



EQUALITY POLICY

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**Southend-on-Sea
Borough Council**

**Different Lives,
Equal Chances,
Making Change Happen**



**Our approach to valuing equality and
diversity**

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Valuing equality and diversity is more than a fancy management term. It's about how we as a council can genuinely accept all others regardless of ethnicity, background, ability, preferences and the great things that can happen when we do. It is about honest human interaction without unhelpful barriers.

What is this policy?

This policy sets out our overall vision for equality and diversity. It says what kinds of things you will see us doing to address inequalities in our society.

Importantly, it is also the 'umbrella' for a number of different schemes and policies we need to have in place. This policy sets the general direction. The other schemes and policies set out the detail of how we will get there. These are listed at the end of this policy.

Why is an equality policy important?

As individuals, we all have different needs, backgrounds, expectations and opportunities. We expect these to be catered for by everyone with whom we come into contact – local authorities, other public services, education providers, shops and offices etc. But so often these needs are not met, because they are not thought about or possibly because they are simply ignored. This means that we do not all receive the same services or opportunities, which creates disharmony in our society.

“ (Institutional discrimination) ...can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through thoughtlessness and ...stereotyping “

Macpherson 1999

The Macpherson Report in 1999 (into the death of Stephen Lawrence) highlighted the way institutional processes can influence how organisations operate. In this case, the 'norms' of the police force severely affected their investigation.

This policy sets out how Southend Borough Council will meet equality and diversity needs and our legal obligations.

What are equality and diversity?

‘Equality’ is about providing everyone with equal access to council services, no matter where they live, whatever their background (sex, age, faith, race, sexual preferences or how able they are).

‘Diversity’ is about providing services which respect, value and cater for the differences in the way people would like /need to have them delivered.

Who is this for?

This policy is designed for everyone, regardless of their background. Later in the document we talk about different ‘equality groups’. This term is shorthand for groups of people covered by legislation. The legislation sets out what they have a right to expect, from society and from us as a service provider and employer. We need to understand, respect and cater for their differing needs. The equality groups covered by legislation are:

Different genders :	Men, women and transgender people
Different ages :	Younger and older people, working age people, children
Disabled people :	Physically or mentally impaired people, people with a long term limiting illness and carers for these people
Different religions:	This can also include different faiths/value systems as well as formal religions.
Different sexual orientations	Heterosexual, bisexual and gay/lesbian people
Different races	People from different ethnic, cultural and geographical backgrounds

The local authority, equality and the law

The legislation and our duties give us some big challenges to deliver. We are committed to ensuring that we operate within the law. We are working towards achieving the highest standards of equality and diversity using the Equality Standard for Local Government. The Standard provides a framework through which we ensure our practices are legal and do not discriminate.

“It can be a moment of great shock for an employer to suddenly find themselves before an employment tribunal and facing the prospect of having to pay a six-figure compensation award”

UK Training Worldwide

This policy has been prepared with regard to the legislation covering discrimination in the workplace and for provision of services. We must comply with the following principal pieces of legislation (as amended): -

- Equal Pay Act 1970
- Sex Discrimination Act 1975
- Race Relations Act 1976
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- Employment Rights Act 1996
- Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000
- Employment Act 2002
- Race Relations Act 1976 (Amendment) Regulations 2003
- Religion or Belief Regulations 2003
- Sexual Orientation Regulations 2003
- Age Discrimination Regulations 2006

There are other pieces of legislation and guidance which we also comply with, but these are the main ones.

We have also taken account of:

1. regulations implementing European Directives on the elimination of discrimination, and
2. Codes of Practice issued by the Equal Opportunities Commission, the Disability Rights Commission and Commission for Racial Equality.

We want to go further than just compliance. We want to embody good practice. The sections that follow show how we will achieve this.

Our commitment

Southend is a great place to live, work and visit and we would like it to be even better. We can do this by valuing the diversity of our society and designing our services to meet those needs, as far as we are able.

We will :

- treat people fairly
- try to ensure that they all have equal access to the same services and opportunities
- put equality and diversity at the heart of delivering excellence
- lead the development of equality and diversity in our community, for our staff and with those who deliver our contracts
- actively promote equality for all citizens, whatever their race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion/belief and age
- continuously improve our approach to equality and diversity
- operate within the law.

In this scheme we have adopted the principle of the social model of disability. The social model of disability says that the person is not limited by their disability, but by the environment and society they live in. This is also true of other equality groups – we may all face barriers at some point in our lives because society's norms are not geared to our needs.

Therefore we need to change the environment to fit the person, not the person to fit the existing environment. This means removing barriers present in the physical world and society's culture for everyone. Doing this will mean '***different lives, equal chances, making change happen***' becomes a reality.

We have summed up this commitment in our vision below:

Our vision is to create a better Southend by placing equality and diversity at the heart of everything we do, and using these to deliver excellent public services.

Our Values

Values are the deeply held beliefs of an organisation and are demonstrated through day-to-day behaviours. Values:

- make an open statement about how we expect everyone to conduct themselves and treat others
- inform the way we plan and provide services
- will shape our focus for the long term, and
- provide an important reference point when we ask the question 'how are we doing?'.

Our values are shown in the diagram that follows. Our central value "***Good customer care is at the heart of everything we do***" links to our vision for equality and diversity.

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council – our Values



What we want to achieve

This section sets out what we want to achieve for

- Southend as a place,
- our staff and people who deliver aspects of our services, and
- the people who use those services.

We want to achieve and maintain Level 5 of the Equality Standard for Local Government. This Standard is voluntary, but embodies best practice. It is a tool for combating institutional discrimination. At Level 5 we will have embedded equality and diversity into our ways of thinking and working. We want to change our culture so that we develop and grow as an organisation and help our community to do the same.

"..there will be progress if the duty is seen as a way of fundamentally changing the core values and culture of the organisation... we need an outcome oriented approach "

CRE 2001

Promoting community relations : We want Southend to be a place in which:

- **diversity is seen as a strength;**
- people's differences are understood and respected;
- everyone takes responsibility to promote good relations between all parts of our local communities;

- there is zero tolerance for discrimination or harassment of any kind;
- the Council is an example of excellent equalities practice that other organisations aspire to follow.

Service delivery: We want our services to:

- **recognise that equality means quality**
- be available based on the principles of equality to all that need them, as far as resources allow
- make themselves fully accessible (by understanding customer needs and eliminating barriers to access);
- be what the user wants and needs, in terms of what the services are and how they are delivered, and the buildings they are delivered from
- reduce differences in outcomes for different groups in our community
- ensure that our procurement processes build in equality considerations right at the beginning, by involving equality groups in how contracts are designed and delivered
- improve access for local businesses to our contracts, and build their capacity to engage with us
- use our influence to spread good equality practice across our partnerships, partners and contractors.

Our own staff: As an employer we want:

- **to be an excellent example of equalities practice**
- to offer real choice and work-life balance opportunities outside the 'normal' models of work
- our workforce to reflect the community we serve
- to value the diversity of our employees just as highly as we do for our community and operate accordingly
- when managing our employees, to give fair and equal access to career opportunities for different equality groups
- to offer equal pay for work of equal value across the organisation

How we will deliver change

We will deliver excellent equality and diversity practice by doing the following main things:

Having a working structure

We need to make sure that our organisation is geared up to delivering equality and diversity. We need to have specific people who lead and deliver change. We need everyone to be involved.

This means:

- there is active commitment to discussing and tackling equality issues across the organisation
- discussion and action at all management levels, from service teams through Directorate Management Team meetings, Corporate Management Team (CMT) and our top level Steering Group and Board.
- A network of equality and diversity champions, who actively promote, advise on and investigate the issues and keep themselves up to date with equality issues
- A corporate equality Champion sits on our CMT and an Equality and Diversity Manager provides the focus and direction for our efforts
- There is a Member Champion for equality and diversity
- Having clear lines of responsibility and accountability, including at member level

Allocating resources

“Improving access to services and facilities will achieve little if these changes cannot be sustained”
Beyond Good Intentions, DRC

Having people willing to do the job is not enough. We need time and money to deliver better practices.

This means :

- Setting aside staff and time to delivering equality – primarily through our working structure, but also by setting up special projects and project teams as necessary,
- Setting out budgets for equality work, such as special projects, training needs, conferences, our own local equality events and so on,
- Harnessing the capacity and skills of the voluntary groups to help us deliver our duties and meet their needs,
- Delivering equality through our existing partnerships

Assessing and reducing our impacts

As a council, the way we deliver our services, the buildings we deliver them from, the opening times we have and the way we recruit can put up barriers. These are only a few of the areas where our 'normal' ways of doing things can exclude people. We need to think more widely about how we do things, what we do and who it might affect adversely.

“ You need to look under the stones....”

*Stella Gilmartins,
Belfast CC*

This means:

- A corporate training programme for equality and diversity, so people across the whole council understand their responsibilities and change the way they think and do business
- Having a rolling programme of formal Equality Impact Assessments across all of our services
- Ensuring that outside this programme, all major changes, new policies, projects and key decisions are supported by an equality impact assessment
- Looking critically at what we do and who this affects, and consult on the issues
- Delivering action plans for change in the different service areas
- Identify common issues and impacts across the whole council which we can address corporately
- Setting our plans for making our organisation more attractive and accessible to other equality groups

Improving our data

We need to know where to improve, if our people, time and money are to be well used.

This means:

- Having an extensive library of information sources, internal and external
- Improving our systems, collection processes and data analysis, so that services collect data which can be analysed by equality group
- Using these systems and external information sources to collect information at the centre to produce an up to date user profile
- Compare who is using the services with who we think should be and use this to make changes
- Setting equality objectives and targets (in our service and corporate plans) with action plans that support them
- Share the results of what we know and what we are doing with the community

Consulting effectively

To get the right outcomes, we must know what equality groups and the community think about where and what we need to change. We need to be open to this and respond.

This means:

- Maintaining up to date information on all voluntary groups and partnerships
- Developing their capacity to involve with us on key issues and valuing their time appropriately
- Consulting according to our Compact standard of 12 weeks, whether on equality impact assessments or other service issues
- Using a wide variety of consultation and involvement approaches, times, venues, languages and formats, interpretation and translation services, designed thoughtfully to engage as many people as possible
- Having a consultation forward plan, so we coordinate our approaches and minimise consultation fatigue
- Sharing our results and action plans with the people we consulted.

“ Find ways of really listening to people’s stories – they will often lead you to discover simple solutions”

Beyond Good Intentions, DRC

Procuring goods and services

We don’t deliver everything ourselves. Many of our services use contracts with other companies to deliver some of their work. Our spending gives us a huge power to influence others and improve their approaches to equality and diversity. We need to make sure that the companies we ‘employ’ also sign up to the same standards.

This means:

- Involving different equality groups and perspectives in the specification and design of our contracts (staff and external)
- Building capacity in local employers and those who have a workforce which is specialised to different equality groups so they can bid for and win our business
- Tendering processes which do not place adverse barriers on employers and groups who want to bid
- A clear policy on what we expect from prospective companies and how we will assess and monitor that while tendering and afterwards

- Contract management which reviews and enforces equality targets in the contract

Managing our partnerships

“ Local authorities should... promote the Equality Standard as a basis for partnership ...”

Equality Standard

Our partnerships bring together the rest of the public sector, the private sector and voluntary organisations. All of these have skills and knowledge we can use to deliver better equality and diversity. However, the partnerships can be used to discuss and spread good practice.

This means:

- Building relevant equality visions and objectives into partnership terms of reference
- Having clear equality and diversity targets, which are performance managed
- Partnership ways of working should remove barriers to different equality groups who want to or need to contribute – in the same way as we have already mentioned for consultation (venue, time, papers etc)
- Proposals to or by a partnership on new projects and key decisions should be supported by equality impact assessments
- Training for partnership members as required to enhance their skills and knowledge (and therefore contribution to equality and diversity)

Scrutiny and Audit

Our investment of effort needs to be matched by assurance that the outcomes are worthwhile and working. We need to review, scrutinise and audit what we have done, and continuously learn lessons from it.

This means :

- Directors and Heads of Service competently evaluate and quality assure impact assessments or service work/proposals for change
- CMT, Cabinet and Scrutiny Committee members offer high level review and return proposals which are not properly supported by impact assessments
- Internal audit have a programme of work that builds in reviews of equality (specific projects, impact assessments, corporate policies etc)
- There is corporate quality assurance of equality work and impact assessments

Supporting People

*“take steps to
reduce the fear “
DRC*

Equality and diversity will not become part of what we do overnight. People will need supporting to become confident and competent with this way of thinking.

This means :

- Appointing an Equality and Diversity Manager with the skills to help and support staff in the transition
- A programme of ongoing training to equip people with the skills they need
- Advice and support on specific projects or issues in a range of more informal ways, such as one to one meetings, workshops etc
- Advice about new government or regulatory body initiatives and legislation, snapshots of external studies and their implications, and advice on legal cases pending or determined
- Keeping up to date with and letting staff know about external conferences which are relevant to them
- Sharing information as an organisation, through mechanisms like an equalities newsletter, our manager Exchange meetings and Inspiring programme
- Having a good quality intranet resources page for equality and diversity
- Having an equal pay policy for our employees for work of equal value, which is evidenced to be fair and irrespective of background
- Reviewing and revising all our employment practices, to make us an excellent example of equality and diversity, and an exemplar employer.

‘Going Public’

Doing well with equality and diversity is only any good if people know about it. We need to tell people what’s happening, and how they can contribute. This is not the same as consultation.

*“no organisation
operates in a vacuum.”
DRC*

This means:

- Communicating effectively with the media about what we are doing, when and how well
- Having a website which champions equality and diversity, and where this information is easy to find
- Publishing our equality impact assessments and action plans
- Inviting comments and involvement in new events, projects and so on

- Visibly celebrating key equality and diversity events and calendar dates, with our community
- Building community cohesion and integration, taking action against harassment and victimisation
- Developing the capacity and skills of our voluntary sector

The Local Government Equality Standard

The Equality Standard for Local Government ('the standard') was established in 2001 and re-issued in June 2006. The rationale for the standard is basically two things:

- to help authorities keep up with the law on equality
- to help authorities break down barriers to discrimination, whether this is knowing or unknowing.

Local authorities are 'enablers' for the community and deliver important services. This is why they have often been identified in the legislation supporting equal opportunities.

The Standard has 5 levels, from a basic commitment to equality, up to an experienced practitioner. We have adopted the Standard as part of the process for delivering high quality services. Actions we need to take within the Standard are included in the ways we will deliver change described above.

Our other schemes

This policy is the umbrella for all our other statutory schemes. These schemes are:

- **Race Equality Scheme** – setting out how we will deliver race equality and community cohesion, giving different races the opportunity to grow in our community and enhance our workplace
- **Disability Equality Scheme** – how we will change the way we work, and help society to give disabled people choice and control over their lives
- **Gender equality scheme** – (forthcoming) will identify and reduce or eliminate inequality between the sexes, including transgender people
- **Age equality policy** – how we will give older people fair consideration, treatment and rights as an employer
- **Religion/faith/belief policy** – (forthcoming) how we will give different religions and belief systems fair consideration, treatment and rights as an employer
- **Sexual orientation policy** - (forthcoming) how we will give people with different sexual preferences fair consideration, treatment and rights as an employer

Where you can find these

All of these policies will be available on our intranet (for employees) and our website (for the community).

Does anyone check?

There are several bodies that check and regulate what we do on equality and diversity, as well as us. They are:

- **The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC)** – This body deals with gender equality (male, female, transgender) and publishes many useful studies.
- **The Disability Rights Commission (DRC)** – deals with and enforces our duties on disability equality. Under the new legislation it has a stronger enforcing role and can take local authorities to court.
- **The Commission for Racial Equality (CRE)**– deals with race equality in workplaces and in service delivery.

These three organisations will be combined into a new **Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR)** in 2008.

We are also audited and inspected by a number of other bodies:

- The Audit Commission
- Benefit Fraud Inspectorate
- Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED)
- Social Services Inspectorate
- Housing Inspectorate
- Adult Learning Inspectorate

All of these look at equality and diversity in the way we deliver services. Our performance ratings (how well we serve our community) can be affected by how well we approach equality and diversity.

Looking to the future

The Council recognises the proposed changes to equality legislation and enhanced role for us in promoting community cohesion. This policy will be updated to reflect any new duties on an ongoing basis.

And finally...

“ (the duty) is about planning for equality right at the beginning, rather than trying to add it on at the end. It will not only improve your performance....but will help you to meet your wider objectives and priorities “

Bert Massie, DRC Chairman

Comments

We welcome comments on this policy. Please contact

equalities@southend.gov.uk

Phone us on: 01702 215951, or 01702 215890

or write to us at:

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Southend on Sea Borough Council
Civic Centre, Victoria Avenue
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Essex SS2 6ER

Outline Action Plan – March 2007

The council is currently working towards **Level 2** of the Equality Standard for Local Government. These are the key actions which we are taking. We have already made good progress on many of these and expect to fully meet Level 2 in 2007.

Key actions for Level 2

- We have consulted on and published a comprehensive equality and diversity policy + action plan, which is in line with the legislation.
- There is a working structure for delivering equality within the council.
- We have identified and committed resources (finance, people) for improving equality practices.
- Equality and diversity objectives are included in partnership arrangements.
- Our services consult with stakeholders on equality issues.
- We have a harassment and victimisation scheme in place.
- We are working through a programme of equality impact assessments, looking at how the way we deliver services may have different impacts on different equality strands, and making changes.
- We have processes for assessing and improving the quality of our data on service users and from the different equality perspectives.
- We have processes in place for development of service level equality objectives and targets.
- We are developing information and monitoring systems for equality actions, targets and indicators.
- We have set up robust self assessment processes to measure ourselves against the Standard.
- Our scrutiny and audit processes include reviewing equality and diversity.
- We regularly review equality in procurement, contracted services and partnership arrangements
- We are reviewing our own personnel data and making sure we can monitor ourselves, so our workforce represents the local population profile as far as we are able.

- We are making sure we give equal pay for work/jobs of equal value within the council.
- We are ensuring that our application processes, recruitment and publicity do not unfairly restrict who is able to apply for our jobs.
- We have a programme of equality training to support our commitment and objectives for equality.