

Summary of Kingston Council's Equality Scheme

What is Kingston's Equality Scheme?

The Equality Scheme is a three year plan on how we will ensure that RBK does not discriminate against anyone on grounds of their racial or ethnic origins, their disability or their gender. The development of the Scheme is required under the following equality legislation:

- Race Relations Amendment Act 2000
- Disability Discrimination Act 2005
- Sex Discrimination Act as amended by the Equality Act 2006

These three Acts place a 'General Duty' on public authorities. The General Duty is a positive duty that builds equality into every aspect of the Council's work. It represents a change from a legal framework where the onus is on the individual to bring a complaint of discrimination to one where the onus is on the Council, along with other public sector organisations, to seek out actual or potential discrimination and address it.

This is a summary of our Equality Scheme. It outlines the areas of our work that we consider to be important in meeting our responsibilities under the law. Details of where you can obtain copies of the full Scheme are provided at the end of this leaflet.

In addition to addressing the General Duty as outlined above, the Council will progress action on Religion, Sexual Orientation and Age. Action relevant to these areas is highlighted in the action plan at the end of the full Equality Scheme.

The Council has decided that work on disability should follow 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. 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. It is for this reason that action outlined in the full Equality Scheme looks at removing barriers to accessing services.

The Council's commitment to equality

The Royal Borough of Kingston has a very diverse population.

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 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

The aim is to develop measures and actions that ensure discrimination on the grounds of race, disability, gender, religion and belief, sexual orientation and age does not occur.

A key objective for the Council is to 'be a Council which celebrates diversity and practises equality in everything we do, in providing or commissioning services and as an employer'.

We also plan to use our influence in working with other organisations and employers in Kingston, especially those who provide services on our behalf, on how they provide jobs, training and services. This is to ensure that they do not discriminate against people on any equality grounds; and in general follow the principles and approach developed by the Council in this area.

For more information on the Council's commitment to equality see *Putting People First – Equality and Diversity Policy Statement*.

Consultation and involvement

Consultation and the involvement of the public is a major priority for us. We believe that public involvement is essential to the democratic accountability and responsiveness of the Council. Such consultation is also an integral part of the Equality Scheme.

The Council has set up the following consultative forums to help in implementing its Equality Scheme:

- The Equal Opportunities Forum, which brings together representatives from directorates, staff side and the voluntary sector. It is chaired by the Chief Executive
- '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

In order to identify specific needs and barriers to accessing services, we ran a focus event for Kingston Disabled and Older People's Forum on 30 June 2006. Forum members were given the opportunity to comment on all aspects of Council (and health) services. This ensured that the Equality Scheme's Action Plans reflected the real priorities of local disabled people.

We have produced detailed guidance on consultation for Council staff to help them involve different groups of people in ensuring that all service changes are developed in non-discriminatory ways. This Guidance is also available on the Council's website.

Eliminating discrimination and improving access to services

We have undertaken a screening of all policies to see if they were likely to discriminate in terms of race, disability or gender. This 'relevance' test has enabled us to prioritize those policies which need a more thorough equality review. This is called an 'equality impact assessment' (EQIA). Equality impact assessments will be published on the website. We have developed guidance for staff on conducting Equality Impact Assessments. In conducting assessments we will consider the impact on different racial groups, on the full range of impairments (disabilities), and on women and men. We will also, where possible, consider the impact on people from different religious groups, lesbians, gay men, bisexual and transgender people and people of different age groups.

Kingston Disabled and Older People's Forum and the new Black and minority ethnic Forum will act as reference groups for staff undertaking assessments.

Assessments will be done on a rolling programme. Forthcoming Impact Assessments are listed in the full Equality Scheme's Action Plan.

Access to information

We have published a 'Style Guide' to encourage staff to provide information in plain English, using font size 12. Information can be provided in alternative formats on request. The Council has a user-friendly website.

We run a translation and interpretation service –'Kingston Interpreting Service'. This covers all the community languages used in the Borough as well as British Sign Language, Braille and audiotape.

Checking that what we do is fair

An important part of our Equality Scheme is monitoring and evaluating our progress to ensure that we employ people fairly and that our services are provided on a fair and equitable basis. The result of our monitoring will be published on a regular basis and produced in user-friendly form so that people can see what we are doing and how we are doing it.

We have produced equality monitoring guidelines for Council staff. These cover ethnicity, gender, disability and advice on monitoring by religion, sexual orientation and age. The Council already monitors its employment practices and many of its services.

Tackling harassment and violence

We will continue to work with our partners to ensure that domestic violence, racist crime, homophobic crime, adult abuse and abuse of disabled people, are tackled. To achieve this we work in partnership with many agencies within the Safer Kingston Partnership. The Partnership provides an action plan annually, which incorporates issues concerning all aspects of Hate Crime. This has included the setting up of a Domestic Violence One Stop Shop, Racial Incidents One Stop Shop as well as Third Party Reporting sites. For operational issues there are three Forums, Domestic Violence, Racial Incidents and LGBT (for homophobic crime) who report to the Hate Crime Policy Group who in turn reports to the Safer Kingston Partnership.

Our staff

We 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. We run 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.

Education

We promote the development of appropriate Equality Schemes by all maintained schools, using guidance from the Department for Education and Skills and the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

Complaints

The Council has a complaints procedure. 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.

Conclusion

This summary gives you a brief background to Kingston's Equality Scheme. The Scheme and its action plan will be updated every three years. If you need more information, a copy of our Equality and Diversity Statement or a copy of the full Equality Scheme and our action plan contact the Human Resources Department on 020 8547 5152 for or visit our website at www.kingston.gov.uk/equalities.htm This summary is available in the main community languages of Kingston and other accessible formats upon request.