

**Gender Equality Scheme  
“Closing the Gap”**

**Waltham Forest Council - Year One Progress Report  
April 2008**

# Introduction

Welcome to Waltham Forest Council's progress report on the first year of our Gender Equality Scheme. During 2007 the Council published its first Gender Equality Scheme. The scheme and action plan set out the steps the Council would take over 3 years to meet its gender equality duties. In summary, in addition to equal pay, our scheme focuses on the following themes:

- Improving women's safety
- Raising boys' achievements and girls' aspirations
- Promoting men's and women's involvement and participation in decision making
- Supporting parents and carers in the workforce

The objectives were developed in light of evidence gathered and analysed during 2006/07 and to reflect the duty and the significant issues we face. This report has been prepared to let people know the progress the Council has made on gender equality during the first year of the scheme.

# Improving Women's Safety

## *Tackling domestic violence*

We have successfully delivered our 2007/08 action plan, and in doing so we:

- Distributed 80 alarms to sites such as Victim Support, Kiran, Ashiana and Alert. This is to help improve the safety of those most at risk of domestic violence.
- Implemented a Domestic Violence Perpetrators Programme and are now evaluating its success. This has the aim of holding perpetrators accountable for their violent behaviour and reduce risk of re-offending. Looking at the data from April 2007 to September 2007, we have had 58 referrals of perpetrators with 26 being accepted. The data we look at is across 3 boroughs, and 36% of clients (perpetrators) are from Waltham Forest. Over 90% of victims have reported a decrease in repeat victimisation. 85% of victims have reported feeling safer when they are engaged with the Women Support Service (which works alongside the Perpetrator's Programme).
- We have delivered 14 domestic violence-training sessions to 318 practitioners in the borough. Training is for greater awareness and understanding the dangerousness of domestic violence and to provide early intervention as appropriate. There also has been one presentation, one training session for school staff and 59 workshops delivered to 18 school mentors and 461 pupils in 4 secondary schools. We have also trained 16 officers on domestic violence risk assessment and safety planning at a two day training session. It was attended by officers from social services, health, housing, voluntary sector domestic violence service providers.
- In continuing our Sanctuary Scheme, our Community Safety department and the Homeless Person Unit with joint funding targeted 40 homes in order to decrease repeat abuse of victims of domestic violence. The scheme is aimed at people who feel vulnerable or threatened by ex-partners but wish to remain in their homes. Many people, although they are under the threat of violence, do not wish to move home as they may live near to their children's schools, doctors, family and other support networks in the area. Our Sanctuary Scheme aims to make the home more secure by undertaking building works that make it difficult for unwanted visitors to gain access to the property. This may include new locks, stronger doors, and window grills.

- We have sought to develop a deeper gender profile of the fear of crime and of the victims of crime (including domestic violence). We use the gender data from our Residents' Panel to inform our Community Safety Communication Strategy 08/09. The Police analyse domestic violence data, and we use this to inform our Community Safety Domestic Violence Programme 08/09.
- We are committed to providing support to victims of domestic violence and hate crime. We have a strong working partnership with the Police. At the same time we are aware of victims looking for support from non-police reporting sites therefore commissioning an agency to fill this need is vital and we continue to do so.

### ***Improving parks and open spaces***

- We analysed our 2003-2005 Green Space Customer Survey by gender. Surveys have shown that more women cite safety as a reason for not using their local park or open space than men. We have now set targets for 2008/09 to increase female satisfaction with services and decrease the number of female residents who cite safety as a reason for not using parks and open spaces.

### ***Improving pedestrian links***

- We have now completed the subway linking the rail and tube station with the bus station on the other side of Selborne Road in Walthamstow town centre. The Subway is now in use.
- We are looking to improve the walking environment for pedestrian routes across the borough. We are in the process of developing a Walking Strategy for the borough. This is to make signage and infrastructure improvements to the routes. The strategy is due to be complete by September 2008.
- We are working towards providing a pedestrian link between Walthamstow Central Station and Walthamstow Queens Road Station on the Gospel Oak to Barking line. This is a complex venture as there are a number of organisations involved and the land does not belong to the council. We are currently involved in negotiations to implement this link as planned.

## ***Increasing Safety in Housing***

- Ascham Homes have produced new Anti-Social Behaviour policies and procedures. The procedures will be launched to the public on 29 May 2008 to mark European Neighbours Day. A summary document is being produced for distribution to the public. The new procedures will be reviewed after 6 months of operation. Our 2008/09 performance targets and satisfaction surveys will help measure the satisfaction of clients in the way their case was handled.
- Ascham Homes is also aiming to improve security and create living spaces that discourage misuse and promote community friendly behaviour. The company is preparing to bid for money from central government to make these improvements. We will submit this in July 2008.
- We know that when lifts breakdown that this is inconvenient to everyone. Our research with women tenants revealed that lift breakdowns have a particularly secure effect on women with young children especially when trying to do shopping and other home and childcare tasks. We are looking to review and improve our lift maintenance work to tackle this. The average time to respond to a lift problem is now less than four hours.
- In order to identify and prevent harassment by Ascham Homes Staff or our partners we have included in our tenancy agreement includes a clause relating to inappropriate behaviour by staff.
- In considering day to day repairs, Ascham Homes will prioritise repairs that impact on a carer's ability to provide a safe environment for children and other dependents. Where a customer asks for special consideration (such as risk to children), Ascham Direct staff may ask a supervisor for a higher priority to be allocated.
- To improve the gender balance amongst the workforce. Ascham Homes are promoting positive images of their employment opportunities and those of its partners. In July 2007, Ascham Homes and Apollo attended the Youthfest and made available information on apprenticeships and work placements within the company. Over 1000 young people attended the event.
- Ascham Homes want to remove gender related barriers that prevent participation in decision making processes around the management of council housing stock. All Tenants and Residents Associations (TRA) have an equal opportunities policy, which they follow. TRA's are audited and staffs attend a minimum of one meeting a year to observe how they conduct their meetings. Executive Committee Members are surveyed for gender and race equality information. The Tenant Information Network is increasing and allows us to collect information about those residents who want to be involved in specific informal and formal mechanisms. We are also in the process of assessing the accessibility of our existing participation arrangements and of developing ones.

# **Raising the level of boys' academic achievements and raising girls' aspirations**

## ***Raising the numbers of teenage mothers in education, employment and training***

- We have established a database on the numbers of teenage mothers within Waltham Forest. This database provides information on the employment, education or training status of all teenage mothers known to Children Services.
- Children Services aims to hold regular awareness events for teenage mothers to raise awareness of the services and supports available to teenage parents, particularly around re-engagement in employment, education or training. The first Road Show was held in Selbourne Walk and the aim was to encourage teenage mothers to make themselves known to the service. The next event will be held on 26th July 2008 at Leyton Youth Centre and we will be specifically targeting all the teenage mothers we know about.

## ***Explore gender themes with Primary Schools***

- An event was held with Primary schools last autumn term, at which schools were provided with details, guidance and templates to develop school gender equality schemes and to produce individual school equality plans. The event was very well attended and schools were able to explore and develop common themes amongst themselves.

## ***Closing the attainment gap between boys and girls***

- To support individual schools in closing the gap between the attainment of boys and girls we have completed an action plan for 2007/08. We have agreed specific actions. Our regular monitoring of progress towards the targets indicate the majority of schools are on track to meet the targets. The targets are different for each school but they are essentially to ensure the group of pupils who are in danger of not achieving 5 A-C at GCSE are supported. Different activities are taking place in different schools for example in one school we employed a mentor to work with a group of disaffected but able boys.

- We are looking to improve learning and writing skills for boys by signing up childcare providers and early educators to the Quality Improvement in Learning and Teaching (QulLT) quality assurance scheme. We will monitor the impact on children through collecting and analysing the data.

### ***Raising the aspirations of young women to pursue non-traditional learning opportunities and careers***

- In order to raise the aspirations of young women to pursue non-traditional learning opportunities and careers, CLaSS are working with 'Connexions' to explore options with various trainers to provide:
  - A wide range of construction and related training courses and taster events
  - Music production and event management training
  - Painting and decorating training courses
  - Horticultural, land-based and animal care / husbandry programmes.

Personal advisors in schools, colleges and within a range of other community settings are at hand to support and encourage young women in identifying their ambitions, and getting access to these opportunities.

### ***Providing Training and Courses***

Our training has included:

- 12 Skills for Life courses / Parenting Classes delivered at a women's refuge
- 20 learners have attended Skills for Life courses delivered at Kiran, Leyton
- 35 learners will be attending Skills for Life courses at the Asian Centre
- Our Entry to Employment programme includes 'Personal and Social Development'. For example, a Sexual Health workshop was delivered by Youth Service in gender specific groups. The workshop gained positive feedback from the young people involved. Female 'Connexions' Advisors were available for group sessions and personal advice for young people
- Our male learners have progressed into apprenticeship programmes in childcare and care for the elderly.
- Parenting classes for fathers and male carers are delivered on Saturdays at Syburn Children's Centre. Feedback has shown that fathers / male carers felt more enabled and confident to interact with their children more calmly and effectively
- In meeting the needs of older women, our 'Skills for Work' courses were delivered to 18 older women in Warwick Youth Centre. This included employability, accredited Literacy, Numeracy and IT
- We have a 68% positive progression rate of 'Entry to Employment' learners into employment or further education.

# Promoting men's and women's involvement and participation in decision-making

## ***The centenary of Women becoming Councillors***

- As part of Local Democracy Week, the Council held a reception to celebrate the 100th Anniversary of Women Councillors on Thursday, 18 October 2007. This event brought together women from across Waltham Forest, including young women from local schools, who have made a positive and significant contribution to the lives of others within our community. Around 40 people attended the event, which was hosted by the Mayor, Councillor Liaquat Ali. A group of young women (including young Muslim women) studying politics at Leyton Sixth Form College undertook a series of interviews with past and present female councillors on the evening. This focussed on the barriers to women entering public life and ways of empowering women to overcome these.

## ***Embedding gender equality into our work to include young people***

- The principle of ensuring equal numbers of young men and women are involved in consultation and participation processes is embedded in our structured consultation and activity with young people. To help judge our success, we collect gender-monitoring information during the recruitment and selection of young people to groups such as Young Advisors, the Flava Press Gang, Olympic Youth Ambassadors and Joint School Councils. Further, the young people applying to participate in such groups are made aware that selection will take place with the aim of finding a group which is representative of young people in the borough in terms of age, gender, faith, ethnicity, sexuality and disability. As such, the council is explicit about the equality standards it applies when undertaking consultation and engagement activity.

## ***Establishing a Muslim Women's Community Engagement Project***

- To ensure that the voices of Muslim women are heard we have explored the need for a specific community engagement project. Demand for the group has been identified and the project will be developed in line with the newly established national Muslim Women's Advisory Group – we will be incorporating this into the Community Cohesion Strategy in May 2008

## ***To Support Men in their Role as Fathers and Modern Parents***

Our children centres have run projects aimed at fathers and male carers:

- Lloyds Park Children Centre – Male only social events were arranged to engage fathers. Saturday morning sessions were successful in involving fathers in the life of the centre. One father is setting up a support group for parents of children with Downs Syndrome.
- Ridgeway Park Children Centre – are holding weekly Saturday sessions (“Who Let the Dads in?”) engaging dads in a variety of activities with their children from 2-11. Fathers were consulted as to the activities they would like. This is reflected in the programme.
- Church Hill and Hoe Street Children Centre - “Dads, Lads and Daughters” Planned activity sessions and visits out to places of interest. Fathers were consulted and planned the visits at a social event.
- Low Hall Children Centre run a regular Saturday sessions for fathers. Acacia are holding an 'Including Men' discussion on Tuesday 17th June (just after Father's Day) at the Epicentre in Leytonstone and have invited other Children Centres and other colleagues to inform the work we are doing with families.

## **Supporting Parents and Carers in the Workforce**

### ***Develop, implement & publicise the Dignity & Respect at Work policy***

- We are currently developing our Anti-Harassment and Bullying (Dignity and Respect at Work) Policy. The Mediation framework is still being developed and the policy is awaiting consultation with heads of HR, unions and staff network and leadership team. The policy is expected to be fully implemented by summer 2008.
- Once the policy is finalised we are planning to provide internal training (prevention and mediation) for Managers via an external provider (e.g. CLaSS).
- A new Equality Training Strategy 2008-11 is currently under consultation. This has the aim of training managers in how to take a pro-active role in eliminating harassment and bullying.

# Narrowing and eventually eliminating the pay gap

## ***To remove any inequalities in pay and grading arrangements***

- We have undertaken a single status audit. The purpose of this was to harmonise the status of all local government officers especially those who are manual workers. At present we have evaluated manual jobs across street services, have introduced new grades for everyone, and done away with bonuses which tended to favour men and disadvantage women. Women have benefited from this via lump sum compensation in back pay. However, in order to make the transition smoother we have implemented a period of bonus protection from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2007 for 27 months. Now we are looking at administrative, professional, technical and clerical staff for inequalities.

## ***Reduce gender occupational segregation in the workplace***

In January 2008, the Workforce Development and Compliance Manager looked at all areas of the Council to see if there is any evidence of occupational gender segregation between men and women at LBWF. This revealed that there was evidence gender segregation in the following work areas:

### Manual workers

#### **Outdoor Manual workers**

The data revealed that outdoor manual workers (e.g. Street Sweepers, Drivers, Road workers, Street services, Refuse Teams, Street Wardens and Premise Assistants) are largely dominated by men. The ratio here is 96% men and 4% women.

#### **Indoor Manual workers**

The situation is reversed for these workers. There are more women than men in the following employee areas: Catering, Domestic, Homecare workers, Night Care Assistance, Day Care & Play assistants. The ratio here is 98% women and 2% of men.

## Office workers

The segregation here is not as stark as with Manual Workers, but there is an emerging trend. There are more women than men in Social work, Library services, HR, Benefits Officers, Personal Assistants and Lecturers. Here the staff are 80% women compared to 20% men.

However, there are more men in Legal services and Engineering. The ratio here is 63% of men compared to 37% of women.

It is acknowledged that these work areas have traditionally tended to be dominated by a particular gender.

The Council will be looking to address any imbalance by identifying key areas for action and by continuing with implementation of various equality initiatives, such as flexible working practices, targeting recruitment information etc. to remove inequalities in those areas.

## **To support the career development of women to move beyond PO6 level**

### ***Improve the representation of women at grade PO6 and above***

- Through the LBWF Mentoring Scheme, we have sought to provide development opportunities to women. The feedback from the evaluation on the mentoring scheme is largely positive, with majority of participants giving it an excellent score. However, the current uptake on the schemes have proved to be low, and the analysis of responses has been based on a small sample size (7 mentees and 5 mentors). And 2 of the mentees are Inter Borough Participants (From Barking and Dagenham, and Redribdige).
- We are looking to promote our mentoring scheme to attract a diverse pool of both mentors and mentees, better aligned with our business objectives. Development Plans will be more structured, and we will aim to ensure that the individual needs of mentees are better met. We also need great commitment from managers to become mentors. There will be clear targeting of women senior managers (PO6 and above). Our "Mountaineering Club" will also be looking at initiatives to support women's career development in June 2008. We also publicised and promoted International Women's Day to our workforce.

# **Increasing information and support to men and women in balancing their work and caring roles and in developing their careers**

## ***Develop guidance to help promote equality for transsexual staff/candidates***

- The LGBT steering group has asked for this to be deferred until their action plan is updated. Following recommendations from the Stonewall Index in February 2008, we are updating our LGBT Plan. One suggestion was to have an equality champion at management board level.

## ***Improve information in employment monitoring reports to increase the detail for more meaningful analysis***

- We have made our data more robust by getting the required information on grievance, harassment and bullying, training, and discipline. We have also produced an action plan as to get improve information in areas which we are currently lacking such as exit interviews, leavers, temporary promotions, and flexible practices.

## **Activities to carried forward to 2008/09**

During 2007 the Council's HR Diversity Manager post was unfilled. This occurred in spite of extensive advertising to fill it. The post was eventually filled in October 2007 and this enabled the council to implement the activity set out in the Gender Equality Scheme action plan. Due to this lack of officer time it has not been possible to deliver all the activities as we intended. As a result the following activity will be carried forward into 2008/09

- To obtain a better understanding on satisfaction levels of men and women at work and their opinion of flexible working (flexible working policies and practices)
- Promoting the rights of carers and ensure they are being applied consistently
- To improve current information on 'Pregnancy at Work' for both staff and managers
- To obtain a better understanding of the experiences of women returning from maternity leave

- Gather and analyse leaver data and exit interviews by Gender
- To provide information about childcare provision in the borough including childcare vouchers and tax credits
- To examine the possibility of providing more access to childcare support in the Borough for employees with children (of different ages)
- To investigate the lower success rate of men compared to women for pay band 1 positions

The following policies have been **put on hold** due to shortages in HR Staff, resources and current work on the Council's internal efficiency review. They will also be carried forward into 2008/09:

- Capability
- Personnel Records
- Work/Life/Family