

# Action Not Words

## A comprehensive equalities policy for Waltham Forest

### Our equalities vision

Our equalities vision is to make Waltham Forest a proud and prosperous borough where:

- All have an equal opportunity to participate and receive services according to their needs
- Individuals are respected and their contributions are valued
- Where people are proud to live, work and visit and
- Where cultural diversity is celebrated.

To achieve the above vision, the London Borough of Waltham Forest will:

- Promote equality of opportunity
- Oppose all forms of discrimination, intolerance and disadvantage
- Ensure our workforce reflects the diverse communities of Waltham Forest at all levels of the organisation
- Provide fair, appropriate, accessible and excellent services to all

### Waltham Forest

Waltham Forest is proud of its rich mix of communities, cultures, faiths and life styles. The boroughs' population comprises 35% from minority ethnic communities, 49% of the total population is male and 51% female. Nearly 57% state their religion as Christian, and 15% state they are

Muslim. In health matters, one in six people identify themselves as suffering from a long-term illness.

We want to celebrate this richness by making a commitment to deliver a range of services and employment practices that reflect the range of needs and aspirations of local people.

We accept that people are discriminated against on a number of grounds including age, disability, ethnicity and race, faith, gender, and sexuality and as a result may be denied the opportunity to participate within mainstream society.

This policy marks the beginning of how the Council will address these inequalities

### Our equalities commitments:

- We will continue to improve our services to you.
- We will inform residents about their rights
- We are committed to delivering excellent, flexible, culturally appropriate and accessible services to all residents.
- Our staff is committed to promote and implement equalities within their jobs.

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- We are committed to a work force that reflects our local community at all levels to ensure that equalities is embedded within the heart of the organisation.

### What are we doing?

The time is right to raise the profile of equalities work, to develop strategic linkages with our other partners to improve service delivery and employment practices.

We have begun to drive the equalities agenda forward. We are proud to have published our first Race Equality Scheme and Action Plan setting out the Council's priorities for promoting race equality and eliminating discrimination as required out in the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000.

We have established a Council Equalities Board and directorate based Equalities Boards which guide the equalities framework.

We are on a change programme to improve the quality and range of services we deliver by listening to comments made by our colleagues from other government agencies. Much of what they have said is similar to what you - our residents and service users - have said.

In addition, the Community Plan 2003, which was drawn up with our Strategic partners, identifies a number of

priorities that influence the change programme. These priorities are being reviewed for publication of a longer-term Community Strategy in 2005 but are likely to maintain a focus on making Waltham Forest a place where people choose to live because they:

- Lead active lives in a vibrant borough
- Feel safe and secure
- Enjoy equality and prosperity
- Live in happy, thriving neighbourhoods
- Have a sense of belonging and feel included

### How will we deliver excellent services to our community?

- Improve equality practices at a corporate and departmental level.
- Carry out service reviews to ensure that equalities is embedded within the service delivery framework
- Improve access to information using a range of communication channels and outlets
- Raise the profile of our customer feedback channels for communication and feedback so service users and helpers can express their views and opinions about service planning and delivery
- Publish the findings of all consultation exercises on the Council website

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- Act upon all complaints about our services promptly.

### Developing a workforce that reflects the Community

A diverse workforce is one of the ways to deliver excellent and appropriate services. We want you to come and work with us and help us to deliver a range of excellent services.

We want our staff to feel valued for their skills and expertise.

We will ensure that all employees have access to employment and skills opportunities, and that there is openness and transparency in recruitment processes, training, skills development, work delegation and appraisals. We will implement fair employment and equal pay policies and practices.

We will create an environment where staff feel supported in challenging discrimination and harassment. We will challenge those staff who are found to participate in anti-social or discriminatory behavior against their colleagues or service users.

All staff will be supported in their learning to identify discriminatory practices and how to remove those institutional barriers that reduce the quality of service.

### Responsibilities for delivery

- Waltham Forest Council **elected members** and **chief officers** are responsible for leading the Council into the future using a number of structures: -
- **Heads of Services** together with their **Senior Management Teams** are responsible for the implementation of equalities practices in service delivery and recruitment by setting equalities targets
- Our **Council Equalities Board** is responsible for leading and reviewing equalities work.
- The **External Equalities Scrutiny Group** scrutinises all the equalities work undertaken by the Council
- Each directorate **Equalities Board** monitors the implementation and progress of equalities in the services through their equalities plans
- Our **Human Resources** team oversees a range of personnel functions which determine employment policy for the Council.

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### Monitoring progress and reviewing targets

The process of monitoring has begun by a self-assessment, audit and scrutiny using a range of performance indicators and standards.

We have begun putting into place monitoring systems showing service take-up, and highlighting underperformance against targets. This service take-up data informs our service planning.

The External Equalities Group will conduct an annual audit and identify remedial action that will assist in progressing our equalities agenda.

We will publish our statutory equalities performance indicators, performance against our equalities action plan and highlight any good news stories in our local newspapers and the council bulletin.

Our LSP will monitor progress against our Community plan, which underpins our service delivery equality commitment.

### **Relevant legislation and good practice guidelines**

Our commitment is supported by a range of Government legislation and good practice guidelines that set the framework for the equalities policy and action plan.

We are committed to meeting our obligations under these laws.

- Equal Pay Act 1970 and Amendment 1983
- Sex Discrimination Act 1975
- Race Relations Act 1976 and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- Human Rights Act 1998
- European Union Equal Treatment Directive 2000 setting out Anti Discriminatory Measures in employment
- Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) regulations 2003
- Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) regulations 2003

For more details please refer to our Corporate Equality Plan. This is available on the Council's website and from our Strategy and Social Inclusion Team. Telephone number: 020 8496 4588.