

**Draft Comprehensive Corporate Equality
Scheme 2008-2011**
Incorporating Race, Disability & Gender Equality Schemes

Introduction

The Council is dedicated to the promotion of equal opportunities and to removing any discrimination in service delivery, procurement and employment. The Council is committed to achieving equality and community cohesion in partnership with other organisations and local communities.

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2005 placed a general duty on a wide range of public authorities as well as several specific duties in relation to racial equality. The Disability Discrimination Act 2005 placed similar general and specific duties on public authorities in relation to disability equality. The Equality Act 2006 placed similar general and specific duties on public authorities in relation to gender, gender assignment, religion and sexual orientation.

This scheme explains how East Herts Council will meet its general and specific duties under these pieces of legislation. It will be updated as new legislation comes into force in other areas of equality legislation.

Whilst explaining the Council’s responses to existing duties the scheme anticipates future legislative requirements. Our approach will be applied to other groups which suffer discrimination and disadvantage in society. This is explained further in the Council’s Comprehensive Equality Policy.

If you require this information in large print, Braille or another format please contact the council on 01279 655261.

<p>If you would like this information translated in another language please contact: East Herts District Council The Council Offices, The Causeway, Bishop’s Stortford, Herts CM23 2EN Tel: 01279 655261 e-mail: enquiries@eastherts.gov.uk</p>	

General Duties

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 requires the Council, in carrying out its functions, to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate racial discrimination;
- Promote equality of opportunity; and
- Promote good relations between people of different racial groups.

The Disability Discrimination Act 2005 requires the Council, in carrying out its functions, to have due regard to the need to:

- Promote equality of opportunity between disabled persons and other persons;
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination under the act;
- Eliminate harassment of disabled persons that is related to their disabilities;
- Promote positive attitudes towards disabled persons;
- Encourage participation by disabled persons in public life; and
- Take steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, even where that involved treating disabled persons more favourably than other persons;
- To adopt a proactive approach, mainstreaming disability equality into all decision and activities.

The Equality Act 2006 requires the Council, in carrying out its functions, to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment;
- promote equality of opportunity between men and women.

The general and specific duties are reflected in the Council's Comprehensive Equality Policy.

The policy identifies 5 strategic equality and diversity objectives.

1. Promoting Community Leadership and Community Cohesion
2. Improving Community Engagement and Communication
3. Promoting Equality In Service Delivery
4. Promoting Equality of Opportunity in Employment And Training
5. Evaluating the Success of our Equalities Commitments

A detailed action plan has been developed to meet the commitments of the Comprehensive Equality Policy 2008-2011. The plan highlights specific actions in relation to each equality area including race, disability, gender, religion, age and sexual orientation. Progress of the plan is monitored by the Council's Corporate Management Team, Equalities Officers Groups and Executive. The plan forms an integral part of our generic equality scheme and will be reviewed every three years in line with legislative guidance.

Further detailed equality plans for each service are contained in every Service Plan. These are available upon request.

Equality targets have been identified within the Council's Corporate Comprehensive Equality Plan to ensure that progress on equality is mainstreamed into the Council's business and performance management. We have also ensured that Equality is a cross cutting theme within our Community Strategy.

As required by legislation the Council will take steps to:

- Identify which of the Council's functions, policies and proposed policies are relevant to the race equality duty, disability equality duty, and gender equality duty. We have also identified those functions, policies and proposed policies relevant to equality on the grounds of religion, age and sexual orientation. The list of functions can be found in appendix 1
- Set priorities for these functions based on their relevance to race, disability, gender, religious, age and sexual orientation equality. This is laid out in our Equality Impact Assessment Programme.
- Assess how the functions and any related policies or proposed policies affect race, disability, gender, age, religious and sexual orientation equality through the introduction of our Equality Impact Assessment Process.
- Consider how policies and functions might be changed, where necessary, to meet our race, disability and gender equality duties as well as our Comprehensive Equality Policy commitments through the use of our Equality Impact Assessment Process.

Specific Duties

Assessing the impact of functions, policies and proposed policies on equality

Following the commitment of the Comprehensive Equality Policy the Council will ensure that an Equality Impact Assessment Programme and Process is introduced. Existing functions and policies will be prioritised for impact assessment. These are listed in our Corporate Comprehensive Equality Plan 2008-2011. All new proposed functions and policies will also be impact assessed.

The assessments will check whether individual policies or services, have a disproportionate benefit to some groups in the community, and whether the policy is likely to lead to direct or indirect discrimination. This may include assessing what barriers different parts of the community may face in accessing information or Council services. They will also recommend any alternative actions required to redress inequality and promote equality of opportunity.

The information gathered through these impact assessments will inform future Corporate Equality Action Plans, and individual service equality action plans. The Corporate Management Team and Equalities Officers Group will receive an annual report on the key findings from the impact assessment programme so that information gathered is used to prioritise future equality actions.

Consulting on the impact of functions, policies and proposed policies on equality and involving people from minority communities

In developing this scheme, the Comprehensive Equality Policy and Corporate Comprehensive Equality Plan, the Council will consult with members of community groups, its Citizens Panel, partner organisations and its Equalities Officers Group. This will involve people from, and organisations working to promote the needs of, minority communities including those for minority ethnic groups, disabled people, older and younger people, religious groups and the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities.

Each Service area will seek to involve people from organisations representing minority communities in monitoring and developing the Council's implementation of its Corporate Comprehensive Equality Plan 2008-2011. Its Citizens Panel includes residents from minority communities and consultation findings will be analysed to identify adverse impact of functions and policies. This will include analysis to identify any different views of black and minority ethnic residents, disabled residents, and male and female residents. We will ensure that findings will be fed back into the strategic planning process and the service planning process to set future objectives, including corporate and service level equality objectives.

Individual services conduct customer surveys, and findings will be analysed to identify any adverse impact of our services on minority communities and men and women. We are developing consultation and scrutiny processes for our Equality Impact Assessment Programme to ensure that people from minority communities, and both genders, are involved in the process.

Arrangement for gathering and using information for monitoring policies for any adverse impact on the promotion of equality

The Council has established and is further developing monitoring systems to assess access to services, treatment of customers and equality of outcomes for its functions and policies. This includes monitoring on the grounds of race, disability, gender, age, religion and sexual orientation where relevant. Information may be gathered at the point of service access, through customer satisfaction surveys, or from resident surveys. This information will be used both for performance management as well as for equality impact assessment. Where unequal access to service is identified, or differences are found in outcomes of services for different groups, service plans will identify specific objectives to address the inequality.

The Council will assess the different needs and priorities of different groups, including men and women, using monitoring, consultation and equality impact assessments and respond to these in individual service plans.

Consultation data relating to partnership work will seek to assess the needs of specific groups and differences in views and experiences.

The Corporate Comprehensive Equality Plan and Corporate Equality Targets are monitored by the Council's Corporate Management Team, Equalities Officers Group and Executive.

Individual service performance is monitored by Departmental Management Teams, Scrutiny Committees and the Executive.

Arrangement for publishing the results of such assessment, consultation and monitoring

The agendas and reports to the Council's Equalities Officers Group, Scrutiny Committees and Executive will be published on our website. Annual updates on the implementation of our Corporate Comprehensive Equality Plan will be published on our website. Findings from our Equality Impact Assessments will also be published on our website annually.

Arrangements for ensuring that people have access to information and services

The Council offers to make information available in alternative languages and formats where required for key services. We have translated documents, and produced them in large print, and on audio tape. We also make use of interpreters for customers whose first language is not English who require them for key services. We will make this offer of alternative languages and formats as clear as possible on all relevant documents.

The Council's Customer Services and Service departments have access to Language Line which enables us to work with interpreters on the phone. We also have a text messaging service and are developing the use of e-mail and the internet to increase access to our services.

The Council provides services in alternative ways, such as visiting disabled customers at home to ensure equality of access to our services.

The Council will continually improve access to its public buildings for people with disabilities in line with the Disability Discrimination Act 2005.

Arrangements for training staff on issues connected to equality

The Council will develop an equality training programme within our Corporate Training Programme. This includes specific training on equality as well as integrating equality into all aspects of our training programme. Training is also provided to Councillors on equality. All staff are assessed annually for training needs in relation to equality through their appraisal.

Specific Duties for Employment

The Comprehensive Equality Policy commits the Council to eliminate discrimination on the grounds of gender, disability, learning difficulty, health status, race, colour, ethnic or national origin, faith or religious belief, age, marital status, responsibility for children or dependents, sexuality and gender assignment. This applies to both employment and service delivery.

The Council monitors various aspects of its employment procedures on the grounds of race, gender, disability and age. It will review existing procedures and policies to ensure they do not discriminate on the grounds of gender assignment.

The Council completed an equal pay audit in 2004. The actions arising from this audit have formed specific objectives addressing any identified gender pay gaps and occupational segregation.

We will ensure that the differing needs of our employees are accounted for by consulting staff through the Equalities Officers' Group on employment and training policies as appropriate and relevant.

Individual feedback is gathered through annual staff Performance and Development Reviews (PDRs). Assessments of needs in relation to reasonable adjustments for disabled staff are reviewed at least on an annual basis.

Eliminating harassment

Staff are able to take forward issues of harassment through the Council's agreed Grievance and Harassment procedures. This is monitored on grounds of race, disability, gender, age, religion and sexual orientation. An annual report will be made to the Equalities Officers Group of such complaints.

All local residents are able to report harassment to the Council. The Council works in partnership with the police and other agencies such as Housing Associations, to investigate and respond to harassment. Where possible the Council will take action through the use of enforcement action, anti-social behaviour contracts or anti-social behaviour orders. We will work in conjunction with our partners to gather evidence for prosecutions. With customer consent we will share information with the Police and monitor such complaints on the grounds of race, gender, disability, sexuality, religion and age. Reports will be made to the Community Safety Partnership and Executive on such complaints.

Promoting positive attitudes

The Council will promote the use of the Social Model of Disability in its work. This model views the discrimination experienced by disabled people as brought about by discrimination and prejudice which results from real physical, economic, political and cultural barriers in society. This is contrast to the medical model of disability which views disabled people in terms of their impairments.

We will ensure that we make good use of Council publications including Link magazine to promote equality of access to its services, to challenge discrimination and to celebrate the diversity of the local community.

Feedback and further information

We welcome feedback on our work on equality. If you have any comments about any part of the Council's work on equality please contact us on:

Phone: 01279 655261

Textphone: 07734 334504

E-mail: enquiries@eastherts.gov.uk

Mail: The Council Offices, The Causeway, Bishop's Stortford, Herts CM23 2EN

Appendix 1

FUNCTIONS, POLICES AND PROPOSED POLICIES ASSESSED AS RELEVANT TO THE DUTY TO PROMOTE RACE EQUALITY, DISABILITY EQUALITY DUTY AND THE COUNCIL'S COMPREHENSIVE EQUALITY POLICY

The list presents the functions under the heading of the respective management board lead.

Chief Executive

Runs the Council supported by	Director of Customer and Community Services Director of Internal Services Director of Neighbourhood Services
Directly responsible for Strategic Direction	Communications Performance and Policy

Director of Customer and Community Services

Environmental Services	Waste Services Ground Maintenance Street Lighting Highways Inspection Animal Warden Administration Environment & Biodiversity Pest Control
Community & Cultural Services	Leisure and Recreation Castle Hall Community Projects Economic Development Community Planning
Customer Services and New Media	Frontline Services Parking Administration and Notice Processing New Media Information

Director of Internal Services

People and Organisational Services	Human Resources Health and Safety
Financial Support Services	Financial Management Accountancy Services Asset Management Payroll Services
Revenues and Benefits	Benefit Service Revenues Service
Democratic & Legal Support Services	Electoral and Electoral Registration Services

	Committee and Member Services Legal Services Land Charges, Local Land and Property Gazetteer and Street Naming and Numbering Services
Business Support Services	IT Procurement Facilities Management Markets Internal Audit Internal Customer Services Insurance Services Building Surveyors Caretakers

Director Of Neighbourhood Services

Health and Housing	Environmental Health Housing Strategy and Development Housing Options
Community Safety	Community Safety Business Continuity Emergency Planning Licensing
Planning and Building Control	Development Control Conservation and Heritage Planning Enforcement Planning Policy Building Control