



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

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January 2021**

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## 1. Introduction

This implementation plan has been prepared to enable compliance with the public sector equality and human rights duty (the Duty) and to give expression to Meath County Council's ambitions for equality and human rights.

It sets out the foundation from which Meath County Council will implement this Duty: the Equality and Human Rights Values Statement and the assessment of equality and human rights issues relevant to its functions. It sets out actions to create the conditions for implementing the Duty; the key moments at which the Duty will be implemented during 2021; and the manner in which Meath County Council will report on progress made under the Duty.

This plan is focused on the diversity of people 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.

## 2. Equality and Human Rights Values Statement

This 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.

## **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. The steps required under the Duty involve using this assessment to further advance equality and human rights.

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).
- Victimization 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. Creating the Conditions for Implementing the Duty**

##### **Leadership**

The CE and Senior Management Team will show leadership on the implementation of the Duty, and of this and future implementation plans for the Duty. This leadership will be to ensure an understanding of the Duty across the organisation; the incorporation of the Duty in all plans and policies; and a reflection of the Duty in organisational culture and values.

The Duty and its implementation will be on the agenda of the Senior Management Team:

- At the start of each year, to consider and approve an implementation plan.
- In the middle of each year, to consider and respond to a progress report from the working group, addressing any obstacles that might arise.
- At the end of each year, to consider and approve a report on the progress made under the Duty during the year.

A formal link will be established between the senior management team and the working group for the Duty.

##### **Structure**

Meath County Council will continue to operate a cross-organisational working group to drive and support the effective implementation of the Duty. The terms of reference for this group are to

- Prepare, **support and monitor** implementation of an annual workplan for the Duty which will identify:
  - Key moments for implementing the Duty during the year in terms of plans, programmes, processes, and policies being developed or reviewed.
  - Key plans, programmes, processes, and policies being implemented that would benefit from an equality and human rights review, based on the assessment made of equality and human rights issues and the Equality and Human Rights Values Statement.
- Support and keep under review initiatives to engage staff and service users with the values in the Equality and Human Rights Values Statement.
- Keep the assessment of equality and human rights issues and the Equality and Human Rights Values Statement under review and update as found to be necessary.
- Monitor and report to senior management on the progress made in the implementation of the duty and its impact.



- Establish and communicate good practice in Meath County Council in implementing the Duty and in addressing equality and human rights issues.

The working group will meet four times a year. These will be half-day externally facilitated meetings. They would be attended by a member of senior management.

### **Capacity**

A **skills development module** will be developed and provided each year to those responsible for the plans, programmes, processes and policies that are prioritised as key moments in the implementation plan for the Duty. This will enable them to ensure compliance with the Duty in preparing these plans, programmes, processes and policies. The module will address:

- The Duty and its requirements.
- The values-led approach to implementing the Duty.
- The foundations established for the Duty by Meath County Council.
- Conducting a participative impact assessment on plans, programmes, processes and policies to ensure they adequately
  - address the issues identified in the assessment of equality and human rights issues, and
  - give expression to the values set out in the Equality and Human Rights Values Statement.

A **values leadership module** will be developed and provided each year to those responsible for enabling an organisational culture that reflects and engages the values set out in the Equality and Human Rights Values Statement. This will support them to develop initiatives to engage staff with these values to secure an organisational culture that supports compliance with the Duty. The module will address:

- Values and how values work.
- The Equality and Human Rights Values Statement of Meath County Council
- Approaches to underpin and systems to enable a values-led organisation.
- Planning effective initiatives to engage staff members with values.

A **familiarisation module** will be developed and provided each year to management personnel to support an understanding of the Duty, its requirements and its potential for the organisation, and to enable an active participation in its implementation. The module will address the:

- Duty, its requirements, and its potential.
- ambitions and foundations established for the Duty.

### **Communication**

The ambitions and requirements of the Duty and the approach to its implementation by Meath County Council will be a focus for ongoing communication with staff. This will include:

- provision of information on the Duty and the work being done for its implementation,
- progress made on foot of implementation of the duty, and
- celebration of good practice by Meath County Council in implementing the Duty.

This work will be pursued through the Meath Connect App and the staff newsletter. It will call on the work and support of the Internal Communications Working Group.

### **Organisational Culture**

Meath County Council will engage staff with the values set out in the Equality and Human Rights Values Statement:

- Initiatives led by Corporate Services that draw from the following possible strands of activity:
  - leadership from senior management;
  - staff communications, including the staff app, the weekly newsletter, and workplace TV screens;
  - developing messaging and stories for communications;
  - communicating good practice on equality and human rights issues in Meath County Council; and
  - developing an 'ideas box' for feedback on the values and their application and ideas to strengthen this work.
- Initiatives led by Human Resources that draw from the following possible strands of activity:
  - staff induction and training programmes; and
  - a values focus in Personal Development Plans based on commitments made in the Annual Service Delivery Plan.

Meath County Council will engage a wider audience with these values, through including a focus on the Equality and Human Rights Values Statement in:

- corporate plans and annual reports; and
- annual report on implementing the Duty.

## **5. Key Moments for Implementing the Duty**

The working group will seek the support of all departments to prepare a source document listing the Meath County Council strategies, plans, and programmes in place and planned and their time frames for review and renewal; and the internal policies in place and any timescale for their review.

Key moments for implementing the Duty will be identified annually by the working group.

The Annual Services Delivery Plans and subsequent business plan will be a key moment for implementing the Duty each year, starting from the plans to be developed at the end of 2021.

Specific key moments for implementing the Duty in Meath County Council during 2021 will be determined on publication of the Business Plan for the year. Indicatively, they could include:

- Age Friendly Strategy.
- Tourism Strategy.
- Sports Strategy.

Depending on developments external to Meath County Council, they could further include:

- Local Economic and Community Plan.
- Climate Action Plan.

Those responsible for the development of the plans and strategies selected for this process will implement the 'address' step of the Duty, with support of the working group as needed. Training will be made available to enable them to implement this step effectively.

The working group, on foot of the source document developed, will further identify one strategy and two internal policies, that are already in place, to be subjected to an equality and human rights review in order to comply with the Duty. Those responsible for this strategy and these two internal policies would be supported by the working group, to conduct this equality and human rights review by assessing:

- the ongoing contribution of the strategy or internal policy, to addressing the issues identified in the assessment of equality and human rights issues, and
- the alignment of the strategy or internal policy with the values set out in the Equality and Human Rights Values Statement.

Training will be made available to enable them to implement the review effectively.

The working group will identify a number of priority service areas for which an equality and human rights review will be undertaken to strengthen their performance on equality and human rights. This equality and human rights review would involve an examination of policies, procedures, perceptions and practices in relation to that service, and preparation of a set of recommendations to enhance the equality and human rights focus in its design and delivery. It would include a service-user input and a staff input to inform the review process.

## **6. Reporting on Implementing the Duty**

The working group will prepare a report at the end of the year on the progress on implementing the Duty and on the impacts achieved through this, for consideration by the Senior Management Team and subsequent inclusion in the Annual Report.