

## ***Equalities Strategy***

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## **Introduction**

The statutory, social and political environment within which we operate has changed significantly in recent years and the onus is now on us to modernise our internal practices to improve the services we provide to the community. Equality of opportunity is key to the Government's modernisation agenda. To fulfil our obligations under Best Value, and for it to be effective, we must ensure that we engage with customers and potential customers of our services and address equality considerations.

The Council's Community Strategy and its Corporate Plan provide the framework for meeting the needs of the community. Our role is to help to bring about an inclusive society where no one is marginalised through personal circumstances and where everyone is offered the best opportunity to realise their potential. This strategy will assist us in achieving Best Value and achieve our Equal Opportunities policy's aims and objectives. It will also help us find ways to combat discrimination and enable everyone from all sections of our community, to participate in social, cultural and economic life.

We recognise the importance of fair treatment and equal access to our services and employment opportunities and believe that all equality issues should be included within one corporate document and mainstreamed into policy formation and service delivery. This strategy incorporates our statutory duties under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, namely to:

- i) Eliminate unlawful racial discrimination;
- ii) Promote equality of opportunity; and
- iii) Promote good race relations among people of different ethnic groups.

This strategy for equalities sets out:

- 1. Our Vision
- 2. Our Equality Objectives
- 3. Minority Groups
- 4. Profile of Rossendale Borough Council
- 5. Equality in Employment
- 6. Elected Members
- 7. Equality in Service Delivery
- 8. Contractors and Partners
- 9. Complaints and Harassment
- 10. Provision of Information
- 11. Our Approach to Equality
- 12. Communication of the Strategy
- 13. Training
- 14. Action Plans
- 15. Review
- 16. Related Documents

Under this Act we are required to publish a Race Equality Scheme. The requirements of the scheme are included in this strategy.

## **1. Our Vision**

Rossendale Borough Council is firmly committed to providing and promoting equality for all its employees and the wider community. This equalities strategy should ensure equality influences the way we provide services and the way we employ and develop staff. The strategy will also ensure that Members and Officers will challenge the way services are delivered thereby ensuring they meet the needs of all the residents of Rossendale. To achieve this we will endeavour to create an environment in which there is respect for every individual and recognition that no employee, potential employee or customer will be unfairly discriminated against irrespective of their gender, disability, race, sexual orientation, age, religion or belief.

## **2. Our Equality Objectives are:**

- To provide services which are responsive to the needs of the community, equally accessible to all and free from prejudice and discrimination
- To work actively towards eliminating all forms of unfair discrimination, both direct and indirect
- To have a workforce that represents the community that we serve
- To value diversity so that we can improve our ability to deliver better services
- To raise awareness of our commitment to equality
- To promote equality of opportunity
- To seek to influence partner organisations and contractors' commitment to equality
- To encourage participation
- To encourage individuals to report all forms of discrimination and to resolve complaints and incidents promptly.

## **3. Minority Groups**

### **3.1 Gender**

The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 makes discrimination unlawful on the grounds of sex and marital status, and gender reassignment. The Equal Pay Act 1970 also regulates discrimination by implying an equality clause into the contract of employment. We acknowledge that some people may be discriminated against because of their gender, their care responsibilities or their marital/family status and that this may result in them being denied equal access to services and employment opportunities. We will, where possible, facilitate access to services and employment by continuing to develop policies in this area. The Equality Act 2006 amends the Sex Discrimination Act of 1975 and the Equal Pay Act of 1970 and places a statutory duty upon public duties to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment and promote equality of opportunity between men and women. We will produce and publish a gender equality scheme, carry out and publish gender impact assessments on major changes in policy and procedure.

### **3.2 Ethnic Minority Communities**

The Race Relations Act 1976 makes discrimination unlawful on the grounds of race, colour, nationality, ethnic origins and national origin. We recognise that people may be discriminated against because of their colour, race, beliefs, ethnicity or nationality. We are committed to challenge all forms of racial discrimination and we will continue to develop policies and procedures to give people from ethnic minority communities fair and equal access to employment and to Council services. We will seek the views of ethnic minority communities to identify gaps in service provision or employment and we will take all reasonable steps to overcome the barriers identified. We have developed a Race Equality Scheme which explains how the Council will respond to the general and the specific duties of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, building on its ongoing commitment to securing racial equality in both service delivery and in employment.

We aim to ensure that the needs of the ethnic minority communities are taken into account when developing strategies and policies. We will positively embrace the requirements under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the recommendations from the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry.

### **3.3 Age Discrimination**

The Employment Equality Age Regulations came into force 1<sup>st</sup> October 2006, and, we are working towards developing policies to ensure services and employment are equally accessible to all regardless of age.

### **3.4 People with Disabilities**

Legislation has been in place since 1995 and further DDA legislation was introduced in 2004 and 2005. There are many types of disabilities, many of which are not always apparent and discrimination against people with disabilities takes many forms. Barriers are often created which makes it difficult for them to reach their full potential or to have equal access to services. We will seek the views of disabled customers and disabled employees. Assessments will be carried out, and all reasonable steps taken, to ensure access to services and employment opportunities, which will comply with the DDA.

### **3.5 Sexual Orientation**

The Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regs became law 1<sup>st</sup> December 2003. We recognise that lesbians, gay men may be discriminated against because of their sexual orientation. We are committed to providing fair and equal access to Council services and employment opportunities and will seek the views of the local gay and lesbian community on key service strategies. With the addition of new powers granted by the Equality Act 2006, we will not discriminate on the grounds of sexual orientation in the provision of goods, facilities and services, the exercise of our public functions or in the disposal or management of our premises.

### 3.6 Religion and Belief

The Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regs became law 1<sup>st</sup> December 2003. We respect the rights of employees and individuals not to be discriminated against because of their religious or non-religious beliefs. With the addition of new powers granted by the Equality Act 2006, we will not discriminate on the grounds of religion or belief in the provision of goods, facilities and services, the exercise of our public functions or in the disposal or management of our premises.

The Council is continuously reviewing good practice and legislation in relation to equalities issues. The strategy will be updated to meet any new requirements.

#### 4. Profile of Rossendale Borough Council (figures at 2004)

- 4.1 The population of Rossendale is 65,669. 96.2% is White, 0.5% is Mixed Race, 3.1% Asian, 0.1% is Black, and 0.2% is Chinese. Of the total population 3.8% is non-white.
- 4.2 The economic history of the area is one of textile and shoe manufacturing. There is a low wage economy. Rossendale Borough Council employs 231 people (Headcount) and the make-up of its workforce consists of:

#### Baseline Position (January 2006)

Total number of employees : 231

Male	Female
138	93
59.7%	40.26%

Part-time	Full-time	Casual
24	190	17
10.39%	82.20%	7.36%

Ethnicity	Numbers	Percentage
White and other white	216	93.47%
Pakistani	3	1.29%
Bangladeshi	2	0.86%
Unknown	10	4.38%

	Numbers	Percentage
Disabled Employees	9	3.89%

## **Employment Targets**

	<b>2005/06</b>	<b>2006/7</b>	<b>Targets 2007/08</b>
Percentage of top earners that are women 11a	62.50%	60.24%	50%
Percentage of top earners from Ethnic Minority Communities 11b	0%	0%	0.75%
Percentage of top earners who have a disability 11c	7.84%	10.04%	7.84%
Employees with Disabilities 16 a	4.76%	5.71%	4.37%
Employees from Ethnic Minority Communities 17a	1.7%	2.4%	2.00%

## **Population**

<b>Description</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Percentage of economically active disabled community population	17.90%
Percentage of economically active minority ethnic community population	3.8%

### **5. Equality in Employment**

- 5.1 Rossendale Borough Council has a comprehensive Equal Opportunities Policy, and which aims to ensure that all employment practices support equality of opportunity and combat discrimination in employment, and that all decisions relating to recruitment, employment conditions, training, promotion and career development are based on solely objective and job related requirements.
- 5.2 The implementation of equality of opportunity in recruitment and selection should ensure that we recruit the best people for the job and achieve the best return for our investment.
- 5.3 To ensure that every employee or potential employee has equality of opportunity. The Equalities Group will:
- Regularly review and make recommendations to the Senior Management Team on the Council's employment policies.
  - Regularly review and make recommendations to the Senior Management Team on recruitment and selection practices.
  - Regularly review and make recommendations to the Senior Management Team on training and development opportunities.

- Develop policies and set targets, for approval by the Senior Management Team, to achieve a representative workforce.
- Regularly monitor and review all aspects of employment practices.

5.4 Monitoring and reviewing of all employment related practices is essential if we are to identify how effective we are in combating discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity. We will do this by:

- Gathering equalities information on all employees and job applicants.
- Analysing the data collected and identifying where there are barriers to equality and why these occur.
- Develop strategies and targets to address any discrimination.
- Produce an annual report for the Portfolio holder and Senior Management Team on the employment activities of the Council.

## 6. **Elected Members**

6.1 The Relevant Authorities (General Principles) Order 2001 specifies ten general principles, which govern the conduct of members. These principles are underpinned by a draft Code of Conduct, which issued by the Department of the Transport, Local Government and Regions, will require all members to observe.

6.2 Principle 7 (Respect for Others) requires all members to promote equality by not discriminating unlawfully against any person, and by treating people with respect, regardless of their race, age, religion, gender, sexual orientation or disability. They should respect the impartiality and integrity of the authority's statutory officer, and its other employee.

6.3 The Council embraces this Code. Failure by a member to follow the Code may lead to an investigation by an Ethical Standards officer (appointed by the Standards Board for England) and decision by a Case Tribunal (this could result in suspension or disqualification), and or an investigation/hearing in public by the Council's Standards Committee.

## 7. **Equality in Service Delivery**

7.1 The services the Council provides are essential to the economic, environmental and social wellbeing of the community. Everyone has the right to expect good quality services, which are appropriate and relevant to their needs. Therefore we need to take account of the diversity of our population by meeting their needs and developing strategies and policies that are inclusive.

## 7.2 **Best Value**

Best Value Reviews should consider the way in which services impact on all sections of the community and set local targets to redress disparities in the provision of services.

Where we undertake Best Value Review or general reviews of process, we will:

- Under the “Challenge” stage, ensure that managers answer fundamental questions about why and how their service is delivered. This will include compliance with national legislation and corporate policies of the Council, which will include the Equal Opportunities Policy. We have developed an impact assessment methodology to measure how new or existing policies/services affect different groups.
- Under the “Consult” stage, we will consult with the customers of the service and the community. The consultation should include hard reaching groups, minority groups and the disadvantaged this will be referred to in the impact assessment.
- Under the “Compare” stage, we will compare how we deliver our services, including the equalities aspect of the service, to other authorities and organisations, so that we can learn from the best.
- Under the “Compete” stage, where competition exists we will ensure equality is a measurable factor in the decision making process.

## 7.3 **Consultation**

To understand the needs of our community we will seek out the views of all potential customers, especially those under-represented and hard to reach groups. We will ensure that the methods used to reach these groups are relevant and practical to allow all members of our community to influence the services and initiatives that they receive, regardless of their reasons for feeling excluded. We have developed a Community Engagement Strategy and tool kit to assist Managers in carrying out consultation.

We will actively develop effective consultation mechanisms with community representatives.

We will do this by:

- Providing training and guidance on undertaking relevant consultation for Officers.
- Consulting with existing groups.

- We will work with partner agencies to develop effective consultation practices with groups highlighted as experiencing social exclusion.
- We will develop a wide range of consultation methods to ensure we communicate easily with all our community, these will include postal and telephone surveys, focus groups, interviews and personal visits.
- We will ensure that those groups we consult with are given feedback on how their involvement has been incorporated into the planning and decision-making processes through local media, newsletters, public meetings, forums, focus groups and personal interview. The feedback method will be the most appropriate to the audience in question, to ensure comprehensive involvement.

#### **7.4 Audit of Current Service Policies**

To comply with the recommendations from the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, and the legal requirements arising from the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 audits will be an indicator measured as part of the Council's Equalities Action Plan.

The Equalities Implementation Group will test service compliance with Equalities legislation and Council policy. The results of the audits will be reported to the Senior Management Team and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

#### **7.5 Consultation Monitoring and Review of Service**

We have a responsibility to address any inequalities within the services we provide. We will, where applicable, address any inequities in the services we provide. Monitoring and reviewing of all service strategies and policies is essential if we are to identify how effective we are in combating discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity. We will do this by:

- Assisting managers in developing or improving existing monitoring systems to ensure informative equality data is collected.
- Developing guidelines for equality monitoring.
- Examining all monitoring systems for compliance with corporate standards and equalities legislation.
- Gathering equality of opportunity information on all services via service reviews.
- Analysing the data collected and identifying where there are barriers to equality and why these occur.

- Developing strategies and targets to address any disparity within the services we provide, which will be detailed in Service Business Plans.
- The implementation of service equality action plans and performance indicators at a Corporate level due to the size of the organisation, which will be monitored by the Senior Management Team and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- Producing a six monthly report for the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee identifying the results of any impact assessments, consultation exercises and monitoring exercises. The results of such exercises will be sent to relevant groups and, where appropriate, published in the Council's newsletter.

The Council will develop and implementing a Corporate action plan. The Human Resources Team will monitor the composition of the work force, individual service areas will monitor core services by age, disability, ethnicity, religion, gender and sexual orientation to:

- Ensure fair service take up
- Identify where changes can be made
- Make effective use of resources where a need has been identified
- Demonstrate improvements

## 8. **Contractors and Partners**

We will establish a common standard for assessing contractors' compliance with the various discrimination acts.

We will develop model arrangements with our contractors and sub-contractors and encourage them to implement equality practices that seek to promote positive action towards creating a level playing field for members of the community.

Our ultimate aim will be to require our contractors and sub-contractors to provide key performance indicators that address:

- Their employment practices
- Innovative solutions to social exclusion
- Purchasing and contracting arrangements
- Support for the wider community
- Customer satisfaction

## 9. **Complaints and Harassment**

- 9.1 We take complaints about the services we provide or about members of staff very seriously and the Council has a comprehensive Complaints Procedures for dealing with Customer Complaints and a Harassment and Bullying Complaints Procedure to deal with complaints from employees.

- 9.2 We have also introduced measures to record complaints and incidents which are of a racial nature, or perceived to be of a racial nature, and these statistics will be published each year as part of the Council's Performance Plan.
- 9.4 Rossendale Borough Council has adopted the Stephen Lawrence Enquiry definition of a racist incident, "A racist incident is any incident which is perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person".
- 9.5 The Community Safety Officer will co-ordinate the standardised reporting of all racist incidents in accordance with the Stephen Lawrence recommendations. Where incidents are reported then the relevant agencies will be notified to take action. If any person who is the victim of a racist incident is not satisfied by the way this Authority deals with their case then this is a complaint against the Authority.

All complaints are subject to a full investigation in accordance with the Rossendale Borough Council's complaints procedure and monthly monitoring arrangements are in place.

## 10. **Provision of Information**

- 10.1 We want to ensure that everyone has access to information as and when they need it. Our Communications Strategy will set out the Council's commitment to communication with all members of the community, employees, members and partners.
- 10.2 We will provide information in printed form and via the Council website. On request, we will provide translations into ethnic minority languages, large print or on tape. We are currently reviewing other formats in which we can communicate with all members of the community.

## 11. **Our Approach to Equality**

### 11.1 **Members**

Over the next five years Rossendale Borough Council aims to achieve the vision and objectives set out in this strategy in order to make a real impact on the staff that work for us and the people of our community. Members will be responsible for ensuring that equality is incorporated into all aspects of the Council's business.

The Council has a lead member responsible for equality and will act as the political interface for the strategy.

The implementation of the equality action plans and performance indicators will be monitored by the Scrutiny Committees and the Equalities Implementation Group.

## 11.2 **Managers**

The Council has established an Equalities Implementation Group. The Group is responsible for formulating corporate equalities policies and providing corporate advice and guidance to members, Senior Management Team and managers on all aspects of equality.

All officers with management duties are responsible for implementing this strategy. All managers are expected to take positive measures to address inequality and promote fairness.

## 11.3 **Employees**

All employees play an integral role in promoting equality. Where they believe unfair discrimination has taken place they should report it to their manager.

## 12. **Communication of the Strategy**

The strategy as a whole will be subject to detailed consultation. All members, new and existing staff will be notified of their personal obligations as part of the Council's training under this strategy and its related policies.

## 13. **Training**

All members and staff will be required to participate in equalities training to raise awareness of equality issues.

All officers with management responsibilities will be required to undertake recruitment and selection training.

All managers will be required to undertake equalities training.

An Equalities Training Programme will be developed for all new members.

The Council is committed to being an active member in the delivery of training as a member of the LSP.

## 14. **Action Plans**

Each year we will produce an Equalities Action Plan to assist the Council in meeting its equalities objectives.

## 15. **Review**

This strategy will be reviewed and updated annually and reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in July each year.

16. **Related Documents**

Race Equality Scheme  
Gender Equality Scheme  
Disability Equality Scheme  
Equal Opportunities Policy

**FUNCTIONS RELATED TO THE DUTY**

<b>ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH</b> Enforcement Policy Quality Policy Environmental Strategy Air Quality Strategy Contaminated Land Strategy Water Strategy Noise Strategy Food and Health Strategy Sampling Policy Workplace and Health Strategy Smoke free Rossendale Strategy Home and Health Strategy Energy Efficiency Strategy	High Low High High High Low Low Low High Low High Low High
<b>STRATEGIC HOUSING</b> Housing Strategy Private Sector Renewal Strategy Affordable Housing Strategy Affordable Warmth Strategy Empty Homes Strategy Homelessness Strategy BME Housing Strategy Supported Housing Strategy Disabled Facilities Grant Equity Release Scheme Homelessness Service	Medium Medium Medium Low Medium High High High High Medium Medium High
<b>COMMUNITY AND PARTNERSHIPS</b> Grants To Outside bodies Community Strategy delivery Plan Strategic Approach to Leisure Community Involvement and Engagement Strategy Tourism Marketing Action Plan Community Cohesion Action Plan Monitoring of the RLTrust Contract	High High High Medium High Medium High High

<b>CUSTOMER SERVICES &amp; E-GOV</b>	
Monitoring of the Customer Services	High
Contract Monitoring of Contract re	Low
Monitoring/ConsultationIA	Low
Access Control Policy	Low
Change management Policy Re IT	Low
Communications Network Security Policy	Low
Data and Asset management Policy	Low
Data Backup Policy	Low
Data Encryption Policy	Low
Data Retention and Disposal Policy	Low
E mail/IT Acceptable Use Policy	Low
Equipment Disposal Policy	Low
Fax Security Policy	Medium
Information Security Management Policy	Low
Internet Acceptable User Policy	Low
Malicious Code Policy	Low
Mobile Computing Security Policy	Low
Mobile Phone Acceptable Use Policy	Low
Server Security Policy	Low
Workstation Policy	Low
Third Party Access Policy	Low
Password Management Policy	Low
<b>NEAT TEAM</b>	
Graffiti Policy	High
Flyposting Policy	High
NEAT Team Enforcement Policy	High
Dog Fouling Enforcement Policy	Medium
Adandoned Vehicle Policy	High
Sharps and Drug Litter Policy	Medium
Flytipping Policy	Medium
Requests For Service Policy	High
<b>REGENERATION</b>	
Economic Development	High
Regeneration	High
Traffic Enforcement	High
Street Naming	High
<b>HUMAN RESOURCES</b>	
Disability Policy	High
Bullying and Harassment Policy and Procedure	High
Disciplinary Policy	Medium
Flexi-time Scheme Policy	High
Organisational development Policy and Function	High
Redeployment Agreement	Low
Drugs and Alcohol at Work	Low
Voluntary Redundancy Agreement	Low

Recruitment and Selection Policy	High
Supervision Policy	Medium
Lone Working Policy	Low
Risk Assessment Policy	Low
Sickness Absence Policy	Medium
Capability Procedures	Medium
Grievance Procedures	Medium
Equal Opportunities Policy	High
Exit Interview Procedure	Medium
Criminal Records Clearance Procedure	Medium
Probation Arrangements	Medium
Booking of annual leave/flexi leave/special leave	Medium
Performance Mgt PDR	High
Payroll Processing	Medium
Employee Related performance Management	Low
HR Strategy	Medium
Health and Safety	High
	Low
<b>LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES INCLUDES PROPERTY SERVICES AND LICENSING</b>	
Licensing Policy	High
Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act Policy	High
Freedom of Information Act Policy	High
Money Laundering Policy	High
Asbestos Policy	High
Legionella Policy	High
Retention and destruction Policy	High
Gambling Policy	High
Elections	High
Access to civic venues/meetings	High
Access to information	High
Constitution	High
Democratic Services Charter	Medium
Procedure For Public Speaking	High
Civic Protocol	High
A managers Guide to decision Making	Low
Committee Services	High
Mayoralty	Medium
Member Services	Medium
Civic Protocol	Medium
<b>STREET SCENE AND LIVEABILITY</b>	
Refuse Collection and Recycling Policy	High
Parks and Open Spaces Strategy	High
Street Cleaning Policy	Medium
Sharps Removal	Low
Dog Litter Removal	Low
Assisted Collections Policy	High



To decide how relevant a particular service/function is to the Equalities duty, the following questions should be asked:

- 1) What is the purpose of the function? Who is it intended to benefit? How will they benefit?
- 2) Is there public concern (especially amongst black and minority ethnic communities) that certain functions or policies are discriminatory or racist or potentially disadvantage people?
- 3) How much evidence do you have – none, a little, some, or a lot (for example from research, consultation, complaints or ethnic monitoring) of this?
- 4) Are there areas where there could be a direct or indirect unequal impact on different groups? Consider whether any unequal effect amounts to adverse impact on certain groups or unlawful discrimination.
- 5) Is the function likely to be the subject of complaints and grievances under the provisions of the act?
- 6) How does this function affect different groups in the community we serve?
- 7) Which of the three parts of the general duty – eliminating discrimination, promoting equality of opportunity, and promoting good relations – is relevant to this function?  
Is there any reason to believe that people from minority groups are being, or could be, adversely affected by this function? Which groups do this function affect?