

Public consultation on Warwickshire County Council ceasing to externally commission an Equalities Service as currently provided by the Equality and Inclusion Partnership (EQuIP)

12 October 2026

Version: 0.1

Date Issue: 12 October 2026



OFFICIAL

Public consultation on Warwickshire County Council ceasing to externally commission an Equalities Service as currently provided by the Equality and Inclusion Partnership (EQulP)

About this consultation

Warwickshire County Council is consulting on ceasing to externally commission an Equalities Service. The current service is provided by the Equality and Inclusion Partnership (EQulP). References to “the service” in this consultation document are references to the Equalities Service commissioned by the Council and currently provided by EQulP.

The consultation will gather stakeholder and other feedback on the proposal to cease externally commissioning an Equalities Service and the implications of this proposal, in particular on current and potential future users of the service. It will also help the Council to better understand possible reasons and arguments for retaining an externally commissioned Equalities Service, and to explore possible alternative ways that the outcomes of the service might be achieved.

The consultation exercise is open to all members of the public. Those who currently use, or have used the service, and partner organisations are particularly encouraged to participate. Consultees include the following.

- Current service users and those who have previously used the service.
- Future potential service users (in effect, all Warwickshire residents).
- Equalities groups within the voluntary, community, and social enterprise (VCSE) sector, with a particular focus on groups supporting the 9 protected characteristics as set out in the Equality Act, but also other equalities groups.
- Seldom heard groups, including groups such as Gypsies and Travellers, migrant workers, asylum seekers, younger people, drug and alcohol users.
- Equalities professionals across the public sector and VCSE sector (and private sector where applicable), to include Health, Police, and Borough/District Councils.

The consultation will last for 8 weeks and will run from 12 October 2026 to 6 December 2026.

At this consultation stage, no decisions have been made, and there is nothing that cannot be changed. The consultation will inform a final decision by the Council's Cabinet on the future of the service.

Background

The Council's externally commissioned Equalities Service, currently provided by EQuIP, has operated in Warwickshire over a number of years, evolving from earlier grant-funded provision into a commissioned service.

The service is commissioned to deliver activities across the following three main areas.

- Supporting individuals experiencing discrimination and hate crime.
- Providing equalities training and guidance for community groups, faith groups, businesses, schools, and other public sector organisations.
- Supporting engagement and community cohesion: engaging with community organisations; leading on equality networks and campaigns; and ensuring minority voices are heard by County Council decision makers.

The current service started on 1 October 2022, and the current service contract ends on 31 March 2027.

The service currently costs the Council £135,372 a year.

The service has the following aims.

1. Work towards the elimination of unlawful discrimination, to promote equality of opportunity and good relations between different groups of people who share particular protected characteristics as set out in the Equality Act 2010.
2. Provide relevant information and advice to support individuals and communities to work towards the elimination of discrimination and inequality.
3. Provide specialist advice, support and information to residents in relation to incidents of victimisation, discrimination, harassment, and hate crime, and ensure effective signposting to other relevant specialist support services where appropriate.
4. Deliver training to raise awareness and publicise the rights and responsibilities of individuals, communities, and organisations, regarding diversity and equality.
5. Develop meaningful dialogue with communities, voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector organisations, and public sector organisations on matters relating to equality and community cohesion.
6. Influence public sector policy making, service re-design, and service delivery.
7. Help move Warwickshire residents towards greater independence and confidence.

The service contributes to the three equality objectives set out in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 which the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) refers to. As a

result, the Council must have due regard to the likely impact of the proposal to cease externally commissioning the service on the achievement of these objectives. The PSED requires public authorities like the Council to have due regard to certain equality objectives when carrying out their functions, especially when the Council is making decisions about the future of services.

The three equality objectives are the need to:

1. eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other unlawful conduct prohibited by the act;
2. advance equality of opportunity between people who share and people who do not share a relevant protected characteristic; and
3. foster good relations between people who share and people who do not share a relevant protected characteristic.

The relevant protected characteristics as referred to in objectives 2 and 3 above are:

- age;
- disability;
- gender reassignment;
- pregnancy and maternity;
- race;
- religion or belief;
- sex; and
- sexual orientation.

Appendix 1 summarises the protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act 2010 and how they are protected.

The following is a broad description of the protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act 2010, simplified for accessibility and understanding. For formal definitions of the protected characteristics, sections 4 to 12 of the Equality Act 2010 should be referred to.

- Age. Protection against unfair treatment because of a person's age (for example, being young or old), across employment and services.
- Disability. Covers people with a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. Includes a duty to make reasonable adjustments.
- Gender reassignment. Protects people who are proposing to undergo, are undergoing, or have undergone a process to change their sex. Medical treatment is not required for protection to apply.
- Marriage and civil partnership. Protects against discrimination in employment for being married or in a civil partnership.

- Pregnancy and maternity. Protects women during pregnancy and maternity leave from unfavourable treatment related to pregnancy, childbirth, or maternity.
- Race. Includes protection based on colour, nationality, ethnic or national origins.
- Religion or belief. Covers religious beliefs, non-religious philosophical beliefs (such as humanism), and lack of belief.
- Sex. Protection against discrimination because a person is a woman or a man.
- Sexual orientation. Protects people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, heterosexual, or of any other sexual orientation.]

In practice, due regard means that the impact of the proposed decision on the achievement of these objectives must be considered when a decision is made, not as an afterthought.

What the service does

The specification for the current service is set out in **Appendix 2**.

The service provides a range of free, confidential and independent advice and support activities to people covering the protected characteristics as set out in the Equality Act 2010. This support is designed to be accessible and inclusive.

- It develops and runs a range of equalities related training for community groups, faith groups, businesses, schools and public sector organisations.
- The service brings communities together across Warwickshire, engaging with community and public sector organisations in a variety of ways so that different groups feel heard, represented, and able to influence local decisions.
- It is flexible, allowing its focus and work to change to reflect changing needs and specific priorities agreed from time to time with the Council.

Who can use the service and how it is accessed

The service is accessible to:

- people who live or work in Warwickshire;
- voluntary, community, and social enterprise sector and public sector organisations in Warwickshire; and
- businesses in Warwickshire.

It is available to people and organisations across all five boroughs and districts of Warwickshire (North Warwickshire, Nuneaton and Bedworth, Rugby, Warwick, and

Stratford-on-Avon). It is available to both rural and urban communities and where the service is delivered depends on where the need is the greatest.

Support from the service is available in different ways, including but not limited to:

- face-to-face contact in each of the five boroughs and districts;
- by telephone;
- by e-mail;
- by video call;
- the internet, including the EQuIP website www.equipequality.org.uk; and
- outreach, to support inclusive access to the service.

Examples of activities delivered

Advice and support around victimisation, discrimination, harassment, and hate cases

The service provides one-to-one, tailored advice and support to people.

Most people who use the service do so because they need help with education, housing, or accessing important services. Many of the people supported are from minority ethnic backgrounds or have disabilities.

Some education cases involve children with special educational needs and/or who speak English as a second language, which can make it harder for them to get the support they need.

Housing cases often involve neighbour disputes and the difficulties experienced by people with disabilities finding suitable places to live.

Online hate and social media cases have risen sharply following a Supreme Court judgement on sex and gender. These cases mainly affect the LGBTQ+ community and those involved in equality work. The service helps victims of hate to ensure their cases are handled fairly, especially when organisations are not initially keen to act.

Equalities related training to community groups, faith groups, businesses, schools and public sector organisations.

The service offers a broad range of training programmes focused on equality, diversity and inclusion. The training can be specially designed for individual organisations or delivered in partnership with others, depending on what is needed.

Types of training include:

- Equality, diversity and inclusion: Helping people learn how to include everyone, understand the laws about equality, and take action to stop discrimination.
- Hate crime awareness: Giving training to help people spot and report hate crimes and encouraging everyone to work together for safer communities.
- Cultural awareness: Teaching about different cultures and helping people understand one another.
- Migrant and Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller inclusion: Supporting migrants and Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities with their specific needs.
- Equality network refresher sessions: Regular online meetings about topics like hate crime, laws against sexual harassment, migration, violence against women and girls, health fairness, transgender and Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller awareness, and support for pupils with extra needs.
- Bespoke workshops: Special training made for different groups like councils, police, museums, and community organisations, often in response to new issues or changes in the law.

Training is provided in workshops, conferences, and online sessions. Through this, professionals and community partners are provided with the most up to date information and skills to support equality and inclusion in Warwickshire.

Community cohesion work

The service works to bring people together and make communities stronger. The service organises events, forums, and partnerships to help everyone feel included and improve access to local services. Examples of events and forums include the countywide Equality Network, Borough/District level disability forum(s), structured discussions on hate crime and community cohesion, and events focused on equalities matters such as Black History Month and Mental Health Awareness Week.

Activities range from working with the Council and equality networks, running public events, and supporting refugee integration, to tackling issues such as hate, discrimination, and belonging. The service collaborates and reaches out to diverse communities, including Sikh, Muslim, and LGBTQ+ residents, especially during times of concern. By addressing problems like barriers to education, housing disputes, difficulties accessing services, and workplace discrimination, the service helps ensure that everyone has a fair chance and feels part of the community.

Service statistics and performance

As an example of the activity undertaken, between October 2024 and September 2025, the service:

- provided individuals with one-to-one support in respect of 87 discrimination and hate cases: 33 cases carried over from the previous year, 38 new discrimination cases and 16 new hate cases, and handled 74 hate crime reports.
- provided 459 individuals with training, across 66 organisations, including Warwickshire County Council services (e.g., Migration Team and SEND Team), Warwickshire Police, and VCSE sector organisations.
- Organised or played a major role in events relating to Black History Month, a “Zero Discrimination” conference, the Safer Warwickshire “Big Conversation”, the Windrush 75 Exhibition Tour, Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller History Month, Rugby and Leamington Pride events, and community support around the Britain First march in March 2025.

The service is judged to be performing well, consistently achieving the outcomes described in its service specification, and meeting its performance targets.

What we are consulting about

The County Council is asking for people’s views on a proposal to stop externally commissioning an Equalities Service, which is currently provided by EQuIP. The current contract for this service ends on 31 March 2027. There are two reasons why the Council is considering this proposal.

Firstly, the Council is under significant financial pressure. The Council’s Chief Finance Officer’s Statutory Report (Section 25 statement) which was provided to the Council in February 2026 during the budget setting process, commented on the robustness of the Council’s budget proposals for 2026/27. This report made it clear that there are significant financial pressures on the Council, with unfunded pressures of £6.2m in Children’s and Adults’ Social Care. Whilst this gap can be covered for now using emergency reserves, the Council will need to make further savings to manage on a sustainable basis from 2027/28 onwards. Further financial pressures on the Council resulting from the impacts of ongoing demand pressures in statutory services, global conflict and cost of living pressures will be carefully monitored. The Council’s administration has made clear its policy to minimise council tax increases wherever possible.

Together, these factors mean that the Council will almost certainly need to find additional savings both now and in future years as part of its regular financial planning. Work to find these savings will include a clear focus on reducing or stopping some discretionary spending across the Council. The externally

commissioned Equalities Service is a discretionary service which means that there is no legal requirement for the Council to provide such a service and the Council has a choice whether to do so. This makes the spend associated with delivering the service “discretionary spending”.

Secondly, the funding of an externally commissioned Equalities Service is not seen as a priority for the administration which runs the Council.

The financial pressures facing the Council, coupled with the fact that this is a discretionary service and the fact that providing externally commissioned equalities services is not a priority has therefore led to the proposal to discontinue the externally commissioned Equalities Service.

This consultation is only about the externally commissioned Equalities Service. The County Council also funds other services that are currently delivered by the VCSE sector, but these services are not included in this consultation, although they could be reviewed in the future.

The County Council has looked at several other ways of running the service and delivering its outcomes:

- **Reduce the current service** – for example, by reducing the hours that the service is available, the number of cases the provider can take on or the number of training sessions that can be provided. This option has been discounted because:
 - simply reducing some aspects of the current service wouldn't result in a material saving, as the Council would still be paying most of the contract cost; and
 - if the service becomes too small, it stops operating effectively and its performance is likely to be affected because it becomes too inefficient and has insufficient staff to run it; and
 - the different parts of the service (training, advice, information and casework) support each other. Cutting some parts of the service would weaken the overall impact, including how well the service informs policy making and service delivery.
- **Refocus the current service** – for example, by asking the provider to focus on one element, such as case work or training, and stop the other elements. This option has been discounted because as above, refocusing the service wouldn't help achieve the necessary financial savings (the full cost of the contract), and removing parts of the service would break the links between its activities, and the service might become too small to run effectively.
- **Take the service “in house”, i.e., the County Council operates the service itself.** This option has been discounted because in the longer term it would not save money unless the service was also reduced, carrying the same risks as mentioned above. In the shorter term this option could also cost more money as it might involve aspects such as the transfer of staff into the Council.

For these reasons, the Council's preferred option at this stage is to cease externally commissioning the Equalities Service. **For clarity and confirmation, this would see all the activities delivered by the service and described in the "What the service does" section above stopped.**

Ceasing to externally commission an Equalities Service could affect vulnerable groups and give rise to a number of risks which may also have a negative impact on groups with protected characteristics. In particular, it could mean the following.

- There would be less specialist expertise available across the County to meet the needs of residents. This is particularly important for people who experience discrimination, harassment, victimisation, or hate crime, and for helping them access other specialist support where needed.
- The Council's ability to support community safety and bring communities together could be reduced, as there would be less engagement with local community groups, VCSE sector organisations, and public sector organisations.
- Trust and confidence in the Council from VCSE organisations could be damaged.
- The Council might want to consider if alternative ways in which to achieve the equalities objectives as set out in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 (as set out above) were desired.

This consultation allows for and encourages the suggestion of alternative ways that the service and its outcomes might be achieved, whilst making the savings needed, including challenge around the County Council's consideration of the above options.

This consultation invites stakeholders and other people to provide their views on the proposal to cease externally commissioning the Equalities Service and give their views on considerations they think the Council should have in mind when making the decision.

Why we are consulting

The County Council is undertaking this consultation as a matter of good governance, openness and transparency and to ensure appropriate information is taken into account when the final decision is made. The Council has chosen this approach to ensure it is fully informed as to public and stakeholder views and potential impact before making a final decision.

Supporting Information

To help you to consider the proposals and respond to this consultation we have

provided the following supporting information.

- An initial, draft Equality Impact Assessment relating to the possible decision to cease externally commissioning the service, **Appendix 3**. The results of the consultation will help to inform and build on this initial draft, the final version of which will be considered by Cabinet when it makes the final decision on the future of the service. This is to help the Cabinet give due regard to the equalities objectives (outlined above) when making its decision.

You may also find it helpful to refer to the following documents.

- Service Specification – this describes what the service aims to achieve, **Appendix 2**.
- Service Annual Report – this reports on the achievement of the service against any indicators set out in the service specification, **Appendix 4**.
- Quarterly performance monitoring report – this reports on specific service activities from October 2025 to December 2025, **Appendix 5**.
- The Council's Chief Finance Officer's Statutory Report (Section 25 statement), February 2026, linked [here](#).

How to take part

Consultation survey

The primary method of consultation is an online survey available at the website address: www.warwickshire.gov.uk/ask

All reasonable steps will be taken to provide the survey in a format suitable for people's needs:

- Paper copies / large print copies of the survey are available on request (see below).
- Other formats or support (e.g. Easy Read, alternative languages, additional support needs) can also be made available.

These can be requested by emailing communityconversations@warwickshire.gov.uk or by telephoning 01926 412381

Direct responses

If you would like to respond to this consultation in writing you can do this by emailing communityconversations@warwickshire.gov.uk, or writing to Community Partnerships Service, Warwickshire County Council, Shire Hall. CV34 4RL, or by telephoning 01926 412381.

One-to-one conversations will also take place with the following consultees:

- Equalities' professionals across the public sector and voluntary, community, and social enterprise sectors (and private sector where applicable), to include Health, Police, and Borough/District Councils.

Closing date

The consultation will close on 6 December 2026.

What will happen after the consultation

Following the consultation all feedback will be analysed and it is intended that a report will be provided to the Council's Cabinet so that a decision on the future of the service can be made.

Privacy statement.

Following the end of the consultation we shall publish the results, and this may include quotes of comments which will be anonymous. If you reply to an anonymous survey, then no personal details will be captured. Information you provide in any additional correspondence to our surveys and consultations, including personal information, may be disclosed in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) and/or Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR) and Data Protection Legislation.

If you want the information that you provide to be treated as confidential and not shared, including your contact details, please tell us why, but be aware that, under the Freedom of Information Act, we cannot always guarantee confidentiality.

To see how we use your personal data and what your information rights are, please read our overall customer privacy notice at <http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/privacy> or contact our Customer Service Centre on 01926 410410.

Appendices

Appendix 1, Equality Act 2010, protected characteristics.

Appendix 2, Service Specification.

Appendix 3, Initial, draft Equality Impact Assessment relating to the possible decision to cease externally commissioning the service.

Appendix 4, Service Annual Report.

Appendix 5, Quarterly performance monitoring report October 2025 to December 2025.