



Comprehensive equality scheme 2007 – 2010

Incorporating the Race Equality Scheme 2007 -2010

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Foreword.

Harrow Council is a service provider, a community leader and an employer. It cannot fulfil any of these roles successfully without addressing equalities issues. In service provision, equality is about providing a service that is right for each individual, taking account of his or her specific needs. For community leadership, equality is about describing a vision for the area that is built on recognising the wants and needs of every local community. And for an employer, equalities is about moving to a workforce that reflects the communities it serves and eliminating discrimination from recruitment, training and promotion. Above all, for a local authority as a whole, equality is about promoting inclusion and cohesion, fairness and justice.

This Comprehensive Equality Scheme covers the Council's approach to taking forward all of the equality strands. Previously, the Council has developed separate schemes for different equality areas, for example, race or disability. While this highlighted issues that were of concern to particular people and groups in the Borough, it also diluted the message that the Council is committed to addressing all forms of discrimination –

- Age (both younger and older people)
- Disability
- Gender (women and men, including transgender people)
- Race (tackling discrimination and promoting equality between groups)
- Religion and Belief
- Sexual Orientation.

Bringing all of these strands together in this document provides a much better picture of the overall effort being devoted to equality. Some of the actions taken to address a particular equality strand are also applicable to other strands and the overall result should be a consistent and improved level of service to all residents and consumers of services.

The idea of a Comprehensive Equality Scheme has also prompted the Council to think about the way people are categorised. Rather than think of people by reference to the equality strand or strands that might apply to them, the Council wants to address equality as a mainstreamed part of customer service, community leadership and as an employer.

In this scheme we have, therefore, considered what we need to do:

- as a service provider, to make ourselves an organisation providing equal access and eliminating discrimination;
- as a community leader, to make ourselves an organisation that promotes equality, provides appropriate information and undertakes meaningful consultation; and,
- as an employer, to move towards a workforce that reflects the community it serves.

Underpinning these ambitions, the comprehensive scheme also sets out how the Council intends to meet its duties under the Race Relations Act 1976, the Disability Discrimination Act, 2005 and the Sex Discrimination Act as amended by the Equality Act 2006.

1. Introduction

This scheme is a development from the previous schemes that addressed individual equality strands. In recent years, these schemes have helped to contribute to the Council's progress on equality issues as measured by achieving first levels 2 and 3 and, currently, level 4 of the Equality Standard for Local Government. At the same time, the things that people in Harrow have in common together with the Council's action and that of its partners has maintained and, in some cases, improved community cohesion in the borough. For example, the annual Quality of Life Survey, conducted for Harrow Strategic Partnership, which measures community cohesion, continues to report high levels of agreement with the statements that "This is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together" and "This area is a place where residents respect ethnic differences between people".

Despite the progress that has been made, there remains much to do, not least as the ethnic make up of the population continues to change with new-to-Harrow groups becoming established. The new approach represented by this holistic comprehensive equalities scheme responds to these changes in the ethnic composition of the borough as well the continuing aging of the population profile and the emphasis on new equality strands.

2 Background

The Sustainable Community Plan (2006-2020), developed by bringing together key agencies in the Borough, provides the overarching vision for Harrow which is that it will remain and become a more desirable place to live, learn, work and play. The Council's contribution is described through its own vision, vision statements and corporate priorities:

Vision: To be recognised as one of the best London Councils by 2012, in a borough that is cosmopolitan, confident and cohesive

The Council's vision is supported by more specific statements:

1. Satisfy our customers
2. Ensure people feel safe and secure
3. Transform our living and working environment
4. Protect our Green Belt and Harrow heritage
5. Listen to and care for people who need our help

- 6 Value, empower and involve young people
- 7 Promote vibrant cultural and leisure opportunities
- 8 Provide high achieving schools at the centre of community services
- 9 Encourage, promote and retain business
- 10 Sustain a diverse and cohesive community which lives in harmony
- 11 Deliver value for money

Within these aspirations, the Council has adopted the following corporate priorities

- 1. Increase levels of customer satisfaction
- 2. Work with our partners to reduce crime and the fear of crime
- 3. Improve the performance of our environmental services and promote recycling
- 4. Promote policies that retain Harrow's suburban character
- 5. Improve care for adults and children who most need our help
- 6. Expand participation opportunities for Harrow's young people
- 7. Continue improvement in schools to make education in Harrow even better
- 8. Increase opportunities for participation in sports and culture
- 9. Regenerate the town centre, improve district centres and promote new businesses
- 10. Build on our existing strong and cohesive community
- 11. Improve the way we work and provide value for money

3. This scheme has been prepared with the benefit of comments from consulted organisations and individuals. More than 50 local organisations specifically catering for the needs of people to whom one or more of the identified equality strands are likely to apply were consulted as were a number of individuals who expressed interest and the general public through the Council's website in addition to all members of the Council, the trades unions and specific workers' groups. The consultation draft of the scheme has been amended in various places to recognise the comments received.

4. Borough Profile

Harrow is an outer London Borough in the northwest of the capital. In 2007, it has an estimated population of a little over 211,000; a comparative high average standard of living, low unemployment, good public transport links into the centre of London and good road links to the rest of the country.

The most distinctive aspect of Harrow is the diversity of its population. At the time of the 2001 census, over 40% of the people living in Harrow were

from minority ethnic communities and it is very likely that the proportion has increased since then. The population includes people from at least 137 different countries and, based on the seven religions listed in the census, Harrow has the highest level of religious diversity in England and Wales. This gives Harrow both a fascinating range of experiences, cultures and skills but also challenges around communication and cohesion.

At the 2001 census, there were 99,953 men and 106,681 women in the Borough. This ratio of about 7% more women than men is mirrored across London as a whole.

Approximately 15% of people in the Borough are disabled. National statistics show that disabled people do less well than non-disabled people in many areas of life. This includes employment, income and education. They are more likely to face discrimination in accessing services.

Recent research by the government into local authorities and disability ('Able Authorities' DCLG 2006) showed that for many authorities, disabled people are not seen as equal citizens but rather citizens with special needs. In some cases, they are seen as a burden and not an asset. There was, in the research, little evidence that authorities think about disability when planning services except in cases where those services were specific to disabled people. Some work existed on physical changes to the environment but very little on changes to the culture or corporate approach. This is something Harrow is committed to changing.

In relation to the age profile of Harrow's population at the time of the 2001 census, the borough had a smaller proportion of its population than the London average in the age groups 0 and 4; 20 and 24; and 30 and 34. It has a greater proportion of its population than the London average in the age groups 45 to 59; 65 to 74; 75 to 84; 85 to 89 and 90 or over. The mean average age of Harrow residents was almost 2 years higher than the London average.

5. Equality Scheme

An equality scheme is a plan which outlines an authority's action over three years, aiming at addressing aspects of the 'General Duty', placed on public authorities, as outlined in equality legislation. The General Duty requires building equality into the beginning of the process of policy making rather than making adjustments at the end of the process. 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 public sector to seek out actual or potential discrimination and address it.

Equality of opportunity and freedom from discrimination are fundamental rights and the Council has a duty to exercise leadership to promote them. We intend to promote equality and prevent discrimination through our roles as:

- Service provider;
- Community leader; and
- Employer.

We will follow best practice in all equality areas and work to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination
- Eliminate harassment
- Promote equality of opportunity
- Promote good relations between different groups in the community
- Celebrate what we have in common and capitalise on our diversity
- Recognise and take account of people's differences

6. Legislation

6.1 Promotion of Race Equality (Race Relations Act, 1976 and Race Equality Duty Code of Practice, 2002)

The Race relations Act 1976, made racial discrimination illegal. The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 gave all public authorities a legal duty to promote race equality. This duty is supported by a statutory code of practice, enforceable in law, requiring public agencies to act proactively to:

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

There are some detailed provisions that are also addressed in the Scheme as follows:

- The list of services, and the policies that inform their activities, that are set out in the programme for undertaking equality impact assessments and the list of other specific actions, all of which are in

appendices to this scheme, constitutes the functions that the Council considers to be relevant to its performance of the general duty.

- Similarly, the programme of equality impact assessments, each of which reviews the design and delivery of services, their reach to and their take up by the various ethnic and other groups within the community, which monitors their effectiveness and public access to both the services themselves and information about those services, is the way in which other specific duties will be met;
- Finally, the arrangements for publishing equality impact assessments, the monitoring role of the Corporate Equalities Group with regard to implementation of each assessment's recommendations and their overview of the arrangements for training staff to undertake these assessments will fulfil the remaining specific requirements.

6.2 Promotion of the Equality of Disabled People (Disability Equality Duty Code of Practice 2005)

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) required all employers and service providers to make reasonable adjustments to service delivery in order to improve disabled people's access to goods, services and employment. The Disability Discrimination Act 2005, extended the 1995 Act to cover public functions (such as enforcement and benefits) and introduced a duty to promote the equality of disabled people. This is supported by a new statutory code of practice, to which public agencies must have due regard in order to:

- Eliminate unlawful disability discrimination
- Eliminate unlawful disability harassment
- Promote equality of opportunity for disabled people
- Take steps to take account of disabled persons' disability even where that involves treating disabled people more favourably than other persons. This was already a provision of the DDA 1995, and is the only form of positive discrimination that is legal under UK law. However, the expectation is that positive discrimination should be avoided if a reasonable adjustment can be made without it.

The Disability Rights Commission (DRC) guidance 'The Disability Duty: Guidance on Gathering and Analysing Evidence to Inform Action' advises 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, including expecting to be able to access services independently. It is society and the environment that disables people with impairments. In the current draft Disability Equality Scheme, the Council proposes formally to adopt a social model approach to disability, but this approach will need embedding throughout the organisation. The General Duty aims to understand and dismantle the barriers faced by disabled people according to the social model of disability.

In the same way as equality impact assessments address the specific duties of the Race Relations Act, they also fulfil the detailed requirements of the Disability Discrimination (Public Authorities) (Statutory Duties) Regulations 2005.

6.3 Sex Discrimination Act as amended by the Equality Act 2006: Gender General Duty (this comes into effect on the 6th April 2007)

The Council has a statutory duty to give due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful sex discrimination.
- Promote equality of opportunity between women and men.

In addition, there are specific duties, which outline the way in which the General Duty is to be implemented and, again, these will be met through the programme of equality impact assessments as described above.

6.4 Other Equality Strands

In addition to addressing the General Duties as outlined above, the Council will progress action to eliminate discrimination on the grounds of Religion, Sexual Orientation and Age. Although there is no General Duty in legislation covering these strands, there is a need to address discrimination and current legislation covers employment and service delivery (except for age, where only employment is covered by existing legislation).

Action relevant to each strand is highlighted in the action plan.

7. The Equality Standard for Local Government

The Council has adopted the Equality Standard for Local Government. This is not a legal requirement but provides a framework for continuous improvement in equality. The Standard covers race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion and age. There are five levels of achievement:

- Level 1: A commitment to a comprehensive Equality Policy
- Level 2: Assessment and consultation
- Level 3: Setting equality objectives and targets
- Level 4: Using information systems and monitoring against equality targets
- Level 5: Achieving and reviewing outcomes

Each level covers employment and service delivery. The Council has already achieved level 4 and aims achieve level 5 by the end of 2008.

8. Equality Strands

The Council has identified the following key equalities strands:

- Age (both younger and older people)
- Disability
- Gender (women and men, including transgender people)
- Race (tackling discrimination and promoting equality between groups)
- Religion and Belief
- Sexual Orientation

The statements below set out the Council's commitment to these strands in these areas. It should be recognised that where there has been long-standing legislation, especially in relation to race and disability, more progress has been made and more well-constructed plans exist. Part of the benefit of operating a comprehensive scheme is to spread the good practice, knowledge and experience from these more established equality strands to support the rapid development of the new equality areas.

Age

The Council is committed to promoting equality of opportunity for younger and older people. We recognise that society has negative attitudes, stereotypes and myths about youth, ageing, younger and older people. These attitudes and beliefs can lead to both younger and older people being socially and economically disadvantaged, excluded and marginalised. We believe that younger and older people have the right to equality of opportunity and that they make a significant and valuable contribution to the community at large.

With its partners, the Council has developed a Children and Young Person's Strategic Plan, launched in 2006. As a component of the Plan, a participation strategy was developed to ensure young people are able to take

a full role as citizens in Harrow. The Borough's representatives to the Youth Parliament are elected by the young people of the borough to ensure that young people's priorities are brought into public service decision making and will be invited to participate at meetings of the Council's Cabinet.

The Council's policy on Promoting Independent Living and Well-being was produced in 2005 and aims to ensure that local public services are designed to enable older people to participate fully, economically, socially and in community life. Work will begin in 2007 on a strategy for meeting the needs of people over 50.

Age equality means securing the equal participation in society of people of every age, securing a balance between equal citizenship, equality of opportunity, equality of outcome and respect for difference.

Disability

The council's commitment to disabled people's equality has four objectives:

1: We will promote equality for disabled people by:

- Removing barriers to accessibility, particularly in relation to housing, education, employment and access to services, information and buildings;
- Encouraging good practice in the private sector through our advisory capacity and enforcement powers;
- Upholding the Social Model and our guiding principles in our role in procurement and in our partnership duties.

2: We will tackle discrimination against disabled people by:

- Promoting positive images of disabled people;
- Challenging patronising or discriminating attitudes;
- Making the environment as safe as possible for and challenging anti-social or bullying behaviour against, or harassment of, disabled people.

3: We will support disabled people to achieve their full potential by:

- Providing where possible, support, assistance and care to disabled people to enable them to lead independent lives;
- Supporting the formation of groups, networks and services for disabled people as employees of the council and as residents;
- Supporting disabled people according to their individual need.

4: We will work in partnership with disabled people by:

- Enabling disabled people's active participation;
- Involving disabled people in the changes and improvements we make;
- Consulting with disabled people on issues affecting them rather than with people acting on their behalf.

Gender

Harrow Council is committed to combating sex discrimination and sexism and promoting the equality of women and men. We acknowledge that women constitute the majority of the borough's population and the Council's workforce; and recognise that, while women make a positive contribution to the community, they often experience discrimination, social and economic disadvantage, lack of recognition, inferior status and negative attitudes.

We recognise that society has stereotypes for both women and men, and both women and men can lose opportunities because of these stereotypes.

The Council is aware that staff with caring and domestic responsibilities may need to work part-time or flexible working hours and recognise that a culture of unreasonably long hours can discriminate against staff with other responsibilities.

We will work in partnership with other agencies to eliminate sexual harassment, domestic violence and other hate crimes.

The council is also committed to ensuring the rights, under the Gender Recognition Act 2005, of transgender people (who have Gender Recognition Certificates) to be recognised for their re-assigned or social gender.

Race

The 2001 census shows that 49.9% of Harrow's population is White British with the remaining 50.1% made up of Asian or Asian British (29.7%); Black or Black British (6.1%); White Irish and Other White Persons (8.8%); Chinese (2.6%) and Mixed Persons (2.8%).

The Council recognises that Black and Minority Ethnic people experience discrimination on the basis of colour, race, nationality, religion and ethnic origin. This discrimination manifests itself in all areas of their lives such as housing, employment, education and access to services. Racial harassment and violence is one of the most serious consequences of racism, damaging people emotionally and physically and limiting life choices and opportunities. The Council will take all necessary measures to prevent and

tackle racial harassment and assist BME people to live in freedom from harassment.

The Council also recognises that there are certain areas of public sector performance where the outcomes for White British people are below target. The council is committed to working for the equality of all ethnic groups.

We will work with our partners, including the National Asylum Support Service, to ensure an appropriate co-ordinated response is given to the needs of refugees and asylum seekers.

Under the duty in the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 to promote racial equality **we will**

1. Tackle unlawful discrimination by

- Keeping accurate records of all ethnic and faith groups, their backgrounds and needs and how we respond to them;
- Dealing with complaints of discrimination and harassment speedily and notify complainants of the outcomes and action taken;
- Encouraging dialogue between different racial groups on the appropriateness of our service offer;

2. Support cohesion by

- Promoting activities that celebrate our common experience as well as those that recognise diversity generally and foster understanding and respect for the culture and faith of all our residents;
- Encouraging all ethnic groups to exercise their rights as citizens and participate in the democratic process;
- Using our support for the voluntary and community sector to promote good race relations;
- Countering myths and misinformation that may undermine good community relations;

3. Work in partnership with BME individuals and groups to

- Promote the active participation of minority communities in shaping the future of Harrow;
- Ensure the Council, its staff and contractors and its Partners fully understand the principles of good race relations.

Religion and Belief

Harrow recognises that people can face discrimination because of attitudes in society towards the faith communities to which they belong. Faith-based hate crime has been a new phenomenon in recent years, developing a character that is distinct from race hate crime.

The council also recognises that a person's religious (or similar) beliefs may mean that they have different needs, demands and expectations, which require flexibility on the part of a service provider or employer.

The council is committed to eliminating illegal discrimination and exclusion on the basis of religion or belief.

Sexual Orientation

Harrow Council is committed to combating discrimination faced by lesbians, gay men and bisexual (LGB) people. We want to ensure equality of opportunity for LGB people across services and employment.

We will respect the rights of individuals to be open about their sexual orientation, tackle homophobia, challenge stereotyping and improve knowledge about LGB communities, both internally and to the community as a whole.

The Council also recognises that the Civil Partnerships Act 2005 introduces new legal rights and responsibilities for same sex couples in registered partnerships. The council is taking steps to alter relevant procedures to take account of these rights.

9. The Council's Commitment to Equality

Objectives for responsive and accessible services:

- Show commitment to equality and diversity by being community-focused, engaging with and involving communities, managing performance and making revisions to service plans where necessary.
- Ensure our buildings are as accessible as is possible by making reasonable adjustments
- Ensure that all of our services are accessible
- Make special or separate service provision arrangements where appropriate (e.g. for the reasons of safety or specialist requirements)
- Provide clear, meaningful information about council services in ways that are accessible and meet the community's needs

- Work together and consult with all sections of the community on service needs and provision and involve citizens in informing service design
- Monitor take-up and evaluate services to ensure they do not discriminate or exclude
- Ensure equal access to the Council's complaints procedure
- Promote Council services where monitoring shows an unexpectedly or unexplained low take up from any community or communities

Objectives as a community leader for effective partnership with the community:

- Encourage and support people to be active in community life
- Develop social capital so that local people can become politically, socially and economically engaged
- Challenge communities as well as support them, where necessary, for example, to counter prejudice and build social inclusion
- Work with others to provide an environment that is free from discrimination, harassment and violence
- Encourage (and, where legally possible, require) others to adopt this policy, including those who provide goods and services on behalf of the Council
- Celebrate what we have in common and respect the variety of identities, lifestyles, cultures and religions within the borough
- Listen and respond to the views of our communities through appropriate and widespread public consultation and participation within a safe environment
- Monitor progress.

Objectives for equal and appropriate treatment in employment:

- Employ a workforce that is representative of the borough's working-age population
- Implement recruitment and selection processes which are non-discriminatory and encourage applications from all groups in the community
- Ensure that all employees have fair access to learning and development opportunities

- Provide a safe and accessible working environment that values and respects the identity and culture of each person
- Ensure that access to information and data is as open and transparent as possible
- Create a culture and working environment free from discrimination, harassment and violence
- Ensure effective communication with, and involvement of, all employees
- Apply a transparent way of evaluating jobs that aims to ensure equal pay for equal work
- Encourage and support staff to reach their full potential
- Monitor the extent to which these objectives are achieved.

These objectives will be progressed through the Council's service plans and its contribution to Partnership plans. Progress will be monitored both through the Council's normal performance management arrangements and through a series of Equality Impact Assessments which will be undertaken for each service area every three years on a rolling programme which is set out in the action plan accompanying this Scheme. These assessments will indicate progress made and identify actions that remain to be achieved.

10. Managing Equality Impact Assessments

Between 2002 and 2005, we undertook Equalities Impact Assessments in relation to race equality. Since 2005, Equality Impact Assessments have been undertaken with a wider frame of reference. This scheme, however, envisages extending Equality Impact Assessments to cover race, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation and religion/belief.

We will conduct reviews of all council functions on a three-year cycle. They will cover frontline and 'back office' services. While there are existing toolkits and guidance on carrying out assessments, these need to be reviewed before this scheme comes into operation.

The outcomes of all assessments will be reported to the Corporate Equalities Group (CEG), a body comprising senior officers of the Council drawn from all service areas and including, as observers, the Cabinet Member with responsibilities for Equalities and representatives of staff and service users. This group will ensure that assessments are conducted thoroughly and oversee the implementation of recommendations that they contain.

A timetable for assessments is contained in the action plan which accompanies this Scheme. The timetable has been compiled using a strategic approach that takes into consideration the potential impact of an unequal service on the community, the time since the last assessment, and the extent of the assessment commitment for each department in each year. Each review of function will:

- consider any issues identified through existing performance monitoring
- identify equality areas where performance monitoring has been less robust
- identify areas for development
- identify service strengths

Assessment will be made public including the recommendations and timetable for improvements.

11. Review of the Scheme

The Scheme will be reviewed on a regular basis by CEG and regular reports on progress will be presented to the Cabinet and Harrow Strategic Partnership

12. Other Matters

Access to information, translation and interpretation

The Council is developing a 'Style Guide' requiring staff to provide information in plain English, using, as a minimum, font size 12. Information can be provided in Braille, large print or on tape on request. The Council is reviewing its website with the aim of making it more user-friendly, intuitive to use and simple to navigate.

The Council does not have a translation and interpretation service. In the past, documents or summaries of documents have been translated on request where time and resources have permitted. The Council will continue this practice for the time being. However, it is considering asking the many voluntary and community organisations in Harrow that represent or provide services to specific and particular communities to provide a translation service for members of their communities.

With regard to interpretation, the Council will continue to use a real time service to ensure that walk up and use services and requests for information

can be met. Where appointments are made to gather or provide information, the Council will investigate community provision of interpreting services including signing.

Consultation guidelines

The Council is reviewing its community engagement strategy and developing a consultation strategy. These will build on the existing practice under which consultation guidance and a toolkit have been produced. These include methods of consultation which are most appropriate for different target groups. The guidance specifically refers to the use of consultation in undertaking Equality Impact Assessments to judge the extent to which services have been successful in becoming accessible and eliminating discrimination.

Harassment and bullying

The Council works in partnership with many agencies under the umbrella of the Safer Harrow Partnership. The Partnership provides an action plan annually, which incorporates issues concerning all aspects of Hate Crime, which have included setting up of Third Party Reporting sites.

The Council has a number of written procedures dealing with the issue of harassment either for staff or service users. These expressly refer to ethnicity, gender, disability, religious belief and sexual orientation.

Procurement

The Council is producing guidance to ensure that contractors and suppliers meet the legal requirements placed on the Council to promote equalities and diversity. This will have sections on equality and also on the need to ensure that contractual arrangements are accessible to small and medium sized enterprises, the voluntary sector and minority ethnic businesses. Potential contractors and suppliers are required to provide information on their approach to equality and evidence that they have relevant systems in place. The guidance will be revised to include the need to consider disability in more detail.

Partnerships

Where Partnerships do not have a separate legal identity and are therefore not bound by the General Duty, the Council will apply its own duties and ensure that the work of partnerships promotes equalities.

Complaints

The Council has a complaints Procedure. Complaints will be monitored by gender, ethnicity and disability.

13. Monitoring

The Corporate Equalities Group will be responsible for monitoring that Equality Impact Assessments are conducted, for ensuring the recommendations from those reviews are implemented and for identifying wider implications from assessments that are carried out. The Group will also receive reports on performance against relevant performance indicators and aspects of the Quality of Life survey as a measure of underlying performance. Finally, the Group will be asked to undertake an equalities monitoring function for Harrow Strategic Partnership and report to the Board as necessary.