

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy

1. Introduction

Equality, diversity, and inclusion are at the heart of Healthwatch Worcestershire's values.

This policy is underpinned by the Equality Act 2010, which outlines the legal framework for creating a fair and more equal society. This vital piece of legislation protects people's rights in law and keeps all of us from unfair treatment and discrimination.

As an organisation whose sole purpose is to give a strong and powerful voice to people who often go unheard, the Equality Act sets the minimum standards for our work. We believe that everyone should have fair and equal access to health and social care. We recognise that some people and communities face compounding layers of disadvantage and discrimination, and we will ensure that our approach reflects these intersecting inequalities that people face. We are committed to preventing and challenging discrimination and inequality in all our functions.

2. Our approach

Our approach is more important than ever. The Covid-19 pandemic illuminated the different and disproportionate impact that the disease had on people with protected characteristics under the Equality Act. We will continue to learn from these inequalities and ensure that our work actively seeks to mitigate them.

We will design our programmes of work to meet the diverse needs of the population we represent and challenge inequality in the following ways. We will:

- Build an evidence base that more accurately represents the diversity of the communities we serve
- Involve and consult with individuals and groups with lived experience of discrimination or disadvantage.
- Develop local Healthwatch services through local and regional partnerships where appropriate.
- Conduct appropriate and proportionate Equality Impact Assessments
- Provide fearless but constructive challenge to systems, policies and practices where necessary

3. Embedding Equality, Diversity and Inclusion across our work

The Equality Act underpins our approach and our commitment to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, and victimisation
- Advance equality of opportunity

- Foster good relations

At Healthwatch Worcestershire we need to understand the effect of our policies and practices on equality and consider their impact on the whole population.

Protected characteristics under the Equality Act, are:

- Age
- Disability (including neurodiversity and mental health conditions)
- Gender reassignment
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race (including ethnic or national origins, colour or nationality)
- Religion or belief (or no belief)
- Sex (men and women)
- Sexual orientation
- Marriage and civil partnership (only regarding discrimination)

We also recognise

Some individuals experience multiple and intersecting inequalities

Caring responsibilities, whilst not a statutory protected characteristic, but carers experience significant barriers in health and social care

Socioeconomic status and poverty strongly influence health inequalities and we will target our activity at those geographical neighbourhoods with the most acute health inequalities

A. Influencing

- EDI will be embedded in all influencing work and business priorities.
- All projects will be considered through an equalities lens to highlight excluded voices.
- We will analyse our evidence to identify disproportionate impacts and use this to create concrete recommendations.
- We will hold commissioners, providers and partners accountable for meeting their Public Sector Equality Duty.
- We will challenge decisions that risk creating or worsening inequalities.

B. Research and Insight

- We will proactively ensure our work captures the experiences of people with protected characteristics and disadvantaged communities.
- Where gaps exist, we will undertake targeted engagement to ensure their voices are heard.
- We will use additional data sources to build a comprehensive understanding of inequality.

C. Communication

- Communications will be inclusive, accessible and representative of diverse communities.
- We will actively provide a platform for seldom-heard voices.
- We will use diverse communication methods, including Easy Read, British Sign Language (BSL), translated materials, and formats accessible to people who are digitally excluded.

4. Our responsibility as an employer

A. Recruitment and Selection

- Recruitment and selection will be fair, transparent, and based on merit.
- Job descriptions and criteria will be objective, essential, and justifiable.
- Vacancies will be advertised to reach all sections of the community.
- We will monitor recruitment by ethnicity, sex, disability, sexual orientation, religion and age (voluntary, anonymised, and separated from selection).

B. Workplace Culture

- We will foster a culture that values differences and enables everyone to thrive.
- Inclusivity will encourage innovation, creativity and effectiveness.
- All staff will be supported to achieve their potential.

C. Management Responsibilities

- All management actions (recruitment, training, performance, progression, pay, etc.) will comply with this policy.
- Managers will lead by example, model inclusive behaviours, and raise EDI in 1:1s, team meetings and appraisals.
- Managers will ensure diversity training is provided:
 - at induction,
 - on an ongoing basis, and
 - when specific training needs are identified.
- A **zero-tolerance approach** will be taken to discrimination. Breaches will be challenged robustly and managed under the Dignity at Work or Disciplinary policies.

D. Role of Staff, Directors and Volunteers

- This policy applies to all staff, Directors, volunteers, interns, agency and temporary staff.
- Everyone is expected to demonstrate inclusive behaviour and treat others with respect.
- Training is mandatory, and all are expected to challenge discrimination and report concerns.

E. Induction and Training

- All staff, Directors and volunteers will receive EDI training at induction.
- Training will be refreshed **regularly (at least every three years)** and updated in line with best practice.

F. Failure to Comply

- Minor breaches will be dealt with through management intervention.
- Serious breaches will be managed under Dignity at Work or Disciplinary procedures.

5. Audit & Review

This policy applies to all staff, Directors, volunteers, stakeholders, partners, subcontractors and suppliers.

- The policy will be reviewed every two years, or sooner if required by legislative, organisational or operational changes.
- It will be subject to Equality Impact Assessment under the Public Sector Equality Duty.
- We will publish a summary of EDI progress annually for transparency and accountability

Document Details & Version Control

Version	Comments /Reason for Amendments	Lead Director	Author / Editor	Date	Review by
0.1	Draft	MG	MR/SJ	10/20	
1.0	Approved	MG	MR/SJ	10/20	10/22
1.1	Review with amendments	MG	MR/SJ	05/23	
2.0	Approved	MG	MR/SJ	05/23	05/25
2.1	Review with amendments	DL	MR/SJ	06.25	
2.2	Comprehensive review of text by JN	JN	MR/SJ	09.25	
3.0	Approved at CBM 18.9.25	JN	MR/SJ	09.25	09.27