

Foreword

The creation of a fair and equal society in Waltham Forest is not a minority business of concern only to those who face discrimination. It is a matter of concern for everyone and needs the contributions of all to make it a reality.

Managing population growth and change in an increasingly diverse and ageing community, and providing excellent services particularly to vulnerable people are key priorities for the Council. Our ambition is to achieve equality as a public service provider and employer and to lead on it as a key partner in the wider community. The Corporate Equality Plan (CEP) is part of our approach to achieve this. By publishing the CEP the Council is setting out the contribution

it intends to make and will use this as a basis to encourage others to do the same.

This plan sets out the key equality priorities we are focusing on for the next three years, how we will deliver them and how we will measure our success. From the evidence and feedback we have received we believe our priorities reflect the most persistent inequalities our community currently faces. These are pressing issues because they are the ones that create the most disadvantages. By implementing this plan alongside our Community Cohesion Strategy we will address these issues and promote equality and fairness for everyone.

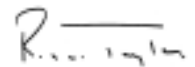
The Council has made strong progress on equality in recent years. In December 2007 we published the results on the first year of our Disability Equality Scheme Action Plan, the results on the implementation of the Gender Equality Scheme Action Plan will follow in spring 2008 together with the Council's first equalities annual report. Internally our work with staff on race, disability and lesbian and gay issues is progressing well and our position

as a Stonewall Champion on lesbian and gay issues has significantly improved in the last 12 months. Overall we are going in the right direction although we still face many challenges to become the excellent local authority we want to be.

As a result of our work to build an equalities culture in the Council and from the signs of progress that are coming through we are now one among a handful of London local authorities to have reached Level 4 of the Equality Standard for Local Government. Our aim now is to reach the final level by March 2009. Achieving this means focusing on the delivery of the equality objectives in this plan.

I look forward to working with you as we move this even further forward.

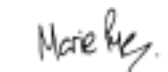
The interim Chief Executive



The Council Leader



Cabinet Portfolio Holder



1. Introduction

This is the Council's high-level Corporate Equality Plan for 2007-2010. It is available on the Council's website, on CD-Rom and in some community languages. If you require it in any other format or a different language please contact Oliqur Chowdhury in the Council's Diversity Unit on **020 8496 3000** or by email at **Oliqur.Chowdhury@walthamforest.gov.uk**

The plan is an important document for all those working for and with the Council as it sets out the equality priorities the Council is focusing on for the next three years and how the Council will deliver them.



2. Our Equality Ambitions

Waltham Forest is a diverse London borough and the diversity of our population is expected to grow in the future especially in terms of race and age.

The Council needs to plan for this changing population, ensuring that the benefits arising from diversity are harnessed, that opportunities for wealth creation are available to everyone and that the needs of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people in our community are met.

This plan supports the Council's ambitions by setting out the Council's policy on equality and diversity and the priorities needed to achieve it.

3. Our Equality and Diversity Policy

To help the Council deliver its policy and meet the legal equality duties the Council has committed itself to the following four strategic outcomes:

- Promoting equality of opportunity
- Opposing all forms of discrimination, intolerance and disadvantage
- Ensuring our workforce reflects the diverse communities of Waltham Forest at all levels
- Providing fair, appropriate, accessible and excellent services to all

4. The Waltham Forest Context

Waltham Forest Council has been rated as a 3-star Local Authority which is improving well. The Council has embarked on a wide-ranging programme of work that will support every directorate in delivering excellence. Its work in delivering and managing equality is part of this programme and is one of the keys to the Council becoming an excellent Local Authority.

The Council currently employs 3,872 people (excluding teachers) in a range of roles to serve a diverse community of 225,000 people.

The majority of staff are women (69.34 per cent), almost half (43.26 per cent) are from an ethnic minority group which compares favourably with the 36 per cent level in the community. The largest age group amongst staff is people aged 40-49 (34.84 per cent). In addition to supporting a network of black and ethnic minority staff the Council also has active networks of disabled staff and lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans-gendered staff.

Some key features of the Waltham Forest population arising from the 2001 Census are:

- In general the highest population numbers occur in the age groups 20-35. However, people in the Mixed White and Black Caribbean group have more people in the 0-15 year age band compared with other groups. People in the White groups also vary quite a lot over different age groups.
- Below the age of 25 there are more young men than young women but from age 25 onwards there are more women in each age group.

- People aged 65 and over make up 11.3 per cent of the population. Among this group 43 per cent of people live alone.
- The percentage of older people who reported having a long-term limiting illness is 54 per cent. This is higher than the London average of 50 per cent. This also varies among different ethnic groups, at 67 per cent Asian people are the largest group of people reporting a long-term limiting illness.
- Men head up seven per cent of lone parent households of whom 57.24 per cent are in full time work and 5.52 per cent in part time-work. Women of whom 26.42 per cent are in work full time and 16.07 per cent in part-time work head the remaining 93 per cent of such households.
- White people make up 64.5 per cent of the population and ethnic minority people 35.5 per cent. Recent newcomers have joined the community from Lithuania, Poland and Pakistan.
- People from many different ethnic groups live in the borough. Black Caribbean people are the largest ethnic minority group at 8.2 per cent, and Pakistani people the second largest at 7.9 per cent. This is the second highest percentage in Greater London after Newham.
- Black African people make up 5.7 per cent of the population and 3.6 per cent of people are of mixed ethnic origins. The largest mixed ethnic group is Black Caribbean and White.
- Among young people in the 0-19 age group 42.2 per cent are white and the remainder are from Black, Asian and other ethnic minority groups. The largest group at 13.9 per cent is Pakistani young people.
- Nearly three quarters (74.8 per cent) of people in Waltham Forest were born in the UK, which is about average for London.
- The percentage of people in Waltham Forest who say they have no religion is 15.4 per cent, 56.8 per cent of people stated their religion as Christian, 15.1 per cent stated Muslim and 1.8 per cent stated Hindu. The Muslim population is the third largest community in London. Nine per cent of people preferred not to say whether they had a religion.
- Amongst young people in the 0-19 age group 14.8 per cent say they have no religion, 47.9 per cent are Christian, 23.1 per cent are Muslim and 1.8 per cent are Hindu.
- Within Waltham Forest 16.54 per cent of people say they have a limiting long-term illness; this could also count as a disability. Of people of working age 13.04 per cent say they have a limiting long-term illness.
- The Census does not currently include information on lesbian, gay, bisexual or transsexual/trans-gendered people.

However, the best estimates for London as a whole are that five per cent of people are lesbian, gay or bisexual.

5. Our Approach

The Council's equality agenda is about making positive changes for our staff, customers and residents. The Council wants to improve its services and the way they are provided to make them more accessible and appropriate to the needs of all customers. The Council also wants to make sure that it is being fair. This means helping those who face the biggest disadvantage as a result of discrimination and prejudice to live their lives free from it and to have the opportunity to contribute to the community. The focus on addressing disadvantage whilst promoting fairness complements our approach to creating community cohesion.

The Council's approach is to use wide-ranging evidence to identify the priority issues for change and to make sure good processes are in place to deliver them. This is consistent with the legal duties to promote equality and

eliminate discrimination. This plan sets out the Council's current priorities for lessening the effects of discrimination and promoting equality and fairness for everyone.

The plan also includes a range of high level targets and performance indicators to help assess the progress being made. These have been selected from the existing targets and indicators in our three year performance plan on which the Council is publicly monitored. The target and performance indicators that best fit with changes the Council want to make have been included.

During 2006 the Council exceeded its targets for increasing the percentage of women and ethnic minority people in the top level of management and also for the prompt repair of streetlights which is relevant to ensuring women's safety. This means that the published targets for future years now look odd because they are low compared to the Council's current level of achievement. However when they were set they represented an incremental increase.

These will be reviewed as part of the annual service planning cycle and there will be an opportunity to change them. This does not mean the Council is taking action to worsen its position.

The Audit Commission measures the Council's commitment and success in delivering equality by the level of the Equality Standard for Local Government achieved. The Standard currently has five levels and the Council is currently at level 4 and aiming to achieve level 5 by March 2009. Waltham Forest use the Standard as a process tool to deliver priorities, and embed an equality culture into the way the Council works in terms of employment and service delivery. This supports the Council's key focus on the delivery of its priorities, using the Standard in this way helps the Council achieve this.

6. Key Priorities

We have set the following six key priorities for change:

Embedding the promotion of equality and the removal of barriers to it into the design and delivery of services

- Improving the amount and quality of equality monitoring data and using it to monitor the performance of services and plan improvements
- Ensuring that the equality impact of key policies and strategies is identified and addressed and that equality impact assessments are used to regularly review and improve existing services
- Implement the best equalities practice in procurement and contract management and in our work with partners

Most of this activity is set out in each directorate's Equality Action Plan.

Addressing current disadvantage by reducing persistent equality gaps

- Raising levels of academic achievement for ethnic minority and white working class boys
- Raising girls' economic aspirations
- Improving the employment rates of young people, lone parents, people from ethnic minorities, disabled people and those over 50 years of age
- Encouraging and supporting women entrepreneurs and young people

Most of this activity is set out in our Gender Equality Scheme, Children and Young People Plan and our Enterprise and Skills plans. Additional information is set out in directorate's Equality Action Plans.

Enabling everyone to get their voices heard and to engage and be involved in decisions that affect them

- Improving access to information for disabled people, especially about the changes we have made to promote disability equality and to encourage and support participation
- Encouraging and supporting women and men to have comparable levels of involvement in decision making at a range of levels from attendance at community meetings to becoming governors and councillors
- Improving opportunities for older people to have their voice heard by establishing an Older Peoples Forum

Most of this activity is set out in our Gender and Disability Equality Schemes, our Children and Young People plan and also relates to the implementation of the "Age is Just a Number" strategy for older people.

Encouraging independence and supporting personal mobility

- Enabling disabled people to get out and about more easily by increasing the physical accessibility of public space particularly council buildings, schools and housing
- Enabling disabled people and older people to live independently at home
- Improving Ascham Homes' approach to prioritisation of works to improve security and women's ability to live their daily lives with ease

All this activity is set out in our Disability Equality Scheme.

Promoting respect for diversity

- Offering translation and interpretation services when it is most appropriate to do so
- Continuing to address hate crime/

harassment against young people, older and disabled people, LGBT people, Black, Asian and ethnic minority people and domestic violence

- Tackling homophobic bullying in schools and supporting the well-being of LGBT young people
- Providing cultural and learning opportunities, which encourage interaction and understanding

Most of this activity is set out in our Community Cohesion Strategy.

Promoting and supporting the flourishing of diversity in the workforce

- Supporting and working with staff networks on race and faith, disability and sexual orientation and working together to address issues identified by staff
- Increasing the number of disabled people at the higher levels of the Council's workforce

- Ensuring the percentage of women, disabled staff and ethnic minority staff at the higher levels of the Council's workforce are in line with the top performing London authorities
- Increasing the overall number of disabled people working for the Council and encouraging the development of young people through apprenticeships and a graduate programme
- Eliminating harassment and bullying in the workplace
- Supporting men and women in balancing their work and caring roles and developing their careers

Most of this activity is set out in our LGBT action plan, the staff disability forum action plan and the race equality in employment action plan.

7. Delivery Structures

The Council's Equality Board under the direction of a member of the Senior Leadership Team is responsible for overseeing the delivery of these priorities and the directorate equality actions plans and statutory equality schemes that underpin them. The Board will lead and co-ordinate the delivery of this Corporate Equality Plan by:

- Receiving biannual monitoring reports against each directorate's equality action plans
- Receiving annual monitoring reports against the action plans in the race, gender and disability equality schemes
- Receiving an annual report showing progress against the targets and indicators
- Identifying and disseminating good practice and learning on equality and diversity across the organisation to increase our efficiency and provide value for money

- Ensuring the Council stays abreast of emerging developments in equality, diversity and human rights and that it can respond accordingly

8. Monitoring and Evaluation

In addition to the arrangements described in section 7, the Council will ask customers and staff to voluntarily provide equality monitoring information. This will be used to help judge the difference the Council is making and to better understand what different groups of people need.

Equality impact assessments on existing services and on the proposals considered and decided on by the Leader and Cabinet will be carried out. Cabinet Members have a key role in ensuring that equality impact assessments are properly done and the results are used to deliver the priorities.

An annual performance report will be prepared for Cabinet and published on the Council website.

This plan is a live document that will be reviewed every three years as a minimum. It will be revised and updated in light of the progress made and to respond to changes in our local circumstances.

The targets and Performance Indicators will be reviewed annually.