



**Corporate Equality and Diversity Strategy**

**2007 - 2010**

**Version 1 July 2007**

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**Contents**

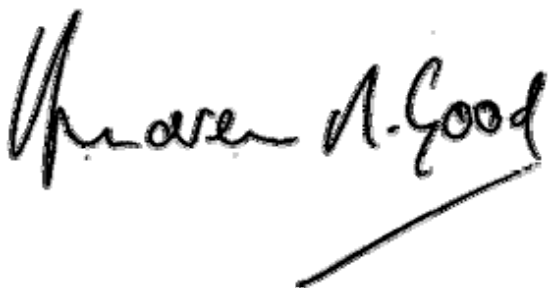
Foreword	Page 4
Introduction	Page 5
Purpose	Page 5
Valuing Diversity	Page 5
Legal Framework	Page 6
Mid Suffolk District Council Policies	Page 6
Corporate Priorities	Page 7
The Equalities Standard	Page 7
Background to the Equalities Standard	Page 7
Future Development	Page 9
Our people – Employment and Recruitment	Page 9
Employees – Roles and Responsibilities	Page 10
Our processes – Policies and Procedures	Page 10
Service Delivery	Page 10
Consultation	Page 11
Impact Assessments	Page 11
Standards and Monitoring	Page 12
Who takes responsibility	Page 12
Dedicated Resources	Page 12
What we will do	Page 13
Evaluating Equality and Diversity	Page 13
Equality Action Planning	Page 14
Outcomes	Page 14
Equality Impact Assessments	Page 15
Review of the Equality and Diversity Strategy	Page 16
Corporate Equality and Diversity Action Plan	Page 17
The Mid Suffolk Demographic (Appendix 1)	Page 20

**Foreword by Leader and Chief Executive**


Mid Suffolk District Council, as a democratically elected body, representative of all the people who live and work in Mid Suffolk, is conscious of the importance of gender equality in the discharging of its functions and in the civic leadership it provides.

The Council is fully committed to fulfilling its statutory duties under diversity legislation, and this Corporate Equality and Diversity Strategy sets out how it proposes to do so. The arrangements established by the Council within the Scheme will be proportionate to the size of the relevant part of the Council, the nature of the policies concerned and the potential impact on the public.

The Council will ensure that all elected members and employees of the Council are aware of our statutory duty and will take the lead in the Council to ensure its effective implementation.



**Andrew Good**



**Tim Passmore**

## **Introduction**

Mid Suffolk District Council are delighted to launch the first district Equality and Diversity Strategy. It represents a major step forward for the Council as it presents in one document our corporate commitment to place equality and diversity at the heart of all we do. Mid Suffolk District Council want to make a difference to the lives of people in the district and in order to do this, the Council wish to demonstrate its commitment to equality and diversity in this strategy.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this Corporate Diversity Strategy is to ensure that we have clearly outlined to our customers, employees and partners:

- How Mid Suffolk will realise its vision
- Individual roles and responsibilities
- What we understand by equality and diversity at Mid Suffolk
- The standards the Council seeks to achieve and by when
- Mechanisms for demonstrating progress and achievements
- Mechanisms for feedback, learning and involvement

## **Valuing Diversity**

The Council believes that valuing diversity means actively recognising the strengths, talents and needs of every individual and all communities. This means nurturing the potential and maximising opportunities for all our customers, employees and partners in order that they can make their unique contribution to quality of life across the district. As a large district employer and key service delivery agency, the Council is uniquely placed to realise its visions and goals for the people who live and work in Mid Suffolk.

The Council will ensure that it is accessible and productive for its customers, employees and partners, generating an environment where all contributions are valued.

The Council recognises that to achieve this, it is essential to recognise the reality of discrimination experienced by many communities, groups and individuals.

Despite developments and improvements to legal frameworks, such as the Race Relations Act and the Disability Discrimination Act, negative impacts of discrimination are still a reality for too many people and communities across the country.

Mid Suffolk District Council is clear that genuine progress is only possible if our approach to delivering our equality and diversity policies systematically seeks to challenge and eradicate unfair and institutional discrimination. Barriers faced by vulnerable groups in accessing jobs, services and life enhancing opportunities

must be removed and replaced by mechanisms to provide support and facilitation.

### **The Legal Framework**

In formulating this policy, the Council recognises and values the important role played by supporting legislation and associated Codes of Practice, in defining discrimination and mechanisms to prevent and stop inappropriate practices. The Council embraces existing and scheduled legislation as presenting opportunities to our customers, employees and partners. The relevant legislation includes:

- The Equal Pay Act 1970
- The Sex Discrimination Act 1975
- The Race Relations Act 1976 (as amended)
- The Disability Discrimination Acts 1995 and 2005
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003
- Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003
- The Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006
- The Sexual Orientation Regulations 2007

The Council is committed to meeting its statutory responsibilities to prevent discrimination and unfair treatment by fully implementing all relevant legislation and ensuring that steps have been taken to ensure that appropriate arrangements are made to meet relevant provisions.

### **Mid Suffolk District Council Policies**

Mid Suffolk District Council wholly support the concepts and practices of Equality and Diversity, both as an employer and local authority. In fulfilling the obligations created by legislation listed above, the Council has three distinct Equality schemes in operation, with associated action plans. These are as follows:

- Comprehensive Equality Scheme 2007 – 2010 (in process)
- Disability Equality Scheme 2007 – 2010
- Gender Equality Scheme 2007 – 2010

These schemes enable the Council to fulfill the responsibilities and embrace values of equality and diversity.

## Strategic Plan

Within our Strategic Plan 2007 to 2011 there are several long-term established priorities, which compliment the diversity policies. These are:

- To create safer and more cohesive communities
- To enhance community engagement
- To create more affordable and decent housing
- To promote jobs and the rural economy

## The Equalities Standard

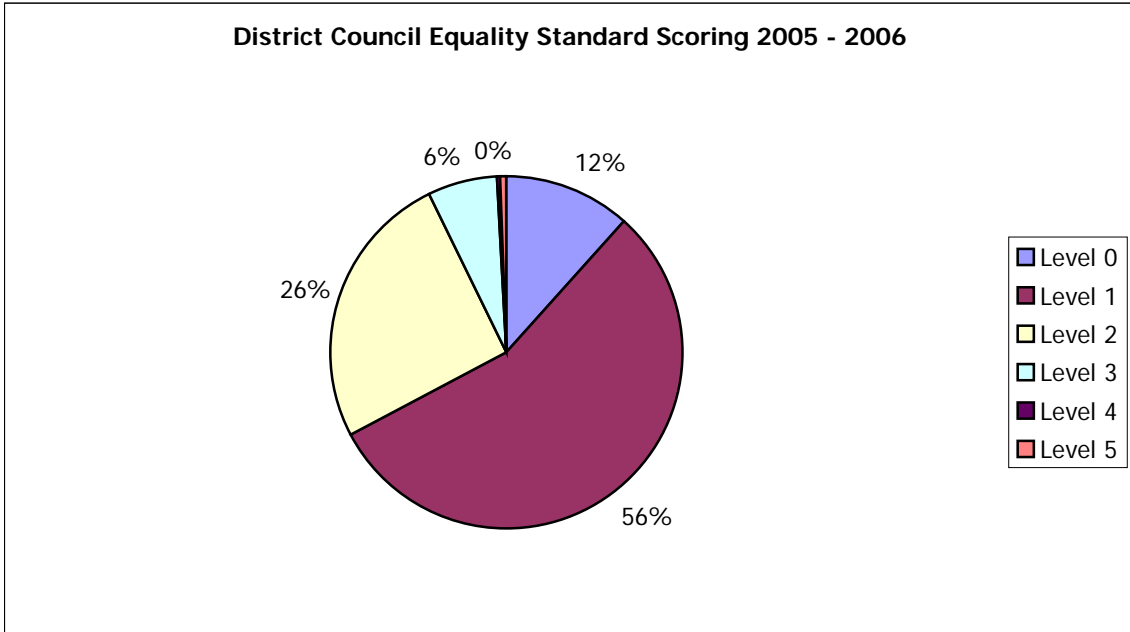
Mid Suffolk District Council, alongside all other local government organisations in the UK, conforms to the Equalities Standard when creating accessible services and employment. Mid Suffolk reached Level 2 of the equalities standard (2001 edition) in 2007 but with future work, we aim to improve our Equalities Standard rating.

The Equalities Standard for local government was recently revised (May 2007) from the previous system of assessment. There are five levels within the equalities standard ranging from Level 1 (the lowest) and Level 5 (the highest). From the table below around a third district authorities were classified above Level 1.

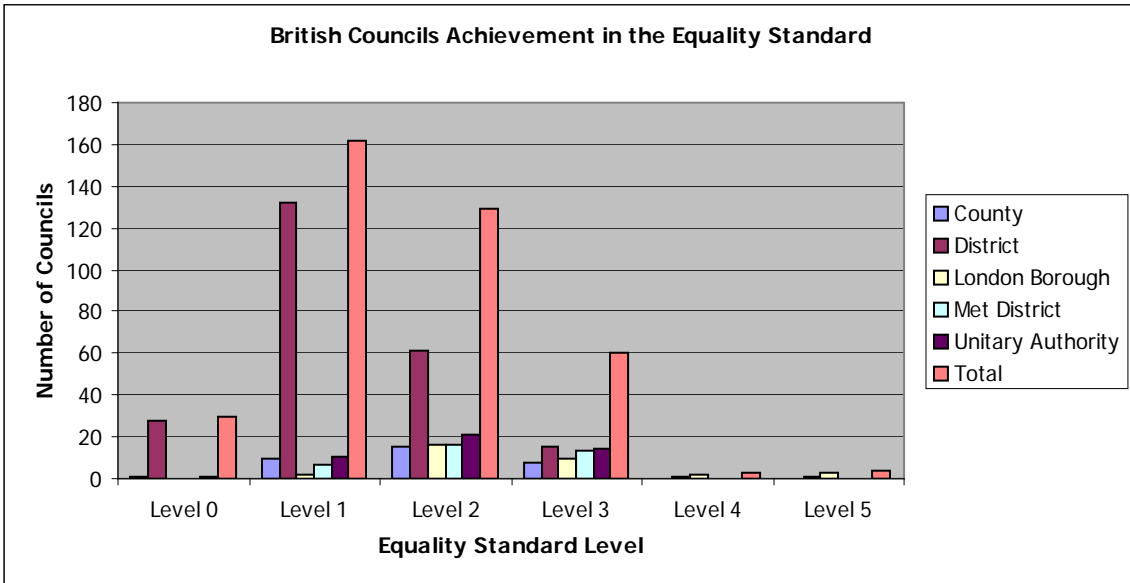
**Summary of the 2005-06 Equality Standard BVPI data**

Type of Authority	Level 0	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Total
County	1	10	15	8	0	0	34
District	28	132	61	15	1	1	238
London Borough	0	2	16	10	2	3	33
Met District	0	7	16	13	0	0	36
Unitary Authority	1	11	21	14	0	0	47
<b>Total</b>	30	162	129	60	3	4	388

District Councils make up the majority of local authorities who are currently participating in the equalities standard work. Of those, 56% are at Level 1 (self assessment from BVPI 2a which includes Mid Suffolk District Council). Mid Suffolk will now be working towards maintaining Level 2 of the Equalities Standard from the enhanced criteria of 2007 from the Level 2 status achieved in March 2007.



Of all Councils who participate in the Equalities standard, only a very small percentage progress beyond level 2 and level 3. The table below illustrates nationally there are very few authorities at Levels 3, 4 and 5.



**Future development of the Equalities Standard**

To meet Level 3 of the Equalities Standard and to continue progressing with the standard, the Council aims to do the following by 2010:

## Corporate Policy Team

- Complete Equality Impact Assessments for all existing and new policies
- Consultation Process in place for all major decision making
- Corporate Equality Action Plan
- Established information and monitoring systems to assess progress with Equality Action Plan and provision to create targets.
- Established information and monitoring systems in place to assess progress towards achieving specific targets
- Once targets have been reviewed, new targets are set within a planned agenda.

### **OUR PEOPLE**

#### **Employment and recruitment of staff**

The Council aims to:

- Nurture and build a diverse and representative workforce that broadly represents the community it serves at all levels, enabling it to better meet the service needs of all our communities.
- Treat all employees and applicants for employment fairly and ensure they are not discriminated against because of their race, gender, disability, age, religion or belief or sexual orientation.
- Regularly review its recruitment and selection procedure to ensure fair access to all jobs. People will be selected based only upon skills, abilities, experience and qualifications to carry out the duties of the post applied for.
- Ensure that all employees are valued and treated with dignity and respect. Where harassment, victimisation or bullying is found in the workplace this will be confronted and dealt with through the appropriate procedures. Every employee has a responsibility to challenge and report inappropriate behaviour.
- Provide fair access to training and development opportunities.
- Have due regard to equal pay legislation.
- Support employees who wish to use a mode of dress dictated by ethnic background and religious beliefs. However, where uniforms are provided or where the wearing of any apparel may conflict with health and safety regulations or this policy, the relevant service manager may impose restrictions.
- Consider and reasonably adapt organisational requirements or existing practices where they are contrary to employees' cultural or religious needs or where these can be reasonably adjusted to meet the needs of employees with a disability.

### **Employees' roles and responsibilities**

The contribution of the Council's workforce is critical to achieving all the aims of the policy. The actions and behaviours of all employees determine equality of access and outcome and this results in how customers perceive the Council. The Council will ensure that employees are supported to project appropriate behaviour and actions; the Council has developed competencies that apply to all employees. The Council is determined to maintain equality and fairness of treatment in all dealings with employees and the public.

### **OUR PROCESSES**

#### **Policies and Procedures**

In order to make sure that we maintain regard for this policy, all policies, procedures and practices will be reviewed in order to assess their impact on achieving and contributing to equality and diversity objectives.

Priority will be given to new policies and procedures, but a systematic review of existing policies; procedures and practices will be carried out. A policy and procedure on maintaining dignity at work will be developed to support equality and diversity.

#### **Service Delivery**

The Council provides direct services, regulates, funds and commissions services. In all these roles and activities we are committed to fair and equitable access to services, whether they are provided directly by Council employees in partnership with other agencies or indirectly through external contract, funding or commissioning arrangements. All Council departments will take steps to ensure that Council functions and policies are carried out in a way that complies with statutory requirements, minimises adverse impact on any section of the community and meets the needs of all local people as appropriately as possible.

We aim to:

- Ensure equal access, fair treatment and appropriate provision to the whole community regardless of race, gender, disability, age, religion, nationality, social background or sexual orientation and any other reason not connected to entitlement and availability.
- Provide quality services that are designed to meet a wide range of different needs within the community and regularly review them to ensure that no customers are disadvantaged.
- Provide appropriate services, adapting them to meet the needs of the whole community promoting equal access to services, including producing clear information about how to access our services (for example in different languages or large print).

## Corporate Policy Team

- Provide and publicise clear information on how customers can complain about the services they have received and respond efficiently to complaints.
- Ensure that wherever practicable, all services and buildings are accessible to disabled people.

In addition we will:

- Assess organisational and individual requirements to achieve compliance with legislation.
- Establish mechanisms for responding to harassment.
- Ensure equal access to services.
- Ensure that all our functions and policies are carried out in a way that complies with statutory requirements and minimises adverse impact on any section of the community, meeting (as appropriately as possible) the needs of all local people.
- Set equality and diversity objectives with targets, outputs and outcomes within departments and service areas, as part of regular business planning process, in accordance with corporate performance planning guidelines.
- Develop and implement a framework that enables and supports a regular process of self-assessment, scrutiny and audit.

### **Consultation**

As part of the corporate consultation strategy we will consult with and listen to our customers, partners, community groups, employees and stakeholders on all aspects of developing and implementing this equality and diversity policy.

### **Impact Assessments**

We will have an equality impact assessment of all existing and proposed policies, procedures and practices to ensure that they do not have a disproportionately adverse impact on particular sections of the community.

### **Standards and monitoring**

We will measure our overall performance against the Equality Standard for local government, with the aim of progressing through the levels to achieve the best for our district.

The measurement will be aided by:

- Using the census and all subsequent statistical information to keep abreast of population, economic and geographical developments within the district.
- Continuous monitoring of recruitment and selection, training and other personnel procedures and measuring change and composition of the

## Corporate Policy Team

- workforce. Collecting and analysing information to check that our employment policies and practices are fair and prevent discrimination.
- Reporting annually on the results of employment monitoring.
  - Developing efficient and confidential monitoring systems to analyse and evaluate how effectively services meet the needs of the community. This will include monitoring information about use and non-use of services, together with reviewing allocations of service ensuing equal access.
  - All departments compiling, publishing and periodically reviewing plans for achieving equality of opportunity and access to services.

### **Who has responsibility?**

We take our responsibilities for equality of opportunity and diversity seriously and recognise that discrimination can only be eliminated in partnership with employees, customers and external partners. The following staff and members have responsibilities within the strategy:

- The Chief Executive supported by the Policy Team is the responsible corporate lead.
- Service Managers are responsible for the Equality Impact Assessments within their departments and for assessing all new and amended policies.
- All employees must carry out their duties in accordance with this comprehensive equality and diversity strategy and statutory requirements.
- The Executive and Councillors will promote, support and uphold this policy in their dealings with employees, partners and our customers.

### **Dedicated resources**

Mid Suffolk District Council will commit sufficient resources to ensure that equality and diversity are fully embedded into the core business of the Council. This means that we will have professional advice for senior managers who will champion equality and diversity.

### **What we will do**

This strategy commits the Council to:

- Improving equalities practice at corporate, departmental and individual levels throughout the Council.
- Developing equalities objectives and target setting for all services, that are measurable and lead to long term improvements.
- Developing a systematic process of conducting equality impact assessments across the diversity field and across all service areas.
- Developing and promoting anti discrimination policies and practices at all levels of the Council and in customer service.

**Our equality action plan aims to ensure:**

- Services are designed to manage diversity effectively by tackling inequality and social exclusion and promoting independence.
- Services are accessible, welcoming, caring and responsive to the needs of the community.
- As far as possible, the Council enables people to fully participate in consultation over definition, planning and delivery of Council services.
- We will work with our partners to pursue equality and diversity objectives across the public, voluntary and business sectors of Mid Suffolk
- We will respond effectively to legislation and national policy initiatives on anti discrimination measures and practices.
- We will effectively monitor that we are achieving our goals to eradicate discrimination and anti social behaviour.

**Evaluating equality and diversity**

The Council will ensure that our improvement plans address equalities issues in a tangible way that is open to inspection and audit process by:

***Challenging*** – whether the service meets the needs of all sections of the community.

***Comparing*** – over time, how well our services are performing from the point of view of all groups against other service providers.

***Consulting*** – effectively about services and ensuring that consultation is carried out in a non-discriminatory, inclusive way and is used to manage and promote equality and diversity.

***Competing*** – to ensure that service providers meet equality objectives effectively. We will use and develop best value tools to measure and continuously improve our performance on equalities.

The Mid Suffolk equality action plan will allow the Council to assess how well it is doing in meeting equality objectives. The Policy Team and Business Support

## Corporate Policy Team

Team will monitor Best Value Performance Indicators and Service Plan equality commitments.

In addition, the Council will make an assessment of its achievements against the equality standard for local government. The equality standard is a key performance indicator for best value and we will be reporting our achievements through our best value performance plan. There are a number of laws that place responsibilities on local authorities to ensure they are taking steps to remove discriminatory practices and promote equality of opportunity.

### **Equality Action Planning**

Our equality action plan aims to:

- Incorporate a consultation and scrutiny element
- Incorporate an equal access to services element
- Ensure that we are an equal opportunities employer

The action plan sets out how we intend to show what specific action we will be taking to put these aims into practice and how we will monitor our achievements and make improvements. We will produce an annual action plan based upon agreed priorities emerging from evaluating performance and progress.

### **Outcomes**

In taking the actions and meeting our objectives set out in the action plan, we will expect to achieve a number of outcomes which show real improvements over time, including:

- Service provision that reflects the whole community.
- Better access to services and more accessible services.
- A caring and responsive Council, which meets the demands of the community the Council serves, resulting in improved satisfaction across all areas and a decrease in complaints.
- A workforce that is at all levels, representative of Mid Suffolk's population and illustrates our commitment to diversity.

### **Monitoring**

We will monitor services through setting equality targets in our best value performance plan. The equality standard for local government will provide a benchmark to show how well the Council are doing and how the Council intends to improve where any shortfalls are identified.

Under the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000, local authorities were required to identify all functions deemed relevant to race equality and subject these to an

impact assessment. The Equality Standard builds on this principle and extends it in two important ways.

### **Equality Impact Assessment**

1. Whilst the Race Relations Amendment Act required authorities to assess new policies or proposed changes to existing policies or proposed changes, the equality standard seeks to encourage authorities to assess the impact of all current policies.
2. The Act remained focused on addressing race equality. Impact Assessments were therefore to focus solely on this issue. The equality standard however, seeks to extend this to cover gender and disability whilst providing authorities with an option to extend it further to cover all aspects of diversity.

Mid Suffolk is committed to initiating an equality impact assessment of all relevant existing and proposed policies, procedures and practices to ensure these do not have a disproportionately adverse impact on any sectors of the community.

Equality impact assessments will play a key part in furthering the equalities agenda and as a Council Mid Suffolk is committed to ensuring that all relevant policies, functions and procedures are subject to such assessments. The aim of these assessments will be to ascertain whether service provision is not only consistent with legal obligations but caters for people from different ethnic/racial backgrounds, women, men, transgender, people with caring responsibilities, younger or older people regardless of their sexual orientation. Specific issues that impact assessments will seek to address include:

- Whether existing management information systems capture sufficient data on who accesses a particular service and who does not
- Gauging the opinions of customers (gender, race and disability) who use the service and assess how existing provision impacts on these groups.
- Whether users, particularly from historically disadvantaged groups are provided with appropriate information about services and how to access them.

### **How we will monitor equality and diversity**

The Council will monitor and review its policies and practices regularly to ensure that we are meeting our objectives and the priorities that we have set out in our action plan.

## Corporate Policy Team

We will do this through our existing planning and performance processes – for example through setting targets in our business plans and Best Value Performance Plan, which will be monitored against the equality standard for Local Government and be subject to a regular performance review at Management Board and the Executive.

### **Review of the Corporate Equality and Diversity Strategy**

Mid Suffolk will review the corporate equality and diversity strategy every three years and make changes to ensure that we are continuously improving service delivery and customer care. The annual action plan will focus on priority decision making to ensure that overall objectives are met or exceeded.

## Corporate Policy Team

### Corporate Equality and Diversity Strategy Action Plan

In order to promote, support and develop diversity in the district, Mid Suffolk District Council will:

- 1) Maintain a Corporate Equality and Diversity Strategy and review this at least every three years. Lead from the Policy Team  
**Link to Equality Standard – Level 2**  
**Milestone – Sent for approval July 2007**
- 2) Conduct Equality Impact Assessments on all policies within Mid Suffolk to ensure that they do not directly or indirectly unfairly disadvantage any equalities groups – Lead by service areas supported by Policy Team.  
**Link to Equality Standard – Level 2**  
**Milestone – All EIA's for existing policies reviewed by March 2007**
- 3) Train all members in Equality and Diversity issues and maintain training and seminars throughout terms of office – Lead by District Monitoring Officer and Policy Team.  
**Link to Equality Standard – Level 2**  
**Milestone – All staff and members trained by May 2007**
- 4) Work with CSD to carry out equal pay audits to ensure that any differences are addressed between equalities groups – Lead by CSD and Management Board.  
**Milestone – Audits to be completed by end of next financial year (2008/2009)**
- 5) Set up an advisory group to represent the views of staff on all aspects of equality –Lead by Policy Team and Communications Team.  
**Link to Equality Standard – Level 2**  
**Milestone – By end of Financial Year 2007/2008**
- 6) Monitor flexible working opportunities and ensure they are available to all staff – Lead by CSD HR and Management Board.  
**Link to Equality Standard – Level 2**  
**Milestone – Continuous monitoring from implementation of Gender Equality Scheme**
- 7) Ensure that managers are fully aware of corporate diversity policies, and apply these effectively – Lead by CSD HR and Policy Team.  
**Link to Equality Standard – Level 2**  
**Milestone – May 2007 policies put on Infoweb**

## Corporate Policy Team

- 8) Ensure that needs of equalities groups within the staff team are monitored by independent bodies – Lead by CSD HR, Policy Team Team.  
**Link to Equality Standard – Level 2**  
**Milestone – Engagement of the Papworth Trust to look after employee needs**
- 9) Continually look to improve our services for equalities groups, using best practice from other authorities and feedback from our customers - Lead from Service Managers and Policy Team Team.  
**Link to Equality Standard – Level 2**  
**Milestone – Suffolk Speaks project focusing on hard to reach groups and non-users of our services within the district**
- 10) Ensure that the Council embed Disability Equality in all that we do by placing our commitment to it in service plans and reinforcing it in the corporate plan when it comes up for review – Lead by Policy Team.  
**Link to Equality Standard – Level 2**  
**Milestone – Embed equalities further within 2008/2009 service planning**
- 11) Ensure that new staff receive training in equality and diversity - Lead by CSD HR.  
**Link to Equality Standard – Level 2**  
**Milestone – Training provided for all staff at each new staff induction**
- 12) Conduct a yearly review of our equality action plan – Lead by Policy Team.  
**Link to Equality Standard – Level 2 and Level 3**  
**Milestone – Report to executive annually**
- 13) Respond positively and promptly to feedback and comments on how we can improve our services and facilities – Lead by Service Managers Policy Team.  
**Link to Equality Standard – Level 2**  
**Milestone – Report to executive annually with diversity feedback**
- 14) Continue to encourage recruitment from diversity groups and members of the disabled community – Lead by CSD HR service.  
**Link to Equality Standard – Level 2**  
**Milestone – Annual monitoring of staff from Business Support**
- 15) Ensure that all diversity information is presented to members for their scrutiny, approval and recommendations. Lead by Policy Team.  
**Link to Equality Standard – Level 2**

## Corporate Policy Team

### **Milestone – Introduction of more diversity topics to policy panels**

- 16) Review our Equalities schemes on a three yearly cycle – Lead by Policy Team.

### **Link to Equality Standard – Level 2**

### **Milestone – Review all schemes in 2010**

## Appendix 1 - The Mid Suffolk demographic defined within Equalities Criteria

### Race

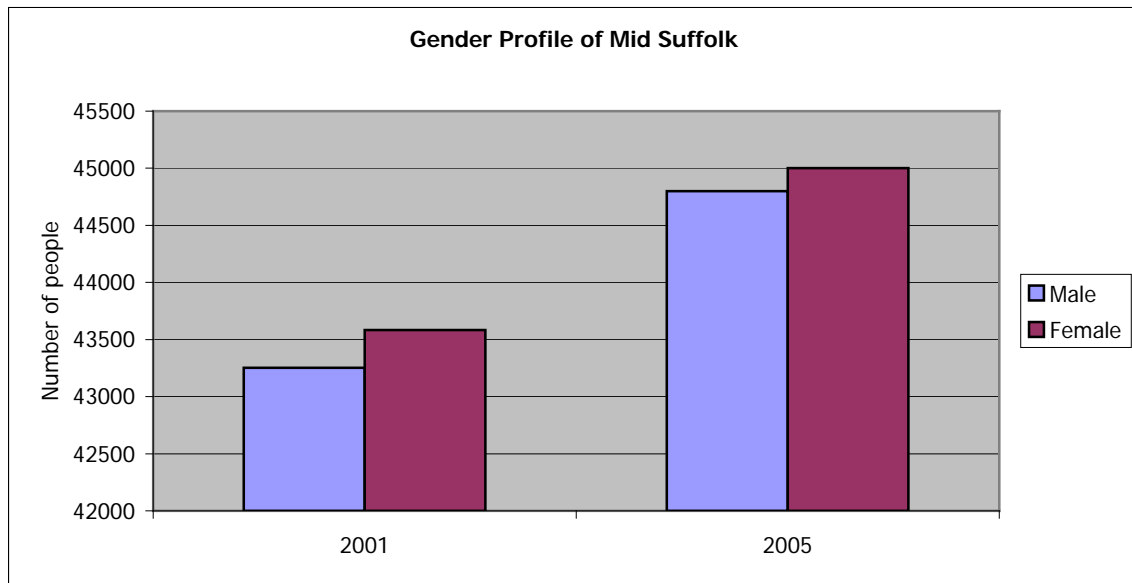
Within the district, 99% of residents classified themselves as white (British/Irish/Scottish or Other) in the 2001 census. 1% of residents classified themselves as a member of a visible ethnic minority group.

### Disability

In the 2001 census, approximately 15% of the population declared that they have a long term limiting illness/disability, which equates to approximately 12,975 people. Of the households within the district, in 2001 10,567 reported that there was at least one person with a limiting long-term illness living there.

### Gender

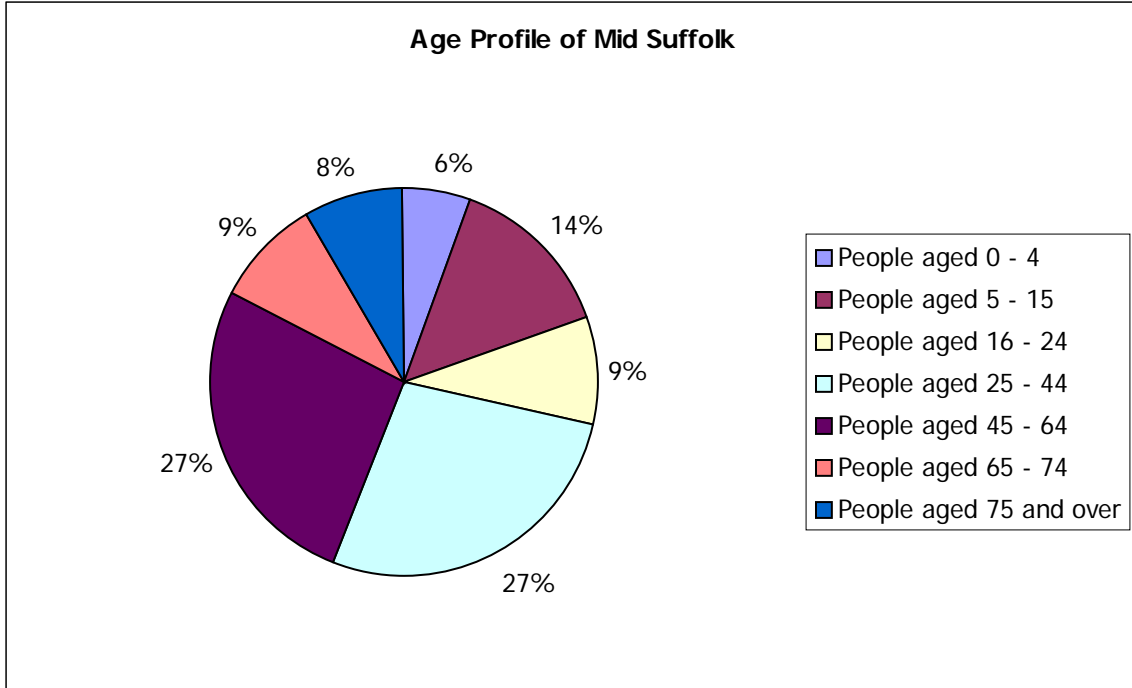
Mid Suffolk has from the 2005 estimate<sup>1</sup> 44,800 males and 45,000 females. The difference between male and female population figures has decreased since 2001, and there has been a considerable growth in the population.



### Age

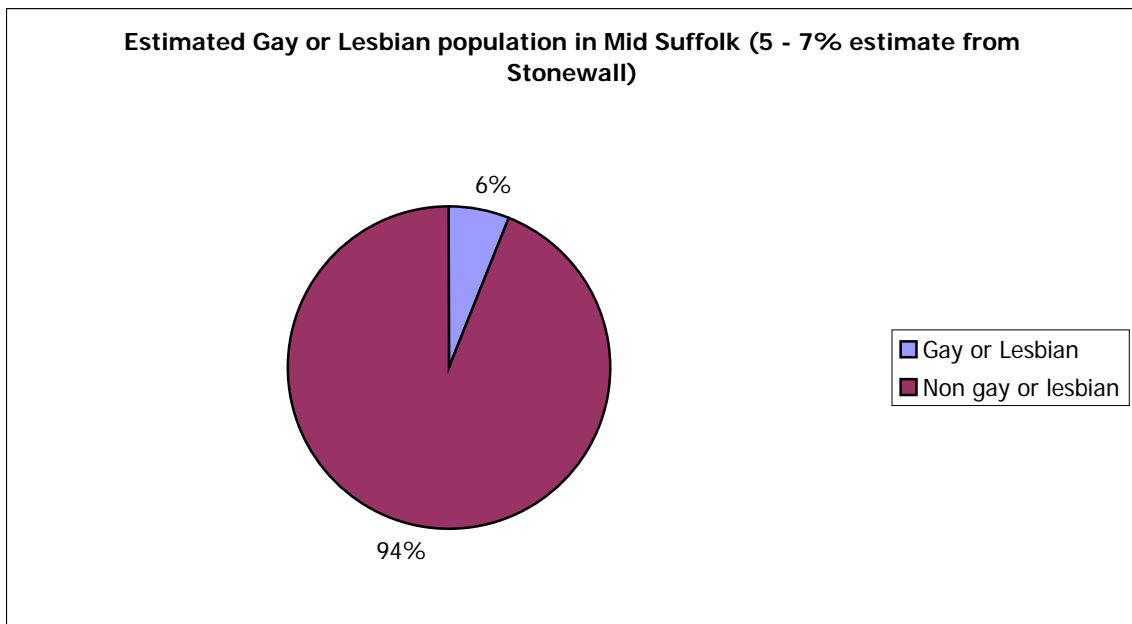
The age spread in Mid Suffolk shows an even split between the numbers of people aged 25 to 44 and 45 to 64 each forming 27% of the population. The 5 to 15 age group form the next largest number with 14% of the population. There are more people aged over 75 than those aged 0 to 5 in the district.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.suffolkobservatory.info/AreaProfileStep3.asp> Extracted on 15th June 2007

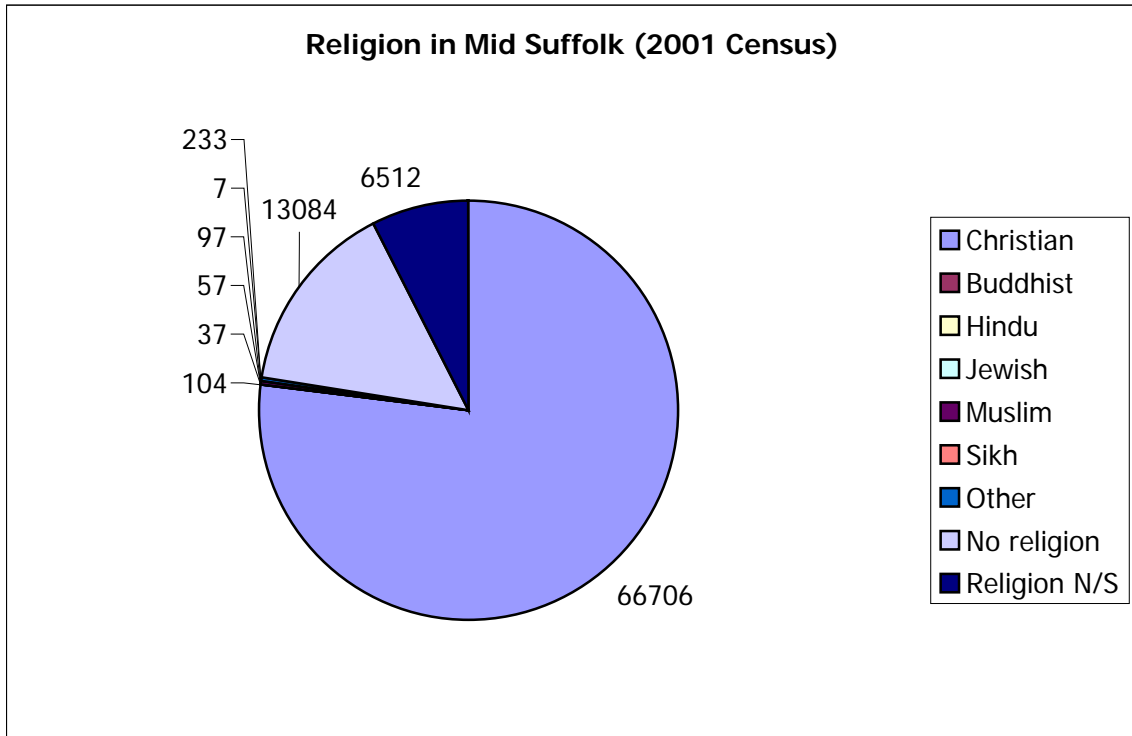


**Sexual Orientation**

In any census, there has never been any statistics gathered from the population about sexual orientation. However, gay and lesbian charities Stonewall estimate that approximately five to seven percent of the population is gay or lesbian. Based upon these estimates, this would equate to about 5,210 residents of Mid Suffolk. The table below illustrates this.



**Religion and Belief**



Within the district, 77% of the population class themselves as Christian, with the next two largest groups either stating they have no religion or that they do not wish to state their religion.

Religion or belief	Number of residents
Christian	66706
Buddhist	104
Hindu	37
Jewish	57
Muslim	97
Sikh	7
Other	233
No religion	13084
Religion N/S	6512

The table to the left is a breakdown, which illustrates the number of people classifying themselves as members of a religious group or belief system in the 2001 census.

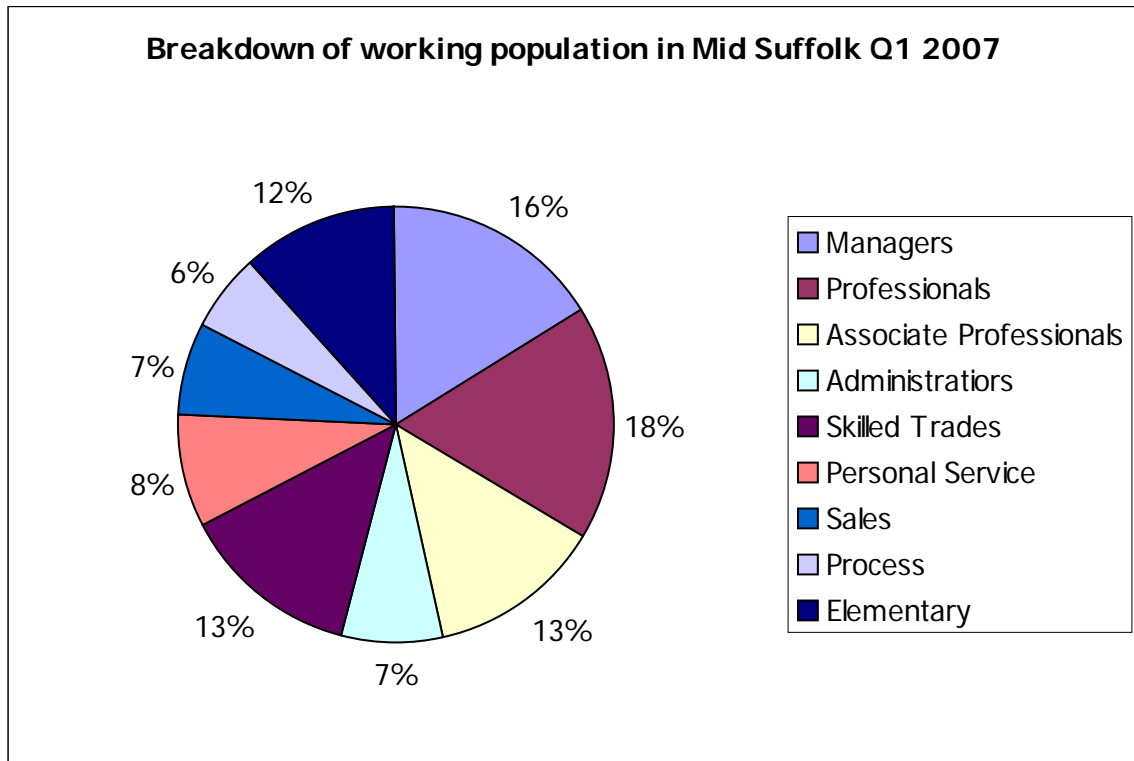
**Economic Circumstances**

The most recent figures for the economic situation in Mid Suffolk are from Q1 2007 and show that the average house price is around six and a half times the income of the average household. The average household income for the district is £34,790.82 as of Q1 2007. Below is a table containing the most recent information on house prices in the district.

Corporate Policy Team

House Type	House Price
Detached	£300,777
Semi Detached	£180,361
Terraced	£147,586
Flats/Maisonettes	£105,947
Average	£218,948

The figures also show that eighty per cent of the population that is able to work is currently employed. Of the people that are employed, the majority are managers, professionals or associate professionals. There are also a significant number of skilled tradespersons.

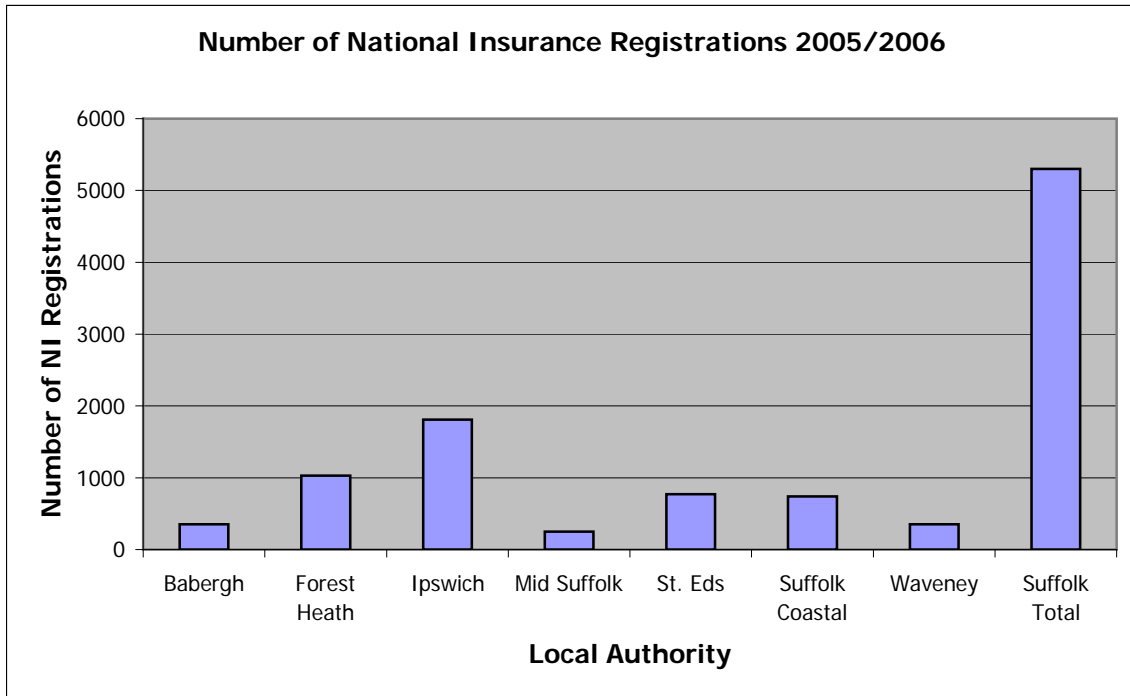


**National Insurance Number Registrations**

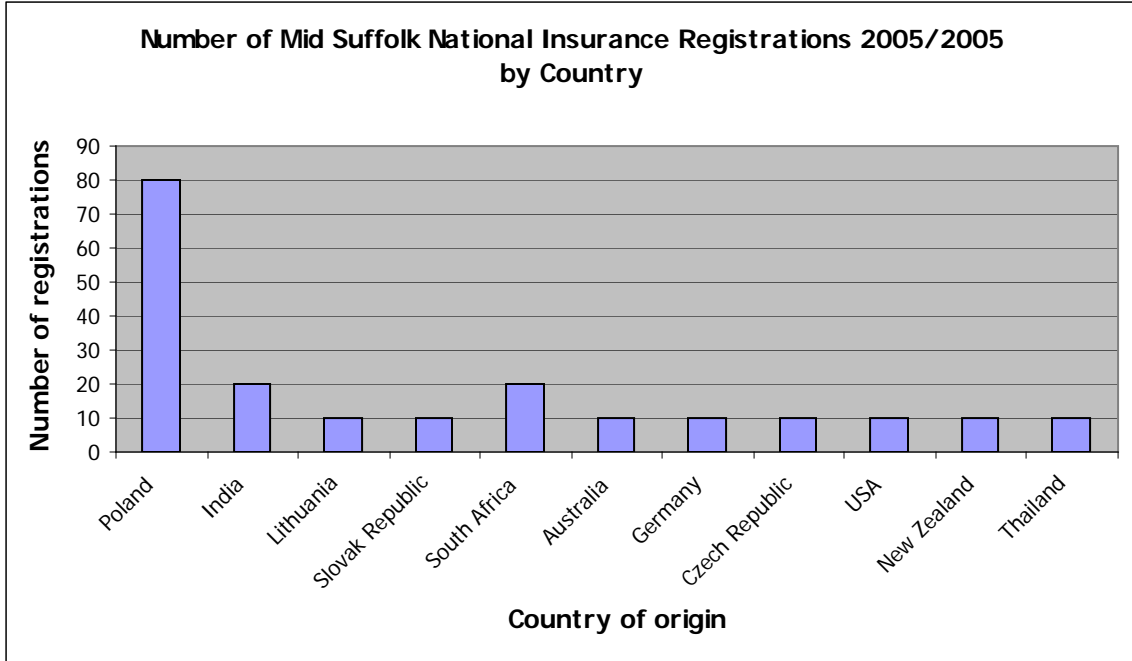
In 2005/2006, the department of work and pensions conducted a survey of the number of new national insurance number registrations from foreign nationals in each local authority area. From these statistics, Suffolk portrayed an interesting picture. Although Mid Suffolk had the lowest number of registrations of national insurance numbers from foreign nationals of all local authorities in Suffolk, 30% of these registrations were from Polish nationals. Below is a breakdown of the

## Corporate Policy Team

Suffolk authority registrations and the origins of people applying for national insurance numbers in Mid Suffolk District.



From the table below, there are also several registrations from India and South Africa (20 from each country) and an even distribution of residents from the Baltic States and Eastern Europe. There are also very small numbers from America, Australia, New Zealand and Thailand. Recent work with Suffolk Speaks is looking to identify where migrant workers live in Mid Suffolk and what industries they are involved with.



### Mid Suffolk diversity past work

In 2002 Mid Suffolk were amongst the first local authorities to produce a race equality scheme. The council has built further upon this and throughout 2003 and 2004, the Suffolk Speaks project focused on ethnic minority recruitment to local government in Suffolk. The 'joint diversity working group' subsequently produced literature to make recruitment more appealing to members of minority groups. In 2005, the Race Equality Scheme was renewed and expanded to form the comprehensive equalities scheme – covering religious belief and sexual orientation.

### Mid Suffolk diversity recent work

In 2006, the newly formed policy team created the Disability Equality Scheme in response to new legislation. October 2006 saw the introduction of the new Age Discrimination laws, making it illegal to discriminate on the basis of age. Customer service Direct created a policy based upon the legislation.

In 2007, the policy team created the Gender Equality Scheme, which was produced in conjunction with all other local statutory partners in Suffolk. The policy team also produced the district's first Corporate Enforcement Policy, which reinforced and entrenched our obligations and responsibilities under human rights legislation when conducting investigations. Throughout 2006 and 2007, various consultations were carried out with our local residents and members of new and emerging communities to monitor community cohesion issues, social exclusion and participation. The communications team are also in the process of

## Corporate Policy Team

drawing up a new consultation and community engagement strategy.

Since 2006, Mid Suffolk District Council has made significant improvements to the BVPI scoring for Diversity. BVPI 2a and 2b determine our performance in the Equality Standard and the Duty to Promote Race Equality.

For BVPI 2a – The Equality Standard for Local Government, we are currently at Level 2 (Q2 2007) as we have carried our impact and needs assessments of our policies and we have an equality action planning process for employment and service delivery within our equalities schemes.

For BVPI 2b – The duty to Promote Race Equality our performance has improved from Q4 2005/6 with 32% to in Q4 2006/7 scoring 79%.

### **Mid Suffolk diversity future**

Currently, the Comprehensive (Race) Equality Scheme is being renewed and updated with latest information about migrant worker populations, new and emerging communities and changes to legislation recently that made it illegal to deny goods and services to gay men, lesbians and bisexuals. The creation of the Equality and Diversity strategy is a significant step forward in this process as it amalgamates all action plans from the diversity schemes in place and enables these action plans to be more easily monitored.

### **Mid Suffolk District Council Diversity Projects**

#### **1) Green Badge Parking Scheme**

As a result of consultations carried out in the district, the council is examining a new parking scheme proposal known as the Green Badge Parking Scheme, which was in response to difficulties experienced by disabled people who do not qualify for a blue badge when parking. The scheme will also include adults caring for young children who require wider parking spaces. The scheme is in its infancy at present and officers will carry further consultation work out following a review of the concept by members.

#### **2) Mere View Very Sheltered Housing Scheme**

This scheme is designed for older people who wish to retain their independence but require professional care for at least four hours per week. All apartments within the scheme are for sale on a shared ownership basis and applicants must be on the Mid Suffolk housing register. Mid Suffolk District Council funds the scheme in partnership with Housing 21 Housing Association and Suffolk County Council. This scheme is one of two being pioneered in the district, which caters especially for disabled people and allows those who are currently owner-occupiers to live in accommodation that is tailored for their needs.

### **3) Specialist Migrant Worker Research Project**

Mid Suffolk has commissioned the Suffolk Speaks project to examine specifically the new and emerging migrant worker community in the district and to gather information to inform service provision. Results of the consultation exercise will be used to determine work required with the new community and will be shared with other statutory partners in Suffolk.

### **4) Member training in Equality and Diversity**

All new members received training in Equality and Diversity matters after the local elections in May 2007. There was a full turnout of members who conveyed their appreciation and the benefits that training had for them.

### **5) Staff training in Equality and Diversity**

All Mid Suffolk staff received Equality and Diversity training in December 2006 and a programme of ongoing training was set up for all new joiners and those who were unable to attend following on from these sessions. The sessions had the real benefit of raising the corporate profile of diversity that has enhanced access to services and individual staff understanding of the needs of diversity groups.

### **6) HR Maternity/ Paternity and leave Policy Review**

A review has been conducted recently into policies in place for maternity and paternity leave. All policies are now up to date with the latest legislative changes and are much clearer in terms of entitlement, circumstances if bereavement occurs and obligations of the employer and the person taking maternity leave.

### **7) Gypsy and Traveller Housing Needs Assessment and working group**

Recent regional housing surveys have been undertaken, lead by our housing services team and conducted by Salford University. This survey detailed the needs and requirements of local gypsy and traveller populations. Researchers interviewed members of the gypsy and traveller community and information was gained about their preferred lifestyle choices, preferred locations and desired local facilities. This information has been used to shape all future provision for gypsies and travellers and has opened routes for further consultation with the community.

### **8) The Suffolk Compact**

Mid Suffolk has signed up to the Suffolk Compact, a voluntary agreement with partner organisations detailing our external commitment to diversity and checking the groups that we fund for diversity policies.

### **9) Service Delivery and Customer Service Direct and public information**

Through our partnership with Customer Service Direct and Suffolk County

## Corporate Policy Team

Council, Mid Suffolk provides all literature and information in a variety of formats upon request. Mid Suffolk also regularly audit our public and private access buildings for disabled access purposes.