



**Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty: Implementation Plan
Implementation Frame
Meath County Council**

April 2021

1. Introduction

The public sector equality and human rights duty (the Duty) requires public bodies to have regard, in carrying out all their functions, to the need to eliminate discrimination, promote equality, and protect human rights for service-users and staff. This document sets out the frame within which Meath County Council is implementing this Duty: the Equality and Human Rights Values Statement and the assessment of equality and human rights issues relevant to its functions.

This frame is focused on the diversity of service-users and staff across the identified groups for the Duty:

- groups covered by the nine grounds under the equality legislation: gender (including gender identity); civil status; family status (including lone parents and carers); age (young and older people); disability; sexual orientation; race (Black and minority ethnic people); religion and belief; and membership of the Traveller community; and
- groups encompassed by the ground of socio-economic status, those who are at risk of or experiencing poverty and exclusion.

It reflects that people hold more than one identity and are part of more than one of the identified groups, keeping a focus on intersectionality in its implementation.

This frame includes the following tools to support implementation of the Duty:

- Equality and human rights values statement;
- Assessment of equality and human rights issues; and
- Checklist for implementing the Duty in development/review of plans, programmes, policies and procedures.

2. Equality and Human Rights Values Statement

This values statement underpins the values-led approach of Meath County Council to implementing the Duty. It reflects and reinforces our organisational culture, that is committed to eliminating discrimination, achieving equality, and fulfilling human rights for service users, policy beneficiaries, and staff.

Our Equality and Human Rights Values

Dignity

Inclusion

Social Justice

Democracy

Autonomy

Values in Practice

Dignity is about the human worth and integrity of all individuals, respect and equal treatment for all regardless of difference, and being person centred.

Statement of Priority: Meath County Council works to be a champion and exemplar for, and set a standard in, creating an environment of quality relationships based on human worth and individual integrity, both at community level and in its workplace.

Statement of Process: Meath County Council works in a manner that all service users and staff are treated equally and with respect, where each individual is valued, and particular attention is given to those most excluded in society.

Inclusion is about integration and recognition of difference. It concerns community, social cohesion, flexibility in adapting to the diversity of needs, and securing a focus on the most excluded.

Statement of Priority: Meath County Council works to advance more inclusive communities and workplace, encouraging and enabling the participation of groups experiencing inequality.

Statement of Process: Meath County Council works in a manner that engages with and acknowledges the diversity of groups in society, and makes adaptations to respond to the needs that arise from this diversity of service users and staff.

Social Justice is about the elimination of poverty and the equal distribution of resources, such as employment and public goods and services. It concerns quality of life, wellbeing, and opportunities to participate fully in society.

Statement of Priority: Meath County Council strives to provide opportunities and achieve outcomes for a diversity of groups in its employment and from its service provision, and to advance fair and just relations in the wider society.

Statement of Process: Meath County Council works in a manner that targets resources on, provides opportunities to, and implements positive actions for those experiencing inequality.

Democracy is about voice, having a say, being heard, and contributing to decision-making. It concerns transparency, accountability, and empowerment. It includes the choice to speak up or not to do so.

Statement of Priority: Meath County Council works to promote and encourage strong community leadership and organisation, and to empower the individual and collective voice for a diversity of groups.

Statement of Process: Meath County Council works in a manner that enables meaningful participation in decision-making processes, with these processes characterised by clarity, engagement and accountability.

Autonomy is about self-determination, and having and making choices. It includes the right to act in one's own interests, free from coercion, having regard to the rights of others.

Statement of Priority: Meath County Council works to ensure groups experiencing inequality have meaningful choices based on real options, in service provision and employment, within the bounds of available resources.

Statement of Process: Meath County Council works in a manner that enables informed choices for groups experiencing inequality, and supports their access to real options on foot of these choices.

Using the Statement

Meath County Council will use this equality and human rights values statement in implementing the three steps of the Duty: assessment of equality and human rights issues; addressing these issues in plans and policies; and reporting on progress.

Meath County Council will engage staff and a wider public with the values set out in this equality and human rights values statement through its internal and external communications, its induction and staff training, and its publications.

3. Assessment of Equality and Human Rights Issues

An assessment of equality and human rights issues involves identification of the issues faced by the identified groups for the Duty:

- Groups at risk of poverty and social exclusion; and
- Groups covered by the nine grounds under equality legislation: gender (including gender identity), civil status, family status (including lone parents, carers), age, sexual orientation, disability, race, religion, and membership of the Traveller community.

This assessment enables Meath County Council to track its current responses to these issues and to further develop and expand these responses as found to be necessary. This assessment is the first step required under the Duty, with subsequent steps making use of this assessment to ensure that the issues identified are adequately and appropriately addressed.

The assessment addresses all the functions of Meath County Council as:

- provider of range of services;
- employer;
- corporate affairs; and
- agent of social, economic, cultural and environmental development.

Unless identified otherwise the issues below are relevant to all four functions.

Assessment of Equality and Human Rights Issues

Dignity is about the human worth and integrity of all individuals, respect and equal treatment for all regardless of difference, and being person centred.

Equality and human rights issues faced by the identified groups, related to dignity, that have a relevance for the functions of Meath County Council are:

- Prejudice and attitudinal barriers for people across the identified groups.
- Stereotypes, stigma, hate speech, and hate crime across the identified groups.
- Discrimination in employment and service provision across the identified groups
- Bullying and harassment at work, in education, in service provision, and in areas of residence across the identified groups.
- Violence and intimidation, including gender-based violence, abuse of older people, child abuse, and fears and experiences of violence in public spaces (in particular for LGBTI+ people).
- Victimisation as a result of challenging discrimination, harassment or other failures to live out this value of dignity.
- Breach of privacy and data confidentiality.

- Expectations held across the identified groups, of discrimination and harassment and barriers to employment, education, and service provision that arise from these.

Inclusion is about integration and recognition of difference. It concerns community, social cohesion, flexibility in adapting to the diversity of needs, and securing a focus on the most excluded

Equality and human rights issues faced by the identified groups, related to inclusion, that have a relevance for the functions of Meath County Council are:

- Isolation, vulnerability, loneliness, and fear of crime – *service provision, corporate affairs, and development functions.*
- Invisibility for diversity in the workplace, internal and external communications, and service provision settings, and in terms of people feeling unable to be open about their personal identity at work or in the community.
- Barriers to access services due to design, manner of delivery, and inflexibilities in meeting specific needs across the identified groups – *service provision, corporate affairs and development functions.*
- Barriers to employment and career progression due to inflexibility and design of work processes across the identified groups, including absence of gradual or flexible retirement options for older people – *employment, corporate affairs and development functions.*
- Lack of universal design, in particular for buildings, public spaces, and IT infrastructure.
- Barriers of communication, including issues such as lack of interpretation and translation and lack of accessible formats and media.
- Lack of understanding, awareness, and recognition of diversity among employers, service providers, and decision-makers.
- Absence of work-life balance, lack of affordable, quality, and accessible childcare, unequal sharing of caring responsibilities, and lack of adequate and appropriate supports for carers.
- Lack of attention to the specific needs of people at the intersections between the identified groups.

Social Justice is about the elimination of poverty and the equal distribution of resources, such as employment and public goods and services. It concerns quality of life, wellbeing, and opportunities to participate fully in society.

Equality and human rights issues faced by the identified groups, related to social justice, that have a relevance for the functions of Meath County Council are:

- Homelessness, time spent in emergency accommodation, lack of appropriate supports for those experiencing homelessness, overcrowded accommodation, lack of social housing, and inadequacy of rent supplement – *service provision and development functions.*
- Housing insecurity, poor quality housing conditions, access barriers due to housing design or lack of adaptation, and lack of appropriate accommodation, including lack of culturally appropriate accommodation, and barriers to transition from and out of direct provision into independent living – *service provision and development functions.*

- Unemployment and long-term unemployment across the identified groups, being 'Not in Employment, Education or Training', and unplanned early retirement (older people) – *development function*.
- Low participation rates in employment and employment gaps, and lack of progression within employment for the identified groups, underemployment, lack of recognition of qualifications gained abroad, and lack of presence for diversity in the workplace – *employment, corporate affairs, and development functions*.
- Occupational segregation that is vertical in terms of management, and horizontal in terms of fields of work, across the identified groups – *employment, corporate affairs, and development functions*..
- Precarious work, unsafe work experienced across the identified groups and exploitation - *development function*.
- Low pay across the identified groups, and gender pay gap and pension gap – *employment, corporate affairs and development function*.
- Poverty and high risk of poverty, across the identified groups and in identified areas of deprivation, and including in-work poverty and fuel poverty – *service provision, corporate affairs and development function*.
- Health inequalities in all areas and their social determinants across the identified groups, in particular mental health – *service provision, corporate affairs and development function*.
- Educational disadvantage, early school leaving, low expectations, literacy, limited participation in early childhood, and limited participation in adult learning across the identified groups – *development function*.
- Participation barriers due to digital literacy issues, digital access issues across the identified groups.
- Participation barriers due to limited transport availability or accessibility across the identified groups – *development function*.
- Barriers to access to social, economic and cultural development funding due to inability to meet criteria and lack of appropriate supports to do so for individuals and organisations across the identified groups – *development function*.
- Disproportionate impact of climate change on the identified groups - *service provision, corporate affairs and development function*.

Democracy is about voice, having a say, being heard, and contributing to decision-making. It concerns transparency, accountability, and empowerment. It includes for the choice to speak up or not to do so.

Equality and human rights issues faced by the identified groups, related to democracy, that have a relevance for the functions of Meath County Council are:

- Lack of consultation, not being heard or being misinterpreted in consultation, and false equivalence of interests in consultation, at work and in relation to service provision across the identified groups – *employment and service provision functions*.
- Lack of opportunities to voice perspectives and lack of influence on decision-making across the identified groups.
- Lack of representation in political arenas and in decision-making fora, across the identified groups.
- Lack of capacity, including resources and organisation, to effectively represent the voice of identified groups.

- Absence of the voice of organisations of people from within the identified groups in consultation and decision-making fora.
- Lack of knowledge due to inadequate information flows and inappropriate channels of communication used to reach the identified groups.
- Lack of transparency and accountability on the part of decision-makers.
- Disempowerment, absence of encouragement and fear to speak up across the identified groups.

Autonomy is about self-determination, and having and making choices. It includes the right to act in one's own interests, free from coercion, having regard to the rights of others.

Equality and human rights issues faced by the identified groups, related to autonomy, that have a relevance for the functions of Meath County Council are:

- Absence of or limited options made available in services, and in employment and career progression – *employment and service provision functions*.
- Lack of independence due to inadequate resources or legal status or inadequate supports.
- Congregated settings, direct provision, and forms of institutional care that limit choices and independence – *development function*.
- Lack of confidence and motivation in making choices, including for fear of rejection or due to internalised oppression.

4. Checklist for Implementing the Duty

The implementation of the Duty is undertaken as an integral part of the development or review of plans, programmes, policies, and procedures.

In the **preparation** for the development/review process it is useful to:

- Tailor the assessment of equality and human rights issues for use in the process by establishing, from the list under each value, those equality and human rights issues that are relevant to the particular plan, programme, policy or procedure.
- Gather any data and information available in relation to the equality and human rights issues identified as relevant.
- Review the equality and human rights values statement to extract the statements of priority (if for a plan or programme) or statements of process (if for a policy or procedure).
- Include this material in the development/review brief for the plan, programme, policy or procedure.

In the **ongoing implementation** of the development/review process it is useful to:

- Include an examination of the equality and human rights issues identified as relevant in any evaluation or review conducted of any previous plan, programme, policy or procedure, and in any surveying of the context for the plan, programme, policy or procedure.
- Transmit the obligations under the Duty to any external consultants contracted and ensure they are fully briefed and engaged in its requirements.
- Track the value statements and the equality and human rights issues identified as relevant to ensure they are responded to as part of the development/review process.

- Identify and communicate any new equality and human rights issues coming to your attention that have not been caught in the assessment tool developed.

In the **final draft stage** of the development/review process it is useful to:

- Convene a meeting of relevant staff to check:
 - Does the draft adequately and appropriately take up and address each of the equality and human rights issues identified as relevant?
 - Does the draft adequately and appropriately progress the statement of priority/statement of process for each of the values?
 - Does the draft include any provision that might run counter to our equality and human rights values or to an effective response to the equality and human rights issues identified as relevant?
- Conduct a participative exercise, as part of this meeting or as a separate meeting, with civil society organisations representative of the identified groups to check that the equality and human rights issues are sufficiently identified and addressed. Participants would be supported to prepare for what is a technical exercise by receiving the draft in advance of the meeting. A report on the meeting would be prepared for consideration by those responsible for the plan, programme, policy or procedure and feedback on the response would be provided to participants.

In the **aftermath** of the development/review process it is useful to:

- Establish and implement systems to track progress on the equality and human rights issues identified as relevant. This would include for the development of indicators and the gathering and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data and information.
- Report annually on progress made in addressing the equality and human rights issues and advancing the statement of priority/statement of process for each of our equality and human rights values. Use this report to reflect on this progress and to strengthen the plan, programme, policy or procedure as found to be necessary.