“Opportunities for all”

London Borough of Hillingdon’s Draft Equality and Diversity Plan
Introduction

Hillingdon Council values the diversity of the people and communities in the borough and in our workforce. We recognise that our strength lies in the diversity of our communities but that it also presents a major challenge to us in utilising the diversity of those communities to the benefit of all.

Equality and diversity issues are integral to modernisation. The modernisation agenda of the government challenges local authorities to get in touch with its people at grass root level in order to revive local democracy and deliver relevant and accessible services. This means we have to engage with all the communities in the borough and tackle issues of discrimination and social exclusion. We are working to improve equality of access for all our communities and to respond to our legal obligations.

This policy framework has been developed in order to recognise and value the diversity that exists and is evolving within Hillingdon’s communities. It is based on the principles of mutual respect, fairness, social inclusion and a commitment to tackle inequality.

“A comprehensive equality policy involves a commitment to review and change local authority practice. This is considerably more than the production of a policy statement and should extend to planning and initiation of a series of processes across the local authority and in partnerships with other groups and organisations”

The Equality Standard – The Employer’s Organisation for Local Government

Profile of the borough

The place

The London Borough of Hillingdon lies on the western edge of London and is the second largest London borough in size. It is home to Heathrow Airport, some of the world’s leading firms, three hospitals and Brunel University. It has excellent rail, bus and road links to the capital and is close to the national motorway network. With large areas of countryside, much of it green belt, Hillingdon’s 42 square miles include lakes, fields, rivers and Ruislip Woods National Nature Reserve.

The people

According to the 2001 Census there are approximately 243,000 living in the borough:

57.1% are female and 48.3% male

21.2% are below 16 years of age

48.3% of the population is between 16 and 44
18.2% are 60 years and over

20.9% of Hillingdon’s population are from black and ethnic minority communities with a projected increase to 25% by 2011

6.5% are from other white ethnic minority groups

3.7% are refugees

The average household income in Hillingdon is £31,213

3,622 people (2.3%) are claiming benefits out of Hillingdon’s working age population of 152,250. (May 2003) Unemployment in the borough averages 1.9%.

64.1% are Christian

4.63% Muslim

4.55% Sikh

4.61% Hindu

0.39% Buddhist

0.81% Jewish.

There are more than 100 different languages spoken in Hillingdon.

The legal framework

Hillingdon operates within a legal framework that outlines its powers and duties. Both as an employer and as a service provider it is obliged to obey the law. This includes a range of relevant equality legislation as well as codes of practice and other recommendations. This legal framework includes:

Disability
The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 places a duty on us to ensure that all services and premises are accessible to disabled people and that we do not discriminate.

Gender
The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 places a duty on us not to treat anyone unfairly because of their gender. We need to ensure that the needs of men, women and the transgendered are taken into account in our services and employment.

Race
The Race Relations Amendment Act 1976 and the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000 which require local authorities take appropriate steps to promote race equality, eliminate unlawful race discrimination and promote good race relations.
Religion and sexual orientation
The council has responsibilities to promote equal opportunities in employment on the grounds of religion, belief and sexual orientation through the Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003 and the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003

Human rights
Hillingdon Council has to ensure compliance with the Human Rights Act (1998) which came into effect in October 2000.

The council also has responsibilities to address specific aspects of equal opportunity or discrimination through other pieces of legislation and Government initiatives such as Best Value and the Comprehensive Performance Assessment. We also have a duty to promote the social, economic and environmental well being of the community.

Hillingdon Council has signed up to the Equality Standard for Local Government. This commits the authority to improving equality practice in employment and service delivery. Progress on this is will be measured under Best Value.

Our vision
Equal opportunities is not just about meeting our legal obligations. It is also about fairness and good sense. Fairness because people pay the taxes and council tax that fund what we do and they are entitled to expect to be treated fairly. It is good sense because if we recruit people fairly we will get the people who are best qualified to help provide good services.

The London Borough of Hillingdon has many roles, as a provider and commissioner of services, enforcer, facilitators of partnerships and community working, regulator and as employer and we are committed to equality and diversity in all of them.

Our vision is of a cohesive borough where there are dynamic, strong and positive relationships being developed between and within communities. We need to encourage all communities to share a common vision and a sense of belonging so that the diversity of people’s backgrounds and circumstances are appreciated. We will work with these communities and our partner organisations within the borough to promote community cohesion and social inclusion.

Equality and diversity is about recognising and valuing fundamental human rights and ensuring equal access for all both in employment and service delivery. We recognise that disadvantage and discrimination are common and are experienced by many communities including the disabled, black and ethnic minorities; white disadvantaged communities; refugees; asylum seekers; lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities; gypsies and travellers; younger and older people; men and women.
As an organisation we want to improve. We need to identify the barriers to achieving equality in our service delivery and improve the way we deal with service delivery and employment issues. We aim to improve our working practices and service delivery to create a council that values the diversity of the workforce and the community which it serves. Our policies, practices, plans and procedures will reflect our corporate equality and diversity policy.

We recognise that different individuals have different needs. We aim to treat everyone fairly without discriminating and to eliminate unfair and unlawful discrimination, implement good practice and challenge all forms of discrimination wherever they exist.

This document and our Equality in Employment Policy are part of this contribution.

**Delivering our vision**

- Hillingdon Council will work towards meeting the requirements of the Equality Standard and achieve Level 3 by March 2008.

- We aim to be an open and accountable council recognised as promoting and celebrating diversity both within and outside the council. We will treat all of our citizens equally and fairly regardless of whether they belong to the majority white population or the smallest minority.

- We will make services relevant and accessible to all service users and ensure levels of service are continuously monitored.

- We will ensure that equalities considerations are included in all our decision making, policies, practices and procedures throughout the council. We will target areas of concern and under representation to develop specific and planned positive action initiatives.

- We will devise a strategy to build up and strengthen community cohesion and increase the participation of all communities in the community planning process, forums, groups, projects and other community involvement agendas.

- We will produce a joint Equality and Diversity Policy Statement with our partners in the Local Strategic Partnership.

- We will ensure that councillors, trade unions and employees understand and support our equality policy and we will introduce appropriate training and awareness raising programmes for staff and members to help achieve this.

- Hillingdon Council will undertake to have a consistent and strategic approach to equality issues that is effective and appropriate, through a thorough service assessment procedure ensuring a systematic review of all policies and procedures to ensure they are equitable; and that all actions are built into service and team plans.
- We will monitor and review all departmental and corporate action plans to ensure they address the needs of all groups, including hard to reach groups.

- We will ensure that systems are developed to audit and monitor service delivery and customer satisfaction in this area.

- We will work with the council’s Community Safety Unit, Hillingdon Homes and the Police to ensure that hate crime across the borough is dealt with effectively.

- The council recognises that there exists barriers to equal access to council services and information. The council will promote positive images in its publication that reflect the full diversity of the borough and make them available in formats that will cater for all sections of the community.

- Hillingdon Council will review its translation and interpretation services to ensure the provision of a responsive, appropriate, accessible and effective service and facility to all sections of the community and ensure levels of satisfaction are continuously monitored.

- We will ensure that our contractors, suppliers, volunteers and partners are aware of Hillingdon’s position on equality and are clear on their obligations to provide services in line with the requirements.

- The council will encourage legal positive measures where appropriate to overcome disadvantage, discrimination and deprivation including in employment.

- We will ensure the council’s workforce better represents the diverse communities of the London Borough of Hillingdon and that inequalities in pay structures and positions of seniority are addressed.

- The council will ensure that where it uses its regulatory functions, it will do this in a strictly fair and equitable manner.

Roles and responsibilities

It is not enough to introduce a policy – we also have to make sure that it is implemented effectively. Our approach will be systematic with named officers and properly allocated roles and responsibilities at every level.

- Cabinet will provide leadership and support and ensure resources are available.

- The Cabinet Member with the portfolio for Performance, Partnerships and Regeneration has overall responsibility for the direction and scrutiny of this policy and ensuring its successful implementation, monitoring and review.
Those Members of the Cabinet with other portfolios, whether they are service based such as housing or social services or cross-cutting issues such as Best Value, will have a responsibility to ensure that equalities issues are integrated into corporate policy and service delivery strategies. Cabinet Members will also have the lead responsibility for monitoring the implementation of corporate equality strategies and plans.

All elected members also have an important role of using their links within the community to develop relationships with community groups and individuals and to encourage dialogue with the council; investigate and monitor equality and diversity issues through the scrutiny process; can hold the executive to account in its delivery of corporate strategies and policies.

The Chief Executive is responsible for providing leadership in the implementation of this policy and for ensuring that service planning and performance management systems incorporate specific objectives in terms of service and employment.

The Management Board and its corporate directors are responsible for the implementation of Equalities and Diversity within their departments and ensuring change across the council.

Individual Directors and service managers with the assistance of their representatives on the Corporate Equalities and Diversity Group (CEDG), are responsible for setting equalities targets, identifying resources and delivering the equality objectives in relation to service delivery and employment. They are to ensure that employees are adequately informed, trained and supported to ensure that their duties are carried out effectively. Managers and all employees with supervisory responsibility have departmental and local responsibility for implementing, monitoring and promoting this policy.

All employees of the council have individual and collective responsibility for working together to promote equality and fairness both in the way they treat all customers through the services they provide and fellow members of staff.

Contractors working on behalf of the council will be expected to demonstrate their commitment to equality of opportunity in customer care and employment.

**Monitoring and Evaluation**

Checking our progress is crucial. We will monitor and review how we progressing in reaching our objectives. We will monitor service users and employees on both a quantitative basis (age, gender, disability, race and ethnicity) and also a qualitative basis (attitudes, perceptions and opinions) and use the audit information to check
our improvement.

- There will be regular equality and diversity progress reports presented to the Management Board and the Cabinet and each department will be expected to produce an annual monitoring report.

- Departments will be required to present individual progress reports on implementing equalities targets to their senior management teams from a development, implementation, monitoring, auditing and review stage.

- The Corporate Equalities and Diversity Group (CEDG) under the leadership of a Corporate Director designated by the Chief Executive is responsible for co-ordinating and monitoring the implementation of the Corporate Equalities and Diversity Policy at corporate and service level to ensure it is effective and supported by planned and consistent monitoring and evaluation. This would be done primarily through the Equality and Diversity Action Plan.

- All employees have a role and a responsibility in the implementation of this policy. Appropriate training and awareness raising will be offered to improve understanding of the issues involved and all staff Performance and Development Agreements (PADAs) will reflect individual and team responsibilities for equalities and diversity.

Consultation and community participation

Consultation is essential to achieve equality in service delivery and employment. The council’s decision making has to take place in a way which ensures that the needs and requirements of the different communities are represented.

- The council affirms the need for openness and transparency in the way it takes decisions. This will help communities to influence the council’s policies and practice.

- Through the council’s Consultation Strategy we will develop a more coherent and consistent approach across the council to consultation and participation with all groups, including, hard to reach communities.

- The council will ensure that equalities issues are regularly raised with existing forums such as the Older People’s Forum and the Disabilities forum.

- Through the Connecting Communities programme the council will support capacity building and the development of strong, secure, self-reliant and confident communities free from any form of discrimination.

- We will continue to support and develop initiatives to foster community cohesion using the West London Community Cohesion Programme where applicable for its duration.
Links to other corporate workplans

The role of the Local Strategic Partnership

The Local Strategic Partnership brings together a wide range of public and private sector organisations to work together to improve the life and prospects of everyone who lives and works in the borough.

The LSP vision is to ensure Hillingdon is a pleasant and vibrant place to live and work, where every member of its communities has access to excellent services and the opportunity to fulfil their potential. This is ambitious and only fully achievable in the long term. To help make it a reality we have adopted six key aims:

- A borough of learning and culture
- A safer borough
• A cleaner and more pleasant
• A borough with improving health, housing and social care
• An economically prosperous borough
• A borough where opportunities are open to all

The responsibilities of the Partnership are to:

• Prepare and implement Hillingdon’s community plan – setting an overall vision for the borough, drawing up an action plan to deliver this vision, monitoring progress and reporting regularly to the community
• Bring together all other local plans and initiatives to ensure the organisations in the partnership work together effectively to meet local need and priorities
• Co-ordinate action across the partnership to reduce inequalities and secure full community involvement in the planning and delivery of services

Policy statements

Age Equality Policy Statement
Ageism can be defined as any negative action or attitude that discriminates against a person or group on the basis of their age. These stereotypes are based on “perceived” notions of an individual’s ability and potential. Ageism is usually targeted against older or younger people. To combat this Hillingdon Council will ensure that services are delivered in a way that takes account of the needs of all service users irrespective of age, paying specific regard to the needs of youth groups and older people’s groups.

The council will seek to develop access to decision making through the council committee structure, supporting self-organised groups and involving young and older people in consultation initiatives. The council will adopt the voluntary code of practice on anti-age discrimination; and will work with the Older People’s Assembly, Youth Parliament and other representative bodies.

Disability Equality Policy Statement
The London Borough of Hillingdon considers that the major difficulties faced by people with disabilities include the lack of provision for their needs as well as discriminatory and prejudiced attitudes. We recognise that in addressing disability issues in an equal opportunities context, there is a tendency to focus solely on issues of access and employment for people with physical disabilities.

The council endorses the right of people with disabilities to lead an independent life and will base its policies and its provision on the principles of the full integration of people with disabilities. Hillingdon is committed to providing services and enhancing access and facilities to enable people with disabilities to make full use of our services and to take up employment.
We are committed to working to eliminate discrimination against people with disabilities in its policies, procedures and practices both in terms of service provision and employment and will adopt the social model of disability.

**Gender Equality Policy Statement**
Hillingdon Council is concerned about the discrimination faced by anyone on grounds of their gender. We are committed to working collaboratively with staff and the community to eliminate sexism in its structures and cultures, as well as encouraging changes in behaviours and attitude. The council is committed to the provision of equal access to its services and equal treatment of its employees and of people who use its services regardless of sex. We are also committed to working to eliminate discrimination against all genders in its policies, procedures and practices both in terms of service provision and employment. The council is further committed to ensuring that all future policies, procedures and practices are equal opportunities based in terms of sex equality.

**Race equality policy statement**
The London Borough of Hillingdon is aware of the unlawful discrimination faced by the Black, Asian and other ethnic minorities including refugees, asylum seekers and travellers in the borough. This results in racial discrimination, racial disadvantage, racial hatred and racial harassment. We acknowledge that racism can be reflected in subtle ways by means of “processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantages minority ethnic people”.

We are committed to working collaboratively with all communities to eliminate racism in our structures and cultures as well as encouraging changes in behaviours and attitudes. We will work to ensure that its structures, procedures and practices do not discriminate either directly or indirectly on racial grounds. Hillingdon is committed to the progress of the Race Relations Amendment Act, Race Equality Scheme and the council's Racial Harassment Policy.

**Faith/ belief equality policy statement**
Hillingdon Council seeks to create an environment where faith/belief are respected and valued. We acknowledge that people hold different faiths and religions and others may have strong held beliefs they may not class as religious. The council will ensure that religious observances are respected and accommodated wherever possible. Harassment of people due to their faith/belief will be taken seriously and will not be tolerated in any form in relation to service delivery or employment.

**Sexuality equality policy statement**
The London Borough of Hillingdon recognises the discrimination faced by lesbians and gay men and is committed to equal access to its services and equal treatment of people who use its services and its employees who are lesbian or gay, bisexual and transgender.
We will take positive action to ensure that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people to feel safe in being open about their sexual identity and recognises their right to be open or private about sexuality.

We will work with the Police, partner agencies, LGBT forum and pressure groups to tackle homophobic crimes in the borough and develop specific services where needed and within our resources. We accept that a key task is to actively assist the development of a workplace culture such that lesbians and gay men can be free from harassment and feel safe.

Appendix

Equality in employment policy

Introduction

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that:

♦ Council services are of high quality and responsive to residents' needs by seeking to ensure that our workforce profile better reflects the profile of our community.

♦ The council makes best use of all of its employees and potential employees' skills, talents and abilities in delivering services.

♦ The council fulfils its legal obligations under various equal opportunities legislation and complies with provisions contained in the various Codes of Practice.

Scope

This policy provides information, advice and guidance to all employees, except schools based staff, regarding their responsibilities to equal opportunity. Schools should either adopt this policy or develop their own equalities policy

The policy

The council is committed to treating all employees (or applicants for employment), fairly and on merit, and to the development and implementation of employment policies, procedures and practices that do not discriminate unlawfully on the grounds of:

- age
- disability
- gender, marital status or domestic responsibilities
- gender re-assignment
- HIV status
- poverty or social exclusion
- race, colour, ethnic or national origin
- religion or belief
- sexual orientation
- trade union activity

♦ The council will ensure equalities responsibilities and considerations are a key and intrinsic part in the development, monitoring, review and revision of all employment policies, procedures and guidelines.
All policies, procedures and guidelines will seek to prevent unlawful discrimination and create a working environment that encourages diversity, respects difference and treats employees with dignity at all times.

- The council recognises, respects and values diversity within its workforce as an asset and key resource in enhancing and maximising performance to effectively meet the diverse needs of its service users.

- The council is committed to providing equal access to training and development within available resources.

- The council will monitor employee and applicant data and information on a regular basis to ensure that there is a continuous review of the composition of the workforce. This will identify the impact of policies and practices and provide the basis to eliminate unjustified discrimination and promote equality of opportunity.

- This data will be reported regularly to Management Board and the Trade Unions. The council will produce and publish an annual report.

- The council’s aim is that the composition of our workforce should better reflect that of our community.

- A copy of this policy will be provided to every applicant and employee.

**Responsibilities**

*Employees* - It is the responsibility of every employee to uphold, respect and act in accordance with this policy. Employees in breach of this responsibility will be subject to disciplinary action that may lead to dismissal.

Managers – Managers are responsible for the effective and correct operation of the council’s policies, procedures and guidelines especially where they may impact on equalities.

Head of Personnel – Responsibility for ensuring monitoring equalities issues and producing an annual equalities report.

**Background and related documents**

All policies, procedures and guidelines are produced with equalities as an intrinsic consideration on their content, however the following documents have particular relevance to equalities.

- The council’s Equality Policy and Procedure
- Recruitment and Selection Procedure
- Disciplinary Code
- Grievance Policy & Procedure
- Golden Rules – Code of Conduct
- Protection of Employees and associated documents (including Bullying and Harassment)
- Conditions of Service