability

- 9.32. We collect and publish equality data on diversity within our workforce, alongside the analysis of staff survey results which feedback on our approach to equalities. We also monitor completion rates of our training courses.

10. Accessibility and Equalities

- 10.1. The council will make reasonable adjustments for individuals where appropriate under the Equality Act 2010. A record of any agreed adjustments will be maintained, and these adjustments will be regularly reviewed to ensure they remain effective.
- 10.2. This Equalities Policy will be available as a downloadable document on the [Equalities page of our website](#) and can be provided in alternative formats or languages upon request including large print, Braille or audiotape. Assistance will be provided to any complainant needing help to access or understand this policy.

11. Policy Review

- 11.1. The council commit to undertaking formal review of this policy at least once every four years and communicate changes across the council.
- 11.2. This policy will be reviewed periodically to ensure compliance with current legislation, and best practices.

Owner	Policy and Performance
Last Review Date	03 June 2026 (v2.0)