

Equalities Guidance Note for Community Councils in Midlothian

Introduction

Equalities in relation to Community Councils is about ensuring fair treatment and the participation of all sections of the community. The Scheme for the Establishment of Community Councils in Midlothian (2025) notes that consideration must also be given by the Community Council as to their meeting place, whether online or in-person. This must be in terms of accessibility and facilities for disabled users, as well as location, as far as practicable, to ensure that the needs of all members, visiting public or other additional members are met.

This guide is to help you in meeting the equalities duties and gives some advice.

What is Equalities Legislation?

The Equality Act 2010 is the main piece of legislation and has been developed to provide people with fairer opportunities and better public services. The way in which we achieve this is to consider and evidence our due regard to the general duties set out in the act.

The general duties are:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, or any other prohibited conduct
- Advance the equality of opportunity
- Foster good relations by reducing prejudice and promoting understanding

The act also identifies nine protected characteristics.

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

What does the legislation do?

The legislation requires us to consider how we can meet the general duties it sets out and outlaws' direct discrimination against people with the identified protected characteristics. The legislation also aims to combat indirect discrimination that is often unintentional and can be difficult to detect.

What does this actually mean?

As a Community Council you are bound by equality legislation and must ensure that.

- membership is open to all
- the Community Council is representative of the local population
- the workings of your Community Council are conducted in a way that does not exclude any group
- equalities are central to your work
- your working practices preclude any unfair disadvantage

The Practice of Equalities

It is impossible to provide a good service and ignore the equality dimension. Equality adds quality! The following are some of the practical steps you can take to ensure that equality and rights are embedded in the practices of your Community Council.

- Find out the make-up of your area
- Examine who actually attends your meetings. Is it representative or are there areas of under representation such as ethnic minorities, young people etc.
- Ask yourself how much you know about the community and how you can increase your understanding
- Examine how you conduct your meetings and ask yourself whether this could pose barriers e.g. times of meetings, venues, facilities
- Be aware of communication problems and be able to overcome these e.g. deafness through the use of interpreters/signers
- Tackle unacceptable behaviour in your meetings such as racism, homophobia etc
- Make a positive unambiguous statement that all are welcome to participate and advertise prominently
- Consider co-opting, should a particular protected characteristic be missing
- Examine the issues that come up and check on whether any issue particularly affects an equality group and try to ensure that this group is encouraged to attend
- Check that your business does reflect the concerns of the community or do an assertive minority dominate the agenda
- Consider how you could measure how you are doing in terms of reaching your community and report on this in your annual report.