

# COMPREHENSIVE EQUALITY POLICY

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## Equality Statement

Eastbourne’s community is made up of different people who in turn have individual needs, requirements and expectations. It is the Council’s responsibility to ensure that it delivers services in ways that promote equality of opportunity and meet the needs of the local community.

The Council is committed to reaching out and enabling those who are excluded or disadvantaged for economic and/or social cultural reasons to have access to services, and the opportunity to fully participate in all aspects of community life.

The Council will observe the law against discrimination and implement the obligations of the Race Relations Act as amended, the Equality Standard for local government together with all associated codes of practice, and all and emerging equality legislation.

The Council has a Race Equality Scheme and has carried out a Best Value Review of Equalities, and is committed to systematically work through each action plan to improve both our internal and external equality practices through promoting equality of opportunity, good race relations and eliminating unlawful discrimination.

To show our commitment both the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive have portfolio responsibility for leading the ‘Equality’ agenda and the Council’s aim “A place for everyone”. We are committed to making Eastbourne a fair, cohesive and inclusive community.

## **Introduction**

Equality of opportunity is central to the Council's objectives and values as stated in the Council's Corporate Plan.

## **The Council's Vision**

The Council's vision for Eastbourne is to create a prosperous, fair and socially inclusive community, which protects people and values and enhances its environment.

### **“A place for everyone”**

Contained within the corporate plan is the specific aim to make Eastbourne “A place for everyone”

In order to achieve this we aim to:

- .. provide access to services for all
- .. help everyone to have a decent home
- .. continue democracy in decision making
- .. support and encourage all residents to develop to their full potential
- .. combat and alleviates the effects of poverty
- .. promote social inclusion and community participation

## **Equality Objectives**

The Council is committed to systematically working through the action plan of its Race Equality Scheme (RES), adopted in April 2002, and attaining the Equality Standard for local government. The Council has said that it will achieve Level 5 of the Equality Standard for local government in 2007.

The Council has completed a Best Value Review of Equalities. As a result the Council has agreed an improvement plan to achieve the objectives determined by the review. Both the RES and the Improvement Plan of the Best Value Review of Equalities are appended to and form part of this policy.

The Council's commitment to promote equality of opportunity for race, gender and disability has been expanded to include religion and belief, marital status, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, and persons with dependants and persons without.

The equality objectives set in the documents mentioned above including the corporate objectives set under 'a place for everyone' will be delivered through good practice in employment and service provision.

All Councillors and employees have a responsibility to promote equality of opportunity and to take action to identify and address possible discrimination whenever and wherever it could occur.

## **Dealing with Racist Incidents**

The Council has an agreed process set up through partnership working with other agencies, for processing and dealing with racist incidents reported to it.

## **Specific Resources**

### **Corporate**

Eastbourne Borough Council is committed to achieving its objectives over the next five years and beyond, so much so that the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive have a shared corporate responsibility for the equality agenda; both having Equality as part of their individual portfolios.

### **Human Resources**

The Council has appointed a Corporate Projects Manager with responsibility for co-ordinating activities in regard to promoting equality of opportunity. The Council also has five departmental Equality Representatives who, together with the Corporate Projects Manager, will assist the Council achieve its equality commitments and ensure that equality is at the forefront of every decision made and every policy written.

### **Financial Resources**

The Council has made a commitment to designate a corporate budget for pursuing the equalities' agenda and implementing specific initiatives such as consultation and publishing results.

## **Lines of Responsibility and Decision Making**

Statutory responsibility for ensuring equalities becomes an integral part of everything the Council does, and for achieving the duties set out in the Race Equality Scheme, lies with the Council.

In order to maintain uniformity in approach and to oversee that the work undertaken to meet those duties is done so appropriately and systematically, an Equality Steering Group and Corporate Equality Planning Group have been established.

### **The Equality Steering Group**

The Leader of the Council will chair the Equality Steering Group. Representatives from both internal and external stakeholders will be invited to form part of the Steering Group. The aim of the group will be to oversee the self-assessment and audit process of the equality work within the Council, and report on its outcomes. In order for the group to achieve its aim clear links to the corporate and departmental decision making process of the Council will be seen.

### **The Corporate Equality Planning Group**

The Chief Executive will chair the Corporate Equality Planning Group. Representatives on this group would be internal only and include the Corporate Projects Manager and the five Departmental Equality Representatives together with the Heads of Service for Audit and Personnel and the Strategic Development Officer responsible for Best Value. Periodically other officers will be invited to attend this group.

The group will have primary responsibility for consultation and co-ordinating self-assessment and audit processes. The aim of this group will be to provide leadership in the development of cross-cutting policy and practice.

### **Self-assessment process**

The Race Equality Scheme contains a breakdown of the services for review over the next three years and sets out the Council's statutory duties under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. The reviews will incorporate an impact assessment.

Similarly, the Best Value Review of Equalities has taken into account the duties under the Equality Standard that sets out a framework for levels of achievement in delivering equality for employment and service delivery. It requires a commitment to improve equality practice with regard, at least, to disability, gender and race. This broadens the scope of the reviews set out in the Race Equality Scheme.

In view of future equality legislation the Council has decided to expand the reviews further to include religion and belief, age, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity and persons with dependants and persons without.

The Council is committed to the process of equality self-assessment. These assessments will be conducted following a step by step process culminating in the production of an Equality Impact Report. The associated Head of Service will present the report in draft form to the CEPG. The final report will be presented to the ESG.

The systematic process of equality self-assessment is outlined in the Corporate Equality Plan but all Equality Impact Reports will feed into the Corporate and Service Planning process, and in-turn the Staff Appraisal and Develop scheme.

Work carried out throughout the year on improving both our internal and external equality practices will be co-ordinated and presented in an annual Corporate Equality Report. The Corporate Equality Report will also state the level of achievement the Council considers itself to have attained. This report will be published in the Council's annual Best Value Performance Plan and exposed to external scrutiny.

We may be asked to validate our self-assessment. Therefore, the Council is committed to gather evidence that will support the self-assessment process.

## **The Committee Process**

Following an impact assessment it may be necessary to make changes to an existing policy, or to introduce a new policy. The Council's constitution, as summarised below, shows how particular policy reviews or new policies will be considered:

## **Full Council**

Key strategic policies are the responsibility of Full Council (Council Constitution Article 4). These policies are reserved for approval by Full Council although normally via a Cabinet recommendation.

## **\_Cabinet**

All other policy matters are within the remit of the Cabinet for approval.

## **\_Scrutiny Committee**

The Scrutiny Committee is entitled to consider matters of new or amended policy, within the rules of the Council's Constitution.

# **Fair Employment**

## **Values**

The Council has set itself 'values' that underpin success in achieving the aims and objectives set out in the Corporate Plan. These values will also underpin the Equality agenda as the Council aims to:

- .. Conduct its business with integrity, impartiality and remain open and accountable
- .. Make the most efficient and effective use of public resources
- .. Encourage co-operative and partnership working
- .. Consult and listen to local people in our planning and decision making activities
- .. Support, value and develop our staff enabling them to continuously improve the quality of our services
- .. Project clear and positive leadership

## **Fair Employment Policy**

The Council is committed to promoting equality of opportunity through its employment practices and has a Fair Employment Policy that will form part of

the Council's Corporate Equality Plan.

Selection for employment, training or any other benefit will be on the basis of aptitude and ability. All employees will be helped and encouraged to develop their full potential and the talents and resources of the workforce will be utilised to maximise the efficiency of the Council.

Every employee is entitled to work in an environment that promotes dignity and respect to all and the Council will not tolerate any form of intimidation, bullying or harassment on any grounds. Breaches of any of our equality policies will be regarded as misconduct and may lead to disciplinary proceedings.

## **Employment Objectives**

The Council has made a commitment to meet the employment objectives set as part of the Race Equality Scheme and the Best Value Review of Equalities.

Additionally, in the delivery of our employment practices we will ensure that every employee, and potential employee, will be treated fairly and equally irrespective of their gender, race, nationality and ethnic origin, disability, age, sexuality, religion, marital status and whether they have dependents or not.

## **Current Employment and Equality Legislation**

We will have due regard to all current legislation covering employment and equality including such acts as the:

- .. Race Relations Act 1976 (as amended in 2000)
- .. Disability Discrimination Act
- .. Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (Gender Reassignment Regulations 1999)
- .. Employment Rights Act 1996
- .. Equal Pay Act 1970
- .. Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974
- .. Immigration & Asylum Seekers Act
- .. Human Rights Act



- .. The Employee Relations Act 1999
- .. Working Time Regulations 1998
- .. Data Protection Act
- .. Equality Standard for local government

and will incorporate any future legislation into our policies and procedures.

## **Contractors and agencies**

The Council will set criteria within the Corporate Equality Plan that ensure all employees and potential employees are dealt with fairly when there is a need to negotiate employment matters with external contractors and agencies.