



# **ROCHFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL**

## **GENDER EQUALITY SCHEME**

### **2007 - 2010**

April 2007

## **1. What is a Gender Equality Scheme?**

The Equality Act 2006 amends the Sex Discrimination Act 1976 by placing a statutory General Duty on all public authorities to:

- promote equality of opportunity between men and women
- eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment including discrimination in pay

The Duty applies to all aspects of the Council's functions and activities as a service provider, policy maker and employer. It also applies to the services and functions we commission.

The Equality Act introduces some specific duties we must take to plan, deliver, evaluate and report. It is different from previous sex equality legislation in that it requires us to take positive action rather than wait for individuals to take action against us and to actively promote gender equality not just to avoid discrimination.

The Act requires public authorities to publish a Gender Equality Scheme which must include information on the Council's arrangements for:

- assessing the impact of existing policies and practices and those that are proposed
- gathering and using monitoring information on the delivery of Council services
- gathering and using monitoring information on the recruitment, development and retention of Council staff
- How we intend to address any gender pay gap within our workforce
- Consulting with stakeholders to help inform us of our gender equality priorities

This is the first Gender Equality Scheme to be produced by Rochford District Council. The Scheme is part of an overarching equality strategy which sets out the vision which the council has to promote equal opportunities for all people and eliminate unlawful discrimination.

As a result of the work we will undertake to implement this Scheme, it is possible that it will need to be revisited in the light of the information we gather.

## **2. About Rochford**

### **The Place**

Rochford is a small district located in south east Essex. It is bounded by the River Crouch to the north and the urban areas of Southend and Castle Point to the south. The district has three main towns, Rayleigh, Rochford and Hockley. Much of the remaining area is green belt with a large area around

Foulness, largely under Ministry of Defence control. London Southend Airport straddles the district's southern boundary with Southend.

## **The People**

The district has a population of 79,700 people, living in 33,534 households. This is predicted to rise to 80,300 by 2011, with a forecasted large increase of those over the age of 85 years.

The area is relatively affluent, ranking 316 out of 354 most deprived authorities nationally. The most deprived ward, Foulness and Great Wakering East, ranks 2,680 of 8,414. Owner occupied homes constitute 75.1 per cent of households. This is amongst the highest in the country.

## **The Council**

Rochford District has been under a Conservative administration since May 2002, which holds 34 of the 39 seats. Many of the frontline services are externalised but the Council directly employ approx 260 staff.

In 2006 the Council adopted the Equality Standard for Local Government. This provides us with a systematic framework to ensure that we consider equality in all levels of policy and practice. The Equality Standard is made up of five levels:

- Level 1 – commitment to a comprehensive equality policy
- Level 2 – assessment and consultation
- Level 3 – setting quality objectives and targets
- Level 4 – information systems and monitoring against targets
- Level 5 – achieving and reviewing outcomes

The Council achieved level 1 towards the end of 2006. To attain level 2 the authority has to show evidence of carrying out a number of Equality Impact Assessments, be actively engaged in consultation with minority groups and be developing systems to provide effective monitoring information. The Council is confident of achieving level 2 in 2007.

### **3. Rochford District Council's Gender Equality Scheme**

#### **Impact Assessments**

Discrimination is not usually intended. It happens because a policy or service has not considered a wide range of different needs. Impact assessments for race and disability are now a legal requirement for all public bodies. They are a systematic way of finding out whether a policy or service will have an adverse impact on any group or sector of the community.

Action is underway on the impact assessment process at Rochford. The Council joined with neighbouring authorities and secured funding to enable its

senior managers to be trained and supported as they began this task in February 2007.

### **Monitoring Information**

The impact assessment process has already highlighted the need for further information on our services and the barriers people face when using them. Work will soon begin on putting in place monitoring mechanisms to enable service take-up and outcomes. Where information is difficult to obtain through routine monitoring we will collect information through surveys or other methods and analyse them by gender.

We already monitor by gender a large amount of employment information such as applicants for jobs, appointments, disciplinary action etc. We will continue to develop our mechanisms to ensure all relevant information is collected.

### **Equality in Employment**

The Council is committed to ensuring that both men and women are treated equally in all aspects of recruitment, selection, promotion and training.

In particular the Council is committed to eliminating any differences in pay for work considered to be of equal value. To ensure this the Council undertook a job evaluation process across the organisation which covered pay and grading. Some further work is to be carried out on other benefits which employees receive to ensure they are equitable.

### **Involving People**

The Council is committed to consulting and involving local people in the planning and delivery of local services. It is important to us that the voices of both men and women are heard.

Current arrangements for consultation and involvement include:

- The development of a consultation plan which will set out when and how we should involve and consult with local residents. We will ensure that our plan take into account the specific needs that may disproportionately affect men and women
- The arrangements for consultation on our equality impact assessments will ensure that men and women are consulted and their differing needs assessed
- Developing the means to assess service satisfaction surveys by gender as part of our approach to monitoring
- Assessing our regular staff attitude survey by gender to gain an insight into the differing views of male and female staff.

## **5. Administration of the Scheme**

### **Action Planning**

The Gender Equality Scheme should be read in conjunction with the Corporate Equality Plan which details the actions needed to promote equality of opportunity and eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment.

### **Responsibility and Accountability**

The Chief Executive has overall responsibility for our Gender Equality Scheme and he will work closely with the Senior Management Team to oversee it. Political accountability rests with the Policy, Finance & Strategic Performance Committee.

Co-ordination of the day to day running of the scheme is the responsibility of the Corporate Policy Manager.

### **Review of the Scheme**

The action plan will be monitored by the Service Development & Improvement Sub-Group and reviewed annually to ensure it is fit for purposes. As a minimum, the scheme will undergo a full review in 2010 and every three years thereafter.

### **Publishing the Scheme**

The scheme needs to be read in conjunction with the Council's Corporate Equalities Strategy, Race Equality Scheme and Disability Equality Scheme. It will be published on the website and will be available in a range of other formats.

### **Contact Details**

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