

EQUALITIES & DIVERSITY

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report seeks Members approval to adopt a Corporate Equalities Strategy and Action Plan which sets out the Council's approach to equalities and diversity issues.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 In recent years, the pressure on local authorities to respond proactively to the equalities agenda has increased through national targets, the issues of new guidance and further changes in legislation.
- 2.2 It is important for the Authority to improve progress in this area and, to this end, the Council has participated in a Government sponsored "Diversity in the Districts" (DiD) project which has helped frame the attached Corporate Equalities Strategy and Action Plan.

3 EQUALITY STANDARD FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

- 3.1 The Equality Standard for Local Government was introduced in 2002 with the joint co-operation of the Employers Organisation for Local Government, Commission for Racial Equality, Disability Rights Commission and Equal Opportunities Commission.
- 3.2 The Standard sets out a framework for achieving an integrated approach to equality and for the effective delivery of services and good employment practices. It aims to:-
- Provide a systematic framework for the mainstreaming of equalities
 - Helps us to meet our legal obligations
 - Integrates equalities policies and objectives
 - Encourages the development of anti-discrimination practice appropriate to local circumstances
 - Provides a basis for tackling all forms of institutionalised discrimination
 - Provides a framework for improving performance
 - The Standard is made of a set of performance targets to guide and monitor the Council's progress in pursuing equal opportunities. It identifies five levels of performance:

Level 1 – Commitment to a comprehensive equality policy

Level 2 – Assessment and consultation

Level 3 – Setting equality objectives and targets

Level 4 – Information systems and monitoring against targets

Level 5 – Achieving and reviewing outcomes

3.3 Local authorities are expected to audit their activities against the Standard and then perform a self assessment of their achievement against it. The Council is currently assessed at Level 0. For information, within England, 207 councils are at Level 1 and a further 83 are at levels 2 to 4.

3.4 To achieve Level 1 of the Standard, the Council needs to:-

- Formulate and adopt a comprehensive equality policy for the authority covering race, gender and disability
- Ensure that the written policies are in line with current legislation and codes of practice issues by the equalities commissions
- Make a corporate commitment to developing a Corporate Equality Action Plan indicating how equality policy will be implemented. This Plan needs to be consistent with the Race Equality Scheme.
- Make a corporate commitment to carrying out a process of equality impact and needs/requirements assessments
- Make a corporate commitment to a fair employment and equal pay policy
- Make a corporate commitment to earmark specific resources for improving equality practice

4 LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENTS

4.1 There is now a wide range of legislation in place on equalities & diversity issues. There are many requirements on the Council as an employer. In addition the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 placed a new general duty on a wide range of public bodies, including local authorities, to promote race equality. This means that the Council, in carrying out its functions, must have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate racial discrimination
- Promote equality of opportunity
- Promote good race relations

In order to comply with the requirements of the Act, Councils must each publish a Race Equality Scheme setting out how it will meet its statutory

obligations over a three year period. Rochford District Council has published a scheme, but it has not been actively implemented and is in need of review to ensure it complies with requirements.

- 4.2 In December of this year, the new Disability Equality duty for the public sector will come into force. This will place similar requirements on the Council in that it will need to publish a Disability Equality Scheme and actively promote disability equality for public sector service users and employees.
- 4.3 It is further anticipated that there will be new legislative requirements relating to gender during 2007. The growth in the amount of legislation on these issues means that it is essential that public bodies adopt a generic approach to equalities to avoid duplication, whilst ensuring the needs of all are adequately catered for.

5 CORPORATE EQUALITIES STRATEGY

- 5.1 As a first step in meeting the requirements of the Standard, it is proposed that the Council adopt a new Corporate Strategy to guide its approach to Equalities & Diversity. A draft is appended to this report and incorporates an action plan to make progress on the various issues facing the Council. If agreed, delivery of the Action Plan will be overseen by a sub group of the Senior Management Team and periodic half yearly reports will be made to this Committee. In due course, this Committee will also need to agree a revised Race Equality Scheme and a new Disability Equality Scheme.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There will be an officer resource in undertaking impact assessments and continuing to develop the Council's approach. It is also likely that there will be further training requirements, in addition to those implemented recently. In the longer term, impact assessments may identify service actions which have a resource impact.

7 RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Failure to meet legislative requirements is likely to result in compliance action being taken against the Authority. There would also be a risk of damage to reputation if this were to occur. It is also important to progress this area in the context of the further CPA inspection anticipated in 2007/08

8 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The production of a Corporate Equalities Strategy is not a specific requirement, but is recommended good practice in ensuring an authority meets its obligations.

9 RECOMMENDATION

9.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**

- (1) To adopt the Corporate Equalities Strategy appended to this report.
- (2) To confirm its commitment to achieving Level 1 of the Equality Standard by 31 March 2007.
- (3) To receive further reports on revisions to the Race Equalities Scheme and the development of the Disability Equality Scheme on a half yearly basis.

Paul Warren

Chief Executive

Background Papers:-

Equalities Standard for Local Government

DiD report on Equality & Diversity

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ROCHFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

CORPORATE EQUALITIES STRATEGY

Date 2006

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THE COUNCIL'S VISION, VALUES AND AIMS

Our Vision

The Council's vision for the District is a simple one:

“to make Rochford the place of choice in the County to live, work and visit”

Our Values

As part of day to day working, the Council operates a code of conduct to:

- Act with integrity
- Be open and transparent about what we do
- Respect others and treat people courteously and equally
- Be responsive to customer needs and requests
- Always try and improve on what we do
- Work with others to improve what we do both directly and through partnership working

Our Aims

The Community Strategy for Rochford, which was produced in partnership with other public agencies, the business and voluntary sector, has key themes relating to:

- Feeling safe
- Looking after our environment
- A good education, good skills and good jobs
- Healthy living
- Getting around
- An inclusive community

To contribute to these themes, the Council has agreed its aims as being to:

- Provide quality, cost effective services
- Work towards a safer and more caring community
- Provide a green and sustainable environment
- Encourage a thriving local economy
- Improve the quality of life for people in our District
- Maintain and enhance our local heritage

PURPOSE OF THE EQUALITY STRATEGY

The Council has long been committed to equality of opportunity and to working to achieve it. This Strategy incorporates the policies and practices that have already been approved and provides a single focus for the development of our approach to equality and diversity.

The Policy intends to bring together the different strands of our approach to tackling equality and diversity and show how they link to the Council's service planning and performance management arrangements – both in service delivery and as an employer.

The Policy includes a Corporate Equalities Action Plan that will enable the Council's approach to be co-ordinated and consistent.

The purpose of the Strategy is to:

- Secure real improvements in service delivery, employment equality, through monitoring and review and focus on issues identified for improvement through an impact assessment process
- Mainstream equalities into the Council's policy, service planning and performance management systems
- Break down barriers to equality of access to services and employment through listening to the community, employees and stakeholders and taking account of their views
- Ensure a commitment across the Council and acknowledge the inter-relationships of equality issues
- Meet the obligations of legislation
- Improve the Council's performance against the relevant Best Value Performance Indicators including the Equality Standard

In summary, this Strategy will help us co-ordinate our work to meet statutory requirements on equalities and also ensure we continue to provide accessible, quality services to the people of Rochford.

FACTS ABOUT ROCHFORD

Rochford is a relatively small district located in south east Essex. The district has three towns, Rayleigh, Rochford and Hockley with their own distinctive heritage. Much of the remaining area is green belt.

The district has a population of 78,500 people, living in 32,000 households. This is predicted to rise to 80,300 by 2011 with a forecasted large increase of those over the age of 85 years. A breakdown of the percentage of individual ethnic groups as of 2001 is as follows:

White British	94.5	White Irish	0.61	Other White	0.93	Mixed White & Caribbean	0.21
Mixed White & Black Caribbean	0.06	Mixed White & Asian	0.19	Other Mixed	0.13	Indian	0.31
Pakistani	0.04	Bangladeshi	0.03	Other Asian	0.09	Caribbean	0.10
African	0.06	Other Black	0.06	Chinese	0.24	Other	0.13

The area is relatively affluent, ranking 316th least deprived out of 354 authorities nationally. Eighty six per cent of households are owner occupied (the fourth highest percentage in the country), with six per cent renting privately and eight per cent in social rented housing. Average house prices are higher than that across England and Wales making affordability a growing concern.

Unemployment levels are below regional and national averages at 2.4 per cent with 79% of people of working age in employment. 68% of the workforce use good transport links to commute out of the area. People in Rochford have a high life expectancy of nearly 81 years.

WHAT EQUALITIES MEANS TO US

The Council has a particularly important role as an:

- Employer – being one of the major employers within the district
- Service Provider – a wide range of services are provided to all sectors of the community, either directly by council employees or indirectly through contractual arrangements
- Community Leader – the Council should lead by example and use its position to influence others in what they do

As an employer:

The Council is committed to equal access to employment and recognises that some groups may experience discrimination and disadvantage. As a major employer the Council intends to set an example to other organisations in its employment procedures and practices that will eliminate discrimination. We are committed to securing a workforce that is, where possible, reflective of the local community with an aim to sustain public confidence in all our recruitment and selection practices. However, to ensure we recruit the best person for the job, selection for any vacant post will be based on merit.

As a service provider:

Good equalities and diversity practice in service areas means:

- Providing good quality and fully accessible services
- Treating each customer as an individual
- Recognising the specific needs and experiences that come with their membership of a particular group in the community
- Implementing consultation and service monitoring, evaluation and review arrangements and ensuring that this data is fed into policy and service development
- Challenging and dealing with inappropriate behaviour and stereotyping, and willingly participating in arrangements to record, report and deal with racist incidents
- Introducing, promoting and participating in initiatives which promote equal opportunities and celebrate diversity

It does not mean:

- Providing a standard service to everyone
- Treating all people in the same way
- Being politically correct

As a community leader:

The Council will work with the Local Strategic Partnership to ensure that the second Rochford Community Plan is firmly founded on equality of opportunity and will also work within all strategic partnerships to ensure that equality is fundamental to any strategies, plans and actions that are developed.

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OUR COMMITMENT TO EQUALITY

Rochford District Council wants Rochford to be the place of choice in Essex for people to live, work and visit.

The Council is committed to improve equality practice at a corporate and departmental level as it believes that everybody should have an equal opportunity to contribute to, and benefit from, society and that a diverse community is a positive asset to the district. The Council is also determined to encourage social inclusion and make sure that the Council's services are more easily accessible to those who want or need them. The Council is committed to lead by example and actively promote equality of opportunity and seek to celebrate diversity. We will treat people equally and fairly when they are:

- Seeking access to or using Council services or facilities provided on the Council's behalf
- Contracting to supply goods or services to the Council
- Applying for employment with the Council, already employed and seeking access to promotion and training or personal development opportunities
- Involved in public consultation and engagement with the Council regarding its services

We aim to ensure equal access to services for the community on the basis of need and to deliver services in a manner that is sensitive to the individual. We will aim to ensure that our workforce represents the community that it services and will adopt pro-active measures such as target setting, in order to achieve our objectives.

The Council will use monitoring data and proactive measures to eliminate institutional practices. We aim to create a discrimination free work environment, fair and transparent processes and practices, relevant and accessible services and active consultation/engagement with all sections of the community especially those from traditionally disadvantaged groups.

We are committed to developing equality and diversity objectives and targets, systematic consultation and impact assessments, monitoring, audit and scrutiny.

The Council has adopted a 'mainstreaming' approach to equality of opportunity. This means that equality objectives are incorporated and become an integral part of management and the duties of every employee. It is the responsibility of every employee of the Council to uphold and implement this policy and the direct responsibility of managers to realise it by adopting sound practices in employment, consultation, contracting/procurement and service delivery planning. The emphasis is upon ensuring that fairness and equality of opportunity is a mainstream not a peripheral activity and that is the responsibility of managers and service providers.

How we will demonstrate our commitment

In order to put our commitment into practice we have identified 4 strategic aims. They are:

- Policy & Service Development – to ensure that equality and diversity are seen as a priority in all policy development and service planning
- Improving Accessibility – to take positive action to ensure that all sections of our community have equal access to information and services
- Involving People – to consult, involve and encourage the participation of all sections of the community
- Employment Issues – to ensure equal access to employment, setting an example to other organisations through employment procedures and practices that eliminate discrimination

The Council also has, or will be developing, policies aimed at specific equality issues. All the Council's equality policies will be in line with current legislation including the Race Relations Act, the Sex Discrimination Act, the Equal Pay Act, the Disability Discrimination Act, etc. We will ensure that all policies are regularly reviewed or produced to respond to new legislative requirements.

The Council intends to use the Equality Standard for Local Government to drive improvement and demonstrate commitment.

EQUALITY STANDARD FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Equality Standard for Local Government was introduced in April 2002 with the joint co-operation of:

- Employers Organisation for Local Government
- Commission for Racial Equality
- Disability Rights Commission
- Equal Opportunities Commission

The Standard sets out a framework for achieving an integrated approach to equality and for the effective delivery of services and delivery of good employment practice. It aims to:

- Provide a systematic framework for the management of equalities
- Helps us to meet our legal obligations
- Integrates equalities policies and objectives
- Encourages the development of anti-discrimination practice appropriate to local circumstance
- Provides a basis for tackling all forms of institutionalised discrimination
- Provides a framework for improving performance

The Equality Standard is made of a set of performance targets to guide and monitor the Council's progress in pursuing equal opportunities. It identifies five levels of performance:

- Level 1 – Commitment to a comprehensive equality policy
- Level 2 – Assessment and consultation
- Level 3 – Setting equality objectives and targets
- Level 4 – Information systems and monitoring against targets
- Level 5 – Achieving and reviewing outcomes

Each of the five levels identifies the action to be demonstrated for the level, separated into four headings:

- Leadership and corporate commitment
- Consultation and Community Development and Scrutiny
- Service delivery and Customer Care
- Employment and Training

Local authorities are expected to audit their activities against the Standard and then perform a self-assessment of their achievement against it. The process should also identify where action needs to be taken. The level of attainment within the Equalities Standard will be determined by the lowest level of achievement in any part of the organisation.

WORKING WITH AND CONSULTING OTHERS

The Council is committed to partnership working – with neighbouring local authorities, other public agencies, local communities and private sector providers. The Council will use its community leadership role to promote the equality and diversity principles contained within this Strategy when working with others.

We will work with Rochford's Local Strategic Partnership to ensure that its second Community Plan is firmly founded on equality of opportunity. As a partner we will work with other strategic partnerships to ensure that equality is fundamental to any strategies, plans and actions that are developed.

We will review our procurement arrangements to ensure that any contracts with agencies delivering services on behalf of the Council will include appropriate equality requirements.

The Council is committed to working in partnership with the voluntary sector in the district and recognises the contribution that the voluntary sector can make to improving equality of opportunity. We have agreed a Compact with the voluntary sector which sets out the framework for the way that we work together.

The Council believes that consultation is based upon the principle that communication is a two way process and is reinforced by regular contact between the public, elected Members, employees, Central Government and services. We recognise that we must consult with residents, employees and partners – listen to their concerns and enable them to participate in the decision making process.

Rochford District Council is committed to consulting on the development of its approaches to equalities issues and will act in accordance with the duties of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act and any subsequent legislation.

We will seek to consult widely and specifically with individuals and representatives from organisations to ensure we obtain views and opinions to make a difference to services and employment opportunities.

Our approach to consultation is based on some core principles. Consultation should begin as early as possible, have clear aims and timetables and be managed effectively. A variety of methods should be used to ensure that different needs are met. Consultation should be co-ordinated to take account of existing corporate or departmental exercises being conducted or planned. Accessibility and inclusion must be considered when planning consultation exercises.

RESPONSIBILITIES AND PERFORMANCE MONITORING

Responsibility for the implementation of the Equality Strategy lies with all elected Members and all employees who will seek to mainstream equality into the Council's working arrangements. The Equality Standard gives guidance on how councillors, employees and local communities should be involved.

However, specific responsibilities are delegated to certain individuals and groups:

Policy, Finance & Strategic Performance Committee – responsible for the progress of the Strategy and all associated actions. Ensuring sufficient resources are allocated to achieve the Council's equality objectives.

All Members – responsible for engaging with local communities and ensuring that their views are heard and their needs considered

Chief Executive - responsible for delivery of the Strategy

Senior Management Team (SMT) – Ultimately managerial leadership must come from SMT for developing and maintaining the equalities and diversity strategy. To help them do this, the Service Improvement & Development Group will have an important role, supported by a small Equalities Working Group of officers. The consistent and effective promotion of the policy is a task for senior managers.

Line Managers – All Council managers have a special and particular responsibility to ensure that they are fully aware of the Council's Equalities and Diversity Strategy and are working to apply it to their own service. At the most basic level managers should be preventing discrimination. Managers are charged with promoting good relations between people of different groups in society and actively challenging prejudice in all its forms. They must ensure that the provision of services and the execution of other functions in their areas are carried out fairly and without discrimination. In practical terms this means working to provide equal access by all sections of the community to services and to eliminate any barriers to achieving this. The aim must be to develop and maintain relevant and accessible services that meet the needs of the whole community.

Similarly Rochford District Council workplaces should be free from physical and verbal abuse, bullying and harassment, where employees from different backgrounds can feel welcome, comfortable and valued. Where this is not the case managers have a specific responsibility to challenge such behaviours and, if necessary, take action under the Council's disciplinary and grievance procedures. Managers should also foster a culture in which all members of the workforce feel confident in challenging such behaviours in the workplace.

Individual Employees – our approach to equalities and diversity needs to be translated into practice. It must inform the work of every member of our workforce. Each of us must accept our responsibility for learning about, understanding and acting in the spirit of the Equalities and Diversity Strategy. Discrimination and harassment are serious workplace issues. It should be borne in mind that individuals can be legally liable for discrimination under the relevant legislation. Every employee is charged with the responsibility for contributing to the creation of a positive and supportive work environment. Similarly, these principles should be upheld in terms of service delivery. In particular the following behaviours should be avoided by employees and positively challenged if witnessed:

- Any manifestation of behaviour that is perceived as personal harassment or bullying
- The intentional use of sexist, racist, homophobic or other forms of language and images that reinforce stereotypical images
- The unfavourable treatment of individuals or groups in society because of their difference to what is perceived as the norm, including making assumptions about people
- The use of hostile or aggressive language or actions towards individuals or groups in society. Jokes and 'off the cuff' comments that are, or can be perceived, as discriminatory and liable to reinforce negative images and stereotypes

The base line requirement for individuals is that they treat others on a fair and equal basis. Negative and discriminatory assumptions should be challenged. All staff need to appreciate the way in which diversity in the workforce strengthens the capacity of the Council to serve local people.

The process for achieving the Equality Standard will be overseen by the Service Improvement & Development Group which will report to the Senior Management Team. They will be helped in this task by a small working group who will seek to be a source of expertise and guidance for the organisation.

Progress on implementation of the action plan will be monitored regularly and reported to the Policy, Finance & Strategic Performance Committee.

CORPORATE EQUALITIES ACTION PLAN

OBJECTIVE 1: Policy & Service Development – to ensure that equality and diversity are seen as a priority in all policy development and service planning

REF	ACTION	MILESTONES	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMESCALE
1.1	To allocate responsibility for equality & diversity to the Service Improvement & Development Group of SMT	Terms of reference agreed Membership agreed Work programme agreed	Senior Management Team (SMT)	April 06 <u>COMPLETED</u>
1.2	To ensure Schemes are in place for Race Equality and Disability	Schemes approved by Members	Corporate Policy Manager	RES – Sept 06 DES – Dec 06
1.3	To agree a process for assessing the impact of new and existing policies on minority and disadvantaged groups	Impact Assessment Process agreed	Service Improvement & Development Group	Sept 06
1.4	To agree and implement a timetable for undertaking impact assessments of all existing policies	Timetable agreed Monitoring arrangement in place to ensure deadlines are met	Service Improvement & Development Group	Dec 06
1.5	To agree arrangements for service monitoring	Arrangements in place for all services Information obtained used as part of service planning process	Service Improvement & Development Group	Dec 06
1.6	To raise awareness of equality and diversity issues throughout the Council and with partners		SMT/Members	Continuous process
1.7	To ensure that the assessment of equality and diversity issues is an integral part of the Council's service planning framework	Equality and diversity included within service planning template	Service Improvement & Development Group	Sept 06

OBJECTIVE 2: Improving Accessibility – to take positive action to ensure that all sections of our community have equal access to information and services

REF	ACTION	MILESTONES	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMESCALE
2.1	To make information on Council services available in alternative languages and formats	Translation service available and advertised All documents carry information on how to access different formats/languages	Head of Administrative & Member Services	March 07
2.2	To ensure that a programme is in place to ensure all staff and members receive basic diversity training and targeted training appropriate to their work area	Training provision in place	Human Resources Manager	Basic <u>COMPLETED</u> See 4.8
2.3	To develop effective links with local minority and disadvantaged groups	Groups identified and a database created Links established with all identified groups	Equalities Working Group	Dec 06
2.4	To ensure that processes for reporting hate crime are embedded throughout the organisation	Review of current situation undertaken Any recommendations from review implemented	Corporate Policy Manager	March 07
2.5	To take all reasonable measures to ensure equality of access to public meetings organised by the Council	Meetings advertised widely	Head of Administrative & Member Services	<u>COMPLETED</u>
2.6	To ensure that the Council considers equality of access in all its external communications	Communications strategy reviewed Any recommendations from review implemented	Corporate Policy Manager	Oct 06
2.7	To ensure all members of the community have access to council facilities in the district	All service plans to have regard to Social Inclusion Policy	Service Improvement & Development Group	Sept 06

OBJECTIVE 3: Involving People – to consult, involve and encourage the participation of all sections of the community

REF	ACTION	MILESTONES	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMESCALE
3.1	To establish a means of consulting with representative groups on this Plan, impact assessments etc	Arrangements in place and meaningful consultation taking place	Equalities Working Group	Dec 06
3.2	To review the Council's Consultation Strategy to ensure consultation mechanisms identify and respond to the diverse needs of the community	Consultation strategy reviewed Any recommendations from review implemented	Corporate Policy Manager	March 07
3.3	To review the corporate complaints procedure to ensure it incorporates equality and diversity issues	Complaints procedure reviewed and re-launched, if necessary	Service Improvement & Development Group	March 07
3.4	To raise awareness of the local democratic processes	More people within the community attending council meetings	Head of Administrative & Member Services	Continuous process
3.5	To work with other agencies to share learning/best practice and minimise duplication of activity	Identify appropriate agencies Establish networks/links with those identified	Corporate Policy Manager	Dec 06

OBJECTIVE 4: Employment issues – to ensure equal access to employment, setting an example to other organisations through employment procedures and practices that eliminate discrimination

REF	ACTION	MILESTONES	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMESCALE
4.1	Recruitment procedures for HR and managers to be reviewed and updated including application form and job descriptions	Revised recruitment procedures in place	Human Resources Manager	Dec 06
4.2	Equalities and Diversity mainstreamed into recruitment and selection training	Training provision in place	Human Resources Manager	April 06 <u>COMPLETED</u>
4.3	Workforce profile including census data to be compiled	Workforce profile report compiled and discussed by management team	Human Resources Manager	July 06
4.4	Job evaluation schemes introduced into the authority including an equality impact assessment	Schemes in place Maintenance procedures established	Human Resources Manager	April 06 <u>COMPLETED</u>
4.5	Develop an equal pay policy	Policy written and agreed	Human Resources Manager/SMT	Sept 06
4.6	Equal employment section of the CEP and employment policy in place	CEP in place	Human Resources Manager	<u>COMPLETED</u>
4.7	Review employment procedures against current legislation and Codes of Practice	Revised procedures in place	Human Resources Manager	Dec 06
4.8	Ensure a programme of equality training is in place to ensure all staff and Members receive basic diversity	Basic awareness training provided to all staff Equalities awareness built into induction	Human Resources Manager	<u>COMPLETED</u> April 06

	training and targeted training appropriate to their work area	training Impact Assessment training in place for identified managers		Dec 06
4.9	Systems reviewed for monitoring suitability including statutory ethnic monitoring duties	Review systems Amended or new procedures in place	Human Resources Manager/SMT	<u>COMPLETED</u> Sept 06

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APPENDIX A**DEFINITIONS****What is Diversity?**

Diversity is a natural progression from equality. Where equality focussed on everyone being treated equally, diversity recognises that some individuals and groups may need different treatment to secure an equal outcome.

What is Social Inclusion?

Social inclusion means making sure that the Council's services are more easily accessible to all those who want or need them. Social exclusion is the term used to describe the reasons that prevent people from enjoying the services to which they are entitled. Within Rochford, we have identified them as being:

- Transportation in rural areas
- Physical barriers
- Communication
- Discrimination
- Poverty and low income
- Social isolation

What is discrimination?

The Council recognises that discrimination can take different forms:

- Direct Discrimination – by treating one person less favourably than another solely because of, for example, their sex, disability or race
- Indirect Discrimination – by creating a condition or requirements of service delivery which cannot be justified and which, in practice, prevents people from certain groups receiving a service or gaining employment
- Institutional Racism – the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, ethnic origin, gender or disability etc. It can be detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and stereotyping which further disadvantage such people
- Harassment – where an individual or group of individuals are harassed or abused because of their race, sex or disability. People who are harassed may feel less comfortable in the service/working environment and may even decide not to pursue their right to receive the service
- Victimisation – where a person is treated less favourably because they have pursued rights to equality in employment/service delivery via the Complaints/Grievance procedure and/or legal proceedings, or it is suspected that they will do so

APPENDIX B

LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

Equal Pay Act 1970

Sex Discrimination Act 1975

Race Relations Act 1976

Disability Discrimination Act 1995

Protection from Harassment Act 1997

Human Rights Act 1998

Sex Discrimination (Gender Reassignment) Regulations 1999

Race Relations Amendment Act 2000

Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003

Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003

Codes of Practice on:

- Equal Pay
- Sex Discrimination
- Race Discrimination
- Equality Standard for Local Government
- Age Diversity in Employment
- Duty to Promote Race Equality

APPENDIX C



Rochford District Council

Social Inclusion Policy

“Making sure no-one is left out”

Overall Aims

'Social Inclusion' means making sure that the Council's services are more easily accessible to all those who want or need them.

'Social Exclusion' is the term used to describe the reasons that prevent people from enjoying the services to which they are entitled. We therefore aim to make all our services as accessible as possible to ensure that all our residents who want or need them can do so.

Main Causes

We have identified the following as the most common reasons for and causes of social exclusion:-

- Transportation in rural areas
- Physical barriers
- Communication
- Discrimination
- Poverty and Low Income
- Social Isolation

Transportation

In rural areas there are often few or no public transport services. This limits peoples' ability to access our services. Hardest hit are the elderly, young people, the disabled and those families living on low incomes or reliant on benefits.

Physical Barriers

Many of our buildings are not fully accessible to those people who are physically challenged. This often makes some buildings impossible to use for:-

- Wheelchair users
- The elderly who find it difficult to:
 - Walk distances
 - Use stairs
 - Open doors
- Parents with prams and pushchairs

Public transport can often be difficult to use for those people not physically fit.

Communication

The way we communicate often overlooks:-

- That some people cannot hear
- That some people lip-read
- That some people are blind or partially sighted
- That some people may not have English as their first language
- That some people have difficulty or may not be able to read or write
- That professionals often use 'jargon'

This lack of recognition of special needs can occur when we provide information in the form of letters, notices, leaflets and agendas. Some people would be able to read if we just use larger print sizes but others might need information on audiotapes or in Braille.

Straight forward, simple language and the use of symbols or pictures would help those with learning difficulties and those with reading problems.

Discrimination

Direct, indirect or institutional discrimination is that some people may be treated less favourably than others on the basis of race, age, sex, gender, disability or sexual orientation. This can lead to them receiving less satisfactory service.

Poverty and Low Income

Many people in our District have low income levels and some people do not have paid employment. This can mean that they cannot afford to use all of the services provided. They may have to be selective in the services they use. For those living in rural areas this can also mean that it costs money to access every day services like the GP, doctor, dentist or the library whether they are using public transport or the car. This can have the effect of denying them the opportunities that are otherwise granted.

Social Isolation

For a few people combinations of all these factors outlined above can result in them feeling socially and physically isolated from everyday society.

What we intend to do

The first step is to highlight the issues through this document; which will act as a reference and reminder document to ensure that in the work that the Council does, either on its own or collectively with other partners, it helps to promote social inclusion. To this end, we will continue to:-

- Review and develop our services to ensure that they recognise and reflect Equal Opportunities and Human Right Policy.
- Progress the programme of works to Council owned buildings to ensure access for people with mobility problems.

- Develop and improve our communications and information for people with hearing, sight and language difficulties.
- Develop training programmes for all Council staff to recognise barriers to social inclusion
- Develop our Community Transport initiative in partnership with other agencies to provide affordable transport to those having difficulty in accessing conventional forms of transport.
- Develop a Corporate Debt Policy which helps those in temporary financial difficulties.
- Progress our e-government initiatives to enhance access to our service, and yet at the same time, be mindful of those reliant on other means of communication.

Our Partners

The Council recognises that it cannot do everything on its own so we will be working with other organisations to address wider social inclusion issues. Our key partners in these areas include:-

- Essex County Council
- Crime and Disorder Reduction Partners
- STAR Partnership
- Rochford and Rayleigh Association for Voluntary Services
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Shelter (South East)
- Castle Point and Basildon Community Care Trust

Resources

Clearly the Council's needs in these areas will be dependent upon the resources available. However, it is important that we ensure that the issues around social inclusion are considered in the delivery of our services and the operation of our facilities within the budgetary limitations set.