

Equality Scheme Appendix 1

Putting People First

Equality and Diversity Policy Statement

Forward

This Policy Statement spells out the Council's commitment to equality and diversity and the measures the Council will take to achieve equality. Kingston has had a Policy Statement since 1986. This has been reviewed and updated on a regular basis. Much has already been achieved but we are not complacent and there is still much to do.

This revised Policy Statement sets out our arrangements for ensuring compliance with new legislation specifically on Race, Disability and Gender. More detail on this, together with our three-year action plan is available in our Equality Scheme, published in December 2006. This policy statement also outlines the way we shall address issues concerning religion and belief, sexual orientation and age.

We are proud of our diverse borough and value every resident. Equality is therefore a crucial part of our key strategic aim of putting people first to make the Council more accessible and responsive. This policy statement will be widely circulated both within the community and within the Council itself.

Everyone who works for the Council will play a part in ensuring that our commitment becomes a reality.

Bruce McDonald

Chief Executive

November 2007

Introduction

The Royal Borough of Kingston has a very diverse population. According to the 2001 Census 15.5% of Kingston's population is from Black and minority ethnic groups; this rises to 20.6% for those under eighteen. However, the GLA estimate of Kingston's BME population in 2007 is 21% and the proportion in our schools is 40%. This is higher than the national average. Kingston has the largest Korean population in Western Europe; recent estimates put this as high as 8-10,000.

Our translation and interpretation service provides 122 translators for 44 languages. The majority population are Christian (64.6%), 3.9% are Muslim,

3.6% Hindu, 0.8% Buddhist and 0.6% Sikh. Approximately 20% of people in the Borough are disabled.

Diversity embodies all the differences that make us unique individuals. In Kingston we recognize that diversity is not only a reality, it's a distinct advantage, and one that we value and embrace. Just as the people of Kingston are infinitely diverse, so is our workforce. Our understanding of diversity helps us serve our community better.

Success and productivity are natural extensions of a corporate culture that truly values all people, putting an appreciation of diversity among our top corporate priorities.

Our commitment to equality in our service delivery and our employment practices means that we believe in:

- Providing fairness and equality of opportunity
- Recognising that everyone is different and that these differences must be equally respected
- Challenging discrimination so that we demonstrate our commitments to equality and do not exclude people or make them feel isolated
- Respecting people's difference in viewpoint and ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to raise their point of view

What does the Policy Statement cover?

The Policy Statement covers residents, visitors, service users, elected members, employees and potential employees.

Staff in locally managed education establishments have their own policies and procedures determined by their governors, which means that they are not covered by this policy. This policy statement is recommended as a model of good practice and where a policy of this nature does not exist this one may be adopted or customised to meet specific needs.

The Policy Statement covers all forms of unlawful or unfair discrimination including those on the grounds of: age, asylum or refugee status, caring responsibilities, class, colour, disability (including physical, sensory impairment, mental health, learning disability or HIV status), ethnic or national origin (including Travellers), gender, gender reassignment, language, marital status, nationality (including citizenship), part-time working, race, religion, sexuality, or trade union membership.

As a Council we have adopted the 'social model' of disability as opposed to the 'medical model'. The key difference between the two is in the 'location' of the problem. According to the medical model, disabled people are unable to participate in society as a direct result of their impairment. However, according to the social model, people with impairments are disabled by physical, social,

cultural and corporate barriers. Disabled people generally have the same needs and aspirations as non-disabled people, expecting to be able to access services independently. It is society and the environment that disables people with impairments. Thus disabled people are not 'people with disabilities'; they are 'disabled people', disabled by society and the built environment.

The policy statement applies to all aspects of the Council's functions including:

- Service provision
- Commissioning and procurement of goods and services
- Recruitment, employment, training and staff development
- Community engagement including consultation with local people
- Grant making
- Partnerships with other organisations
- Promotion and publicity
- The exercise of our statutory powers and responsibilities

The Policy Statement applies at all levels in the Council and implementation is the responsibility of every Council employee.

Policy Statement aim

Our overall aim is to ensure that everyone can fully participate in the social, cultural, political or economic life of the Borough. This includes our staff. To this end we aim to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination
- Promote equality of opportunity and improve access to services (by removing the barriers which deny access to our services)
- Promote good relations between everyone, all people of different races, disabled people, and encourage community cohesion
- Celebrate and value diversity
- Comply with our legal duties under the relevant acts in relation to race, disability, gender, sexual orientation, religion and belief, age and human rights.

Our commitments

- ***Policy and planning:*** we will promote equality and value diversity in all our policies and service planning.

- **Service delivery and customer care:** we will ensure that our services are relevant to the diverse needs of our residents and local communities, are accessible to all and are delivered in a way that is appropriate and sensitive.
- **Community engagement and development:** we will encourage community participation to ensure that we listen to and invest in the needs of our residents and communities.
- **Information:** we will ensure that information about our services is offered in appropriate formats and languages and appears in media read or heard by local people.
- **Protection from violence and harassment:** we will continue to work with our partners to ensure that domestic violence, racist crime, homophobic crime, adult abuse and abuse of disabled people is tackled.
- **Commissioning and procurement:** we will ensure that equality issues are part of the commissioning and procurement process.
- **Partnerships:** we will ensure that our partners are aware of our commitments and share in them.
- **Employment:** we will aim to have a workforce that is representative of the community we serve. To this end we will ensure that our workforce is built on open and fair employment practices, that our staff are valued and that the work environment is inclusive.

How we will achieve our commitments

A plan of action:

The Council's Equality Scheme outlines the way in which we plan to implement our policy statement and includes a three-year action plan for implementation. Points below summarize the Council's main actions.

Measuring success:

The Council has adopted the Equality Standard for Local Government. This provides a framework for continuous improvement in equality. The Standard covers race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion and belief and age. There are five levels of achievement. Each level covers employment and service delivery. We aim to have achieved level 3 in 2007 and level 4 and 5 in the following years. The Standard will help us mainstream equality into everything the Council does.

Structures for implementation:

The Council has an Equal Opportunities Forum, which brings together representatives from directorates, staff side and the voluntary sector. The Chief

Executive chairs the Forum. Its function is to advise on policy and promote good practice. The Equal Opportunities Forum will scrutinise progress on equality, advise on policy and promote good practice.

There are also equality groups operating throughout the Council who are responsible for co-ordinating equality at a Directorate level.

Consulting with residents and staff:

The Council has set up the following consultative forums to help in implementing this Policy:

- 'Kingston Disabled and Older People's Forum' which offers a way for local disabled people (including older people who have impairments resulting from conditions associated with old age) to be involved in shaping services. The Forum is run in partnership with Kingston Primary Care Trust and Kingston Hospital Trust.
- A Black and Ethnic Minorities Forum which acts to inform, challenge, check and support the Council's equality initiatives in order to improve its commitment and effectiveness in carrying out its functions.
- Young People's Forum
- Learning Disability Parliament
- Consultation with Deaf BSL users
- Black and Minority Ethnic Staff Group
- Disabled Staff Group
- Senior Women's Network
- The Futures Group

Assessing our policies and services:

We will continue to monitor existing policies (monitoring service users, identifying gaps in provision and planning change) and assess the impact of new policies to ensure that they do not discriminate. We will put our policies into action based on consultation, raising awareness and developing outcomes that make a difference.

Training our staff:

The Council runs training on equality for staff. Some includes specific training for policy officers and for managers. Mandatory generic equality training is being delivered to all front line staff. The Council also runs regular training sessions on race, disability and age equality. In addition there is an equality slot on the Induction course that all new staff attend. Equality is included in the induction programme for councillors.

Dealing with complaints:

Complaints about any service provided by the Council should be made to nominated people in each directorate. A leaflet 'Have Your Say' is available online and in reception areas with names of those who can be contacted. The Council has a Code of Conduct in relation to staff and breaches of this code are investigated in accordance with the Council's disciplinary procedure.

Who is responsible for equality and implementing this Policy Statement?

The Leader of the Council has overall responsibility for this Policy Statement. The Chief Executive and Directors have the management responsibility for ensuring that the Policy Statement is implemented across the Council. Managers are responsible for delivering equality in their services, providing support for staff to work together to achieve equality, and acting on any staff or community complaints. All employees are responsible for ensuring that they work together to recognise and remove barriers so that they can promote equality, fairness and dignity, and behave in accordance with this Policy Statement.

Resources

The Council will integrate equality into the mainstream budgetary allocation. Staff in the corporate Human Resources team have specialist equality responsibilities. There are also additional resources in some Directorates with staff specialising in equality issues.

Review of this Policy Statement

This Policy Statement is effective from December 2007 and will be reviewed annually and amended as necessary to reflect changes in legislation, codes of practice or special issues of local concern.